

Information n. 1

Rome, 13 February 2011

Dearest Sisters,

Even though we are in daily contact with you through our international website, nevertheless we want to connect with you also in print format so as to give you a more detailed look at the first stage of our Interchapter Meeting.

Upon our arrival, we were welcomed by the sisters of the Generalate community who, as always, made us feel very much at home by means of their exquisite hospitality. Some of us were also very pleasantly surprised to discover that the small building just inside the front gate of the Generalate has been completely renovated to provide additional rooms for guests and is now known as the St. Thecla House.

After an “introductory day” celebrated in loving memory of Maestra Thecla, we initiated our work of getting to know the Congregation’s situation and evaluate the past 3-year period.

Sr. M. Antonietta, Superior General, sketched out for us the journey we have made in our efforts to discern, from the standpoint of genuine “redesigning,” where the Lord is leading us and what “paths of hope” he wants us to trace out. Her report took as its starting point the situation of the Congregation with regard to its members and presences in the world. Although the number of our perpetual and junior professed sisters has decreased by 104 due to deaths and departures, our sisters still have a very strong sense of belonging to the Institute and our missionary spirit is vigorous. In fact, in the past 3 years, in spite of many domestic needs, about 40 sisters have left their own circumscriptions to serve as missionaries in other lands. Our communities are taking on an always more international and intercultural dimension, a sign of our continuing geographical expansion because the Congregation, even in difficult times, can never renounce its missionary ideal—an ideal that our Founder and Maestra Thecla had very much at heart and that the Church constantly solicits.

Recently, so as to reinforce this missionary spirit, some of our circumscription “borders” were redefined. The new *East Asia Delegation* was recently set up, formed by the communities of Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong and Vietnam. Another new Delegation is that of *Southern Africa*, consisting of the communities of South Africa (Johannesburg and Durban) and Maputo, Mozambique. The Congregation also hopes to soon launch a *Central European Delegation*, made up of our German Delegation and the communities of Prague (Czech Republic) and Warsaw (Poland). Several circumscriptions and communities dependent on the General Government are still carrying out discernments with regard to redesigning their borders.

In reviewing the Congregation’s journey, Sr. M. Antonietta presented us with a summary of what has been done in various areas of our life, even though, as she said, it is always hard to evaluate the degree to which real growth was attained in the areas of the assumption of values and fecundity of mission.

Here are some of the highlights of her talk:

Spirituality. The members of the Congregation are very open to the values of our charism and they also have a great thirst to come to a deeper grasp of the Word, our Pauline history and spirituality, and the thought of Fr. Alberione and Maestra Thecla. We have truly experienced that when our animations center on the charism, our sisters’ hearts are moved and inflamed. But animation on various levels is still weak, as well as the use of animation booklets, assimilation of the abundant content provided, and the quality of our interpersonal relationships. We are still having problems adopting discernment as a style of life in our big and small choices on the personal and communitarian levels.

Formation. In our Congregation too, formation is a complex reality that faces a number of problems and challenges springing from the radical changes taking place in society, culture and families, and also from formation intermediaries (the formator, community and apostolic situation). During the past triennium a number of initiatives and activities were carried out in this area. Some of our sisters are pursuing basic university studies and specializations. In 2010, the Congregation held an *International Seminar for its Pre-Postulant, Postulant and Novice Mistresses*. In 2012 it will hold a similar course for its Junior Mistresses. The courses are meant to improve the quality of the Institute’s formation so as to help guarantee a greater perseverance rate among our junior professed and young perpetual professed sisters.

Apostolate. Important steps were taken with regard to collaboration with the laity, organization, diffusion activities combined with animations in the areas of biblical formation and formation to the use of the

media, the inculturation of content, computerization, the launching of web sites and virtual book centers. We are also experimenting with the production of e-books that can be downloaded from our web sites. But at times our organization of the apostolate reveals a disproportion between the apostolic structures that were created and our concrete situation with regard to persons and means. It also reveals a lack of integration between apostolate and economy. There is still a certain resistance to changing our mentality and ways of acting. We perceive the need to relaunch our mission so as to continue to be creative, dynamic, enterprising and wise apostles after the hearts of Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra—apostles capable of transmitting and witnessing to the “apostolic mysticism” of the Pauline vocation to the young generations. We hope the continental meetings for the apostolate and administration scheduled for 2011 and 2012 will be of help in this regard.

Knowledge of the Congregation’s situation was expanded through the report of Sr. M. Gabriella Santon, Bursar General. After explaining that a number of our circumscriptions are experiencing a certain economic instability, she emphasized that this crisis is also a golden opportunity for us to reflect on our administration and on the way we are living poverty, “the hinge of Pauline life.” She encouraged us to have great faith in divine Providence but at the same time to organize ourselves, uniting our resources and increasing solidarity among ourselves.

Another important element in helping us get to know the Congregation’s situation was the input of our circumscriptions concerning their journeys on the local level. This information was shared in small groups, set up according to continent. Although each local situation was unique, an overall harmony emerged, proving the validity of the line of action we have adopted to “think globally and act locally.”

Points that emerged with particular emphasis were:

- the fidelity with which the projects of our circumscriptions and communities dependent on the General Government have adhered to our Continental Projects;
- the *primacy of the Word* in our personal and communitarian projects of life and in our apostolic projects. Not only deeper adherence to the Word on the personal level and in times of community sharing, but also through concrete apostolic initiatives, such as: the translation of the Bible from original texts into Spanish and Portuguese; the production of Bibles with catechetical and pastoral notes, texts and liturgical commentaries; biblical animation initiatives; diffusion of the Bible in countries in which the FSPs are not present; online biblical courses and games, etc.;
- *openness* (even if somewhat timidly) to today’s new technologies: virtual book centers, e-learning, e-books, iPhones, iPads, etc.;
- *a renewed commitment to pastoral work for vocations* (even though some circumscriptions still need to organize this work better) and greater openness to the world of youth;
- *the sharing of our charism with the laity* and the almost unanimous effort to expand the Pauline charism by providing groups of Pauline Cooperators, collaborators (both employees and volunteers) with accompaniment; the foundation of the non-profit organization “The Pauline Association for Communications and Culture”; and the project to open a Pauline spirituality center for the laity. Some of our circumscriptions feel the need to understand the situation of their diffusion centers better so as to find alternative ways of managing them (for example, by entrusting more responsibilities to members of the laity who have received the training they need for this work);
- *a greater commitment to study and self-formation*, which was concentrated above all on the documents of the Congregation (study aids on St. Paul; material for our redesigning project; study aids on the Constitutions). Formation remains a priority for us, including the specific training necessary to carry out the Pauline mission;
- *attention to our elderly sisters*, not only by renovating houses to meet their needs but also through formation initiatives that can help us make the most of every stage of life, both spiritually and apostolically.

The knowledge we acquired in this first stage of our journey has given us the foundation we need to initiate our programming with greater awareness and practicality. This programming will constitute the second stage of the Interchapter, which opened with a day of retreat because “*if God does not build the house, then in vain do the builders labor.*”

We feel you all close to us in prayer and affection, sisters, and we sincerely return this sentiment. The steady arrival of your messages, offering us encouragement and hope, gives us great joy and comfort. We look forward to meeting you daily on our website www.paoline.org. Be sure to keep that appointment!

Warmest best wishes,

Sr. Annunciata Bestetti and Sr. Ida Porrino