

8TH SSP GENERAL CHAPTER

THE SUPERIOR GENERAL'S WELCOME ADDRESS

*Ariccia, 19 April 2004*

1. *Welcome*, dear Brothers! I am happy to greet all of you present in this our first Chapter get-together. And my greeting cannot but take up the greeting of our Founder, etched on stone, because they are always valid for all, as it was in 1960. He said: "I welcome you for a reflection on and an updating of our ministry and apostolate in this house, designed... for the sanctification of our souls... The Divine Master welcomes you lovingly... Mary, Queen of the Apostles, welcomes you... St. Paul, our Father, Teacher and Protector welcomes you..." (UPS I, 11).

Today, the Risen Christ, Mary and Paul, welcome our persons, with the anxieties and the hopes that we bring to this gathering. And during the following days, they shall be our primary inspirers for the reflections, discernment and the decisions that await us.

We are gathered here from different countries: we represent a large family whom we love and intend to serve: we shall feel united with all the brothers spread throughout the world, and in a special manner among us. Many of us already know one another and all of us will have the opportunity to know each other better, and to attune ourselves to the spirit and in the harmony of fraternal communion.

2. We also know well the *nature* and the *objectives* of the chapter, as they are described in articles 210 and 211 of our Constitutions. We are reminded that "the general chapter is the supreme body of government of the congregation". It is "the most wide-ranging and significant expression of the union and solidarity of all the members". It is "to foster the development and the cohesion of the Institute and be guaranty of fidelity to the spirit of the Founder" (art. 210).

Furthermore, having considered the weight of the religious life on the entire Church, 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 *co-responsibility* with the whole Church” (art. 211).

Here, we are brought to the awareness and to the broadness of the prospects. As an “ecclesial happening” and as a “salvific event”, the Chapter invites us, from the very start, to raise our hearts and to expand our sights to the dimensions of our universal “Pauline parish.” Therefore, let us not close ourselves in our local problems; but, with the universal heart of Paul, let us seek the welfare of the whole Congregation, rather of the Church, entrusted to our specific mission.

Furthermore, let us exert our efforts to face the problems and the challenges of the moment with the faith and most lofty vision of our Founder: who, during his flights aboard airplanes, flying over distant territories, meditated and wrote notes on how to bring the Gospel to those populations (On this matter, read the articles: “*Per via aerea: contatti con i cinque Continenti [By air mail: contacts with the five Continents]*”, sent through *San Paolo*; cf. CISP pp. 1005-1048).

This should instill on us, once more, the spirit of faith and an apostolic heart, worthy of authentic “men of God” called to accomplish in the society of today “the works of God.”

3. In my letter of 1 November 2003, while I was exhorting the confreres to approach this Chapter *with the sentiments of Blessed Giacomo Alberione*, I recalled how he convoked and managed, in 1957, the first general chapters of the first three Pauline congregations. In the prayer and in the shared discernment, he wanted that every Institute verified its own response to God’s plan: that is, if each knew how “to lead saints to heaven and apostles to the Church” (cf. *San Paolo*, July 1957).

This priority intention must be also ours. The same light must enlighten all our preoccupations, and solicit us to a sincere *assumption of responsibility*. Besides, our confreres of the whole Congregation” are asking this of us, as they have been praying and invoking for us a “new Pentecost,” and are expecting from this Chapter “abundant fruits, a new vigor in our commitment for sanctification ad apostolate” so that “the light and the strength of the Gospel may be spread among men.”

What particular expressions ought our responsibility be, vis-à-vis the Congregation and the Church, I believe could be expressed in two words: “concreteness” and “trust.”

*Concreteness* means to courageously look in the face our reality in all its aspects, riches and limits, with humility and realism, in order to conclude with achievable projects.

At the same time, *trust* assures us to be able to count always, with optimism and hope, on the aids of our charismatic heritage, for the vocation and mission that characterize us.

Let us truly believe in the assistance of the Divine Master and, for this reason, let us draw each day from Him the strength and light through the celebration of the Eucharist, and the community prayers that will open our daily activities.

We are certain that Blessed Don Giacomo Alberione assists us, enlightens us and blesses us.