

**HOMILY OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING MASS
OF THE VOCATIONAL YEAR OF THE PAULINE FAMILY**

With this Eucharistic Celebration, on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul the Apostle, we begin the Year of Vocation of the Pauline Family. This initiative was decided by our General Governments as one of the concrete ways of putting into practice the conclusions of the Synod of Bishops on Youth, which took place in the Vatican last October and had as its theme: “Youth, faith and vocational discernment”.

In this gathering, the Synod Fathers stated that *«all young people, without exception, are in the heart of God and therefore also in the heart of the Church»* (Final Document, n. 117). Faced with the reality of youth, one of the words that resounded most in the Synod Hall was “listening”. The Synod confirmed that many young people experience that their voice is not yet considered interesting and useful in the social and ecclesial spheres (Final Document, n. 7).

This emphasis says that communication with them needs to be improved, quality communication needs to be developed to create relationships, both in direct contact and in the digital environment. The Synod reiterated that it is in relationships that faith is transmitted. This observation leads the Church to assume a “relational face” that places listening, welcoming, dialogue and common discernment at the centre of a process that transforms the life of those who participate in it (cf. Final Document, n. 122).

The Church is convinced that young people must be listened to with humility, patience and willingness to understand their world and their questions, to give them, in a new way, the answers they await. In this sense, it is precisely a challenge to take on this “relational face” as a concrete form of rapprochement.

We hope that this Year for Vocations will also be a strong time for us, the Pauline Family, to listen more to young people, to grow in our relationships with them, to know how they really are, so that we do not remain with a nostalgic image of a young person who is no longer with us. This is an opportune time, not only to address them by listening to them and offering them the contents of our apostolate, but also to present the life and mission of the Pauline Family as a vocational proposal, in its various apostolic expressions.

In this sense, we must start from the assumption that every vocation has as its starting point the encounter with Jesus, because orienting a young person from the vocational point of view means helping him, first of all, to find Jesus. From the encounter with Jesus flow the vocations of the disciples of the past and present, for all charisms.

The vocation of the Apostle Paul was also like this. As we heard in today’s first reading, the light he saw and the voice he heard on the road to Damascus changed his life (cf. Acts 22:6-10). The encounter with Jesus crucified and risen or, more precisely, the encounter with the love and mercy of God manifested in Jesus, transformed Paul’s life. A strong experience

that asked him to abandon his past, to enter into a new life, going into the world to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Mk 16:15).

The Synod noted that for many young people the life of Jesus still remains profoundly attractive and inspiring today; it becomes a challenging provocation (cf. Final Document, n. 81). How can we help these young people to deepen their relationship with him and to discover the gift of his call in the Church, with the many possibilities, and among these the choice to be a member of the Pauline Family?

This Year for Vocations, besides being a good time to present the various Pauline vocations to young people, also becomes a strong opportunity to enhance our personal vocation, to “revive the gift of God” that we have received, as the theme of this event shows us. This attitude is important, because it helps us to see to what extent we witness what we believe, one of the fundamental aspects of attracting young people. Among the elements that come into play in this area are the fraternal relationship, the apostolic ardor, the life of prayer, the joy...

Another important aspect of our witness is “paolinity”, that is, our identity as a Pauline Family rooted in the Apostle Paul. Let us remember that the Pauline Family was inspired by the life, faith and apostolic experience of Saint Paul. As our Founder, Blessed James Alberione, said, *«the Pauline Family, composed of many members, must be Paul today living in a social body»* (Vademecum, n. 650). *«Jesus Christ is the perfect original: Paul became a form for us, so that in him we are forged to live according to Jesus Christ»* (Vademecum, n. 653). How intense is the “Pauline colour” of our spiritual life, of our apostolate, of community life, and finally, of our witness?

Each member of the Pauline Family is called to do his part for the success of the Year for Vocations, both by actively participating in the activities proposed in the various Circumscriptions throughout the world, and in personal and community prayer, offering the small and great sufferings for vocations: for new vocations and for the perseverance of the young people who are already in our houses of formation.

A thought also goes to the World Youth Day in Panama, where thousands of young people are gathered in these days with Pope Francis. May this meeting produce much fruit for the good of the whole Church, helping her to rejuvenate herself!

We can live this Year of Vocations in the spirit of prayer of the Secret of Success or of the Covenant, in which we recognize that, despite our weaknesses and frailty, Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life walks with us. We can correspond to His trust in us with faith, love, hope and joy. May Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of Vocations, accompany us in this time of grace with her maternal protection.

Happy Vocations Year to all! Amen.

Rome, Basilica of Mary Queen of the Apostles, 25 January 2019
Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul

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