

## **Rekindle the gift you have received**

### ***Creative fidelity at one hundred years of the Pauline charism***

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#### Aids for the day of discernment

6 May 2010

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### **Introduction to discernment in view of the elections<sup>1</sup>**

#### **1. THE TASK OF ELECTING THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CONGREGATION**

The General Chapter is the supreme authority of the Congregation, a privileged moment of its community life and a sign of its unity in diversity. Its “synodal” character gives special prominence to the centrality of God as ultimate end of everybody’s search, and to the responsibility and contribution of each one in the common journey toward the truth. Like the first Christians gathered together with Mary, Queen of the Apostles, the Capitulars strive to understand the will of God and to face adequately the challenges of the present in order to fulfill the mission entrusted to the Congregation (cf At 1,12-22).

Canon law, in affirming that the principal task of the General Chapter is the preservation of the charism transmitted by the Founder and its adequate renewal, indicates the election of the Superior General as one of the three specific tasks, together with those of “treating matters of greater importance” and “giving out norms that all are bound to observe” (CIC, can. 631). The election of the Superior General and of his Councilors takes place in function of the realization of the indications of the General Chapter for the benefit of the whole Congregation.

#### **2. THE HISTORICAL MOMENT OF THE ELECTION**

The reality of our Congregation is the fruit of a twofold history of divine mercies and of non-correspondence to the excesses of divine charity (cf AD 1). Notwithstanding all our experience of weakness and failings, we can be certain that

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<sup>1</sup> The indications for discernment follow what is being proposed by the instruction of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life *The service of authority and obedience* (11 May 2008). For further deepening particularly n. 20 of this document can be consulted.

the Society of Saint Paul is a work of God who remains faithful, even if on our part we are not always so (Rom 11,29).

Fr. Alberione and other confreres with him have sown in the Congregation and in the Church fortitude, enthusiasm, mysticism, vigor and deep certainties. They did not lack the realism of hope that has allowed them to overcome enormous difficulties. If today we experience various obstacles and complications, Saint Paul assures us that “tribulations produce patience, patience tried virtue and tried virtue hope” that will not become a motive of shame because God has given us his Holy Spirit (Rom 5,3-5).

The Spirit comes to help our weakness and “we know that everything contributes to the good of those who love God” (Rom 8,28). Love for God and for our neighbor that leads us to live fraternal life in the Society of Saint Paul must be the first criterion of our choices. The Congregation has been for us a mother and a father, she has made us to suffer sometimes, but also to experience joy; she has helped us to grow, has formed us, purified us, made us increase in numbers. Because of this love, today we are called to do all that is possible to have a Congregation “without stain or wrinkle” (Eph 5,25-27).

### **3. THE PURPOSE OF THE ELECTION**

After having already discussed the reality of the Congregation and after having delineated the objectives for the next six years, we are called to put ourselves on the search for the persons who in the next six years will guide us to answer the challenges identified by the Chapter.

In our capitular reflection we have become aware of the moment that the Congregation is living today not only on the level of the single Circumscriptions, but of the whole world. This allows us to focus on the basic characteristics that the Superior General and his Councilors must possess in order to respond to the present challenges. It is a matter of allowing ourselves to be guided by the Spirit in order to elect not so much the persons that please more or that will be the best administrators, but those who appear capable of guiding the Congregation in the continuous reading of God’s will for us in this moment of our history.

### **4. PRAYER**

In order to choose together what is just and pleasing to God we need first of all a time for prayer and individual reflection. During elections the Holy Spirit offers all the lights that are necessary. The problem is our capacity to accept them and to utilize them. Putting ourselves in the attitude of discernment, let us pray so that the Spirit may enlighten us, but let us be aware that this prayer is in reality a prayer for purity of heart to enable us to open ourselves to the light that he offers to us continually. Our individual reflection must be characterized by the determination to

look for nothing except the will of God, allowing ourselves to be inspired by the example of Christ, Saint Paul and Fr. Alberione, and being aware that the logic of the Gospel is often “upside down” compared to the human one that goes in search of success, efficiency and recognition.

## **5. PERSONAL DISCERNMENT**

The discernment that we do before the elections aims to form a personal opinion that allows each one to judge who, according to his conscience, ought to be elected (cf Directory 222.2/3).

In our reflection we must try to start always from the challenges that in the immediate future the Superior General and his Council will have to face. Persons are elected in view of the realization of the program defined by the Chapter.

In trying to single out names of persons, we must remember that there are no perfect candidates and that, independently of him who will be elected, their action will depend on our will and capacity to collaborate and on our unity.

## **6. COMMUNITARIAN DISCERNMENT**

Communitarian discernment is among the most exalted acts of consecrated fraternity, where with particular clarity stand out the centrality of God as ultimate end of the search of everybody and the responsibility and contribution of each one in the journey of all toward the truth.

Communitarian discernment before the elections excludes any form of assembly that gathers some persons and creates a mob mentality, but expresses itself through interpersonal dialog regarding the situation of the Congregation and the qualifications of those who will guide it (cf Directory 222.1). As much as possible, it is desirable that dialog in view of the elections take place person to person and not in group.

In dialog with the others we must make ourselves available to recognize in every confrere the ability to pick up the truth, even if it is partial. Dialog does not consist in the attempt to persuade the other, but in accepting the view of the brother as mediation so as to discover together the will of God, to the point of even knowing how to recognize the ideas of others as better than our own.

So that dialog with others may be fruitful it is necessary to express with courage and motivate our ideas and positions, remaining open at the same time to the points of view of others.

It is important to free oneself from prejudices, from excessive attachment to one's ideas, from perceived schema that are rigid or distorted, from arrayments that exasperate the differences in points of view.

Our discernment must be made while paying attention to the signs of the times, to the expectations of the people, the needs of the poor, the urgencies of evangelization, the priorities of the universal and local Church, going through again

in our recollection what we have treated, debated on and thought during the Chapter.

## **7. THE ELECTIONS**

In the elections God leaves to us the full responsibility of the choice and they will be successful or not for the Congregation according as we shall succeed in overcoming our narrow-mindedness, fears, ambitions, prejudices, idleness that take things for granted, and instead know how to collaborate with the Spirit.

Whatever will be the predisposition or lack of it of those who have been elected, God will always offer them the grace that they will be able to use or not, depending on the degree of their purity of heart.

The election of the Superior General and of his Councilors is a service that we do to the whole Congregation. Our discernment must lead us to the clarity of conscience as to who is fit to carry out well the role of Superior General and of Councilor General, bearing in mind the real needs of the Congregation. Before the elections, in fact, each of us will have to swear "before Christ the Lord who will have to judge me" that he will vote for the one who "according to conscience" ought to be elected (*Directory* 222.2/3).

## **8. ATTITUDES AFTER THE ELECTIONS**

After the time of discernment, there is the time of obedience, that is, of the execution of the decisions that have been taken.

The persons called to exercise authority must know that they will be up to their task only if, before others, they will undertake that pilgrimage that leads to look for with intensity and rectitude the will of God. The person who is called to exercise authority is at the service of the search for the will of the Father, which is the motive of the existence of the religious life and the only authentic source of unity among the communities. It is always well to remember the severe words that the Lord Jesus addresses to those who are tempted to cloak with worldly prestige their authority: "Anyone who wants to be the first among you, let him be your servant, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20,27-28).

All the brothers must offer with generosity their collaboration to the authority with the firm resolve to maintain unity in every case, whatever may be the result of the elections.

**ATTACHMENT:**  
**SOME INDICATIONS OF THE HOLY SEE**  
**ABOUT AUTHORITY IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE**

The Instruction of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life *Il servizio dell'autorità e l'obbedienza* (11 May 2008) delineates some characteristics of authority in religious life that are summarized here. The image of the Superior proposed by the document is generic and should be adapted to our specific congregational reality. The indications of the Instruction can however be a valid aid in view of our discernment.

The Instruction talks of a threefold service of the Superiors: to the *individual persons* called to live their consecration; to build up *fraternal communities*; to participate in the *common mission*.

*1. Authority as service in the search for the will of God*

- 1.1. The one who is called to exercise authority is at the service of the *search for the will of the Father*, which is the motive of the existence of religious life and the only authentic source of the unity of the communities. He will be able to do it only if, before others, he undertakes this journey. The authority must assiduously look for, with the help of prayer, reflection and the advice of others, what God truly wants. Otherwise, instead of representing God, the Superior risks putting himself rashly in His place.
- 1.2. The authority in the consecrated life is first of all a *spiritual authority*. The Superior must be capable of animating and proposing, of calling to mind the reasons for the existence of the Institute and of helping the others to correspond with fidelity to the call of the Spirit.
- 1.3. As *service for communion* the Superior is called to guarantee to the community the time and quality of prayer and to promote the dignity of the person, paying attention to every member and to his journey of growth. The Superior must avoid both an attitude of delegation that allows each one to do what he likes, and the imposition of his point of view that obliges everyone to conform to his personal visions.
- 1.4. Authority does not retreat in moments of difficulty, but *infuses courage and hope*. It is also capable of admitting its limitations and to profit from its failures and defeats.
- 1.5. The Superior must know and *keep alive the charism* of his religious family, as also the sense of faith and ecclesial communion in effective and affective rapport with the Pastors, first of all with the Pope, the center of unity of the Church.

1.6. The Superior must be not only attentive in solving problems or in overcoming possible crises, but must also pay attention to the normal growth of each one in every phase and season of existence, accompanying the journey of *permanent formation* of the persons in the communities.

## 2. Authority as service to the community

- 2.1. One of the principal ministries of the Superior is *listening*, for which he should always be available, above all with one who feels himself alone and needful of attention. Listening transmits affection and understanding. It says that the other is appreciated and his presence and point of view are held in consideration. An attentive listening allows to better coordinate the energies and gifts that the Spirit has given to the community, and even to bear in mind in decisions the limits and difficulties of some member.
- 2.2. The authority must be concerned with creating a climate favorable to *dialog*, sharing and joint responsibility, creating an atmosphere of trust and promoting the acknowledgment of the capacities and sensibilities of individuals. Alongside listening he will esteem sincere and free dialog in order to share sentiments, prospects and projects.
- 2.3. The Superior must be capable of *valuing* as much as possible the free contribution of *all the confreres*, strengthening and making to converge all the human resources in the project of the Congregation. The communion of goods and personal capacities, of gifts and talents, of intuitions and inspirations is more important than the communion of material goods. Even more fundamental is the sharing of spiritual goods that the Superior must promote, without pretending to see the immediate fruits of his efforts.
- 2.4. The authority must be *capable of balance*, shown both in the ability to pick the positiveness of each one and to utilize to the best his gifts taking into account his difficulties and predispositions, and in that rightfulness of intention that makes it interiorly free, not too much concerned with pleasing and gratifying, and clear in indicating the true meaning of the mission for the consecrated person that cannot be reduced to the valuing of the gifts of each one.

## 3. Authority as service to the mission

- 3.1. The Superior must be *capable of coordinating* the work carried out by the community, encouraging to assume the responsibilities and respecting them when assumed. It will be his care to share the responsibilities, then committing himself to respect each one in just autonomy and to promote that interior freedom that allows each one to work and collaborate, to substitute and be substituted, to be a protagonist and to give his contribution even as he stays in the background.
- 3.2. One who exercises authority must *must help to live differences* in points of view and projects *in a spirit of communion*. The Superior must remember that difference in ethnicity and culture leads to give a different reading of the signs

of the times and therefore to propose different projects, not always compatible. The conflict of ideas must never become a conflict of persons. The ideal is not the uniformity of the communities, but the search for solutions that do not ignore any of the values to which it is necessary to make reference.

- 3.3. Authority must be on watch so that *balance* may be respected between time dedicated to prayer and time dedicated to work, between the individual and the community, between commitment and rest, between attention to common life and attention to the world and to the Church, between personal formation and communitarian formation.
- 3.4. Authority is called to develop a *pedagogy of forgiveness* and of mercy, that is, to be an instrument of God's love that accepts, corrects and always relaunches a new possibility for the confrere that errs and falls into sin. The Superior must do his best so that the whole community may learn this style of mercy.
- 3.5. Authority must have a *sense of justice* that recognizes the responsibility of the community regarding external persons. Understanding toward the confrere cannot exclude justice, especially towards defenseless persons and victims of abuse.
- 3.6. The Superior must be capable of promoting *collaboration with the laity* through a well-defined map of competencies and responsibilities, both of the lay people and the religious, in the same way as intermediate organisms (Administrative Councils and the like).