

**Meeting of the National Formation Promotors in the UNION  
Roma, 11-16 July 2013**

**UNION OF CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE  
Inaugural Address**

First of all, welcome to the meeting of UAC formators! We wish to reflect on the charismatic vision of our Founder especially in the light of the renewed call of the Church for “New Evangelization” and in this Year of Faith, declared by the Holy Father, from October 2012. The entire Pallottine Family remains grateful to you for your commitment to our Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti and his charism. Realization of Pallotti’s dream for his foundation and the Church has become our common responsibility and the present event will be another valuable step in this direction.

What exactly is the Union of Catholic Apostolate? It is not an unfamiliar question for us. This question continues to be asked all over the Pallottine world. I can testify to it, based on my experiences during the visitations to various countries and entities of our Society. This question, in fact, should not frighten or annoy us. It is an indication of the greatness of the prophetic inspiration of St. Vincent. For the same reason, we do not so easily come across experts on Pallotti who can answer all questions with absolute clarity and authority. Rather we are all in the process of discovering, learning and experiencing. This is our responsibility and it cannot be passed onto others.

**I. UNION OF CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE: A CALL TO ONGOING DISCOVERY**

As regards to the essential elements of the Union, we have certainly many documents describing them. The nature of the Union is beautifully described in the General Statutes of UAC: “The Union of Catholic Apostolate, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a communion of the faithful who, united with God and with one another in accordance with the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti, promote the co-responsibility of all the baptized to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and in the world, and to bring all to unity in Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the vast majority of members continue to give different answers to this question. The following are some of the answers which contain elements of truth but, perhaps, not the complete truth regarding UAC.

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<sup>1</sup> Union of Catholic Apostolate, *General Statutes*, Rome, 2008, n. 1.

1. *UAC means empowering the laity in the Church:* but the Union cannot be limited to the laity alone. UAC cannot grow and flourish, in my opinion, without the ample support of the Core Communities of the Union.
2. *UAC means SAC:* Without doubt, the SAC has the most vital role to play in the realization of the Union. But SAC alone is not the Union.
3. *SAC members, Pallottine sisters and lay persons together constitute UAC:* While these three components are important for the Union, there is something more to it. It is a gift in service of the Church.
4. *Laity who has made apostolic commitment constitutes the Union:* Some members tend to think of the goal of the Union as having as many lay persons as possible, who have made the apostolic commitment. It is an important part of the Union but is not everything. These persons should be enabled to make their commitment to the mission of the Church, always inspired by the spirit of our Founder.
5. *Establishment of the structures as envisaged in the General Statutes as primary tasks of the Union:* It is necessary to establish the structures as mentioned in the General Statutes, GCCs, NCCs, Assemblies, Congresses and Secretariats etc. While structures are important, the primary aim of the Union is to form genuine apostles of Jesus
6. *UAC as an apostolic force in the Church:* The core of Pallottine charism seems to be deeply related to the key word “apostle”. The God of infinite love and mercy sends Jesus as apostle of the Eternal Father. We are all called to imitate this Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Therefore, the entire life of Jesus is to be the only rule for all the Pallottines. To be authentic apostles of Jesus is the vocation and mission of each one of us. As Pallotti himself says, “God has commanded each one to procure the eternal salvation of his neighbor; and since in carrying out such a precept we must imitate Jesus Christ who is the Apostle of the Eternal Father, therefore the life of Jesus Christ, which is his apostolate, should be the model of the apostolate of everyone; and as all are called, rather obliged to imitate Jesus Christ, so all, in proportion to their condition and state, are called to the apostolate...”<sup>2</sup> This is also the message given by Pope John Paul II in his homily given at the church of San Salvatore in Onda in Rome on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1986: “Continue to increase your commitment so that that which Vincent Pallotti prophetically announced, and which the Second Vatican Council authoritatively confirmed, may

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<sup>2</sup> OCCC III, p. 142.

become a happy reality, and that all Christians become *authentic apostles of Christ* in the Church and in the world!”<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion we can say that the UAC is not an end in itself. It is a means, an instrument, a “way of being” and living Christian discipleship. UAC tries to create an apostolic force in the Church of authentic apostles of Jesus through the revival of faith and rekindling of charity in the hearts of everyone. It is not just a question of forming a separate Pallottine group; it is a spiritually and apostolically animated group of persons who, in turn, work ceaselessly to realize the apostolic vocation and mission of the faithful in the Church and the world. We must consider the following as **indispensable elements** for the realization of the charismatic vision of our Founder.

### **1. Interpreting the charism according to the signs of the times**

A charism is relevant to the extent that it is able to respond to the needs of the time. Pallotti’s prophetic vision emerged as a response to the need to “revive faith and rekindle charity” in a strongly anticlerical, secular world of his time. We are facing almost exactly the same type of situation in the world today. On the one hand, there is the great need to proclaim the Gospel to the millions who did not have the opportunity to listen to the Good News especially in the continents of Africa and Asia; on the other hand, there is the urgent need to re-evangelize the strongly secular, individualistic Western World which boasts of a Christian culture. There is also the perennial need to reawaken the spirit of charity so that the earthly blessings are shared with the millions of poor and the under-privileged in the world. The situations and needs of the countries, continents and local churches are so totally different and hence the first step should be to discern the signs of the time and respond adequately to them by interpreting and implementing our charism with creativity and courage. This will be the first necessary step to be taken for a “New Evangelization” “ad intra and ad extra.”

How can the Pallottine charism be a response to the challenge of “New Evangelization”? Though we have dealt with this question on a number of occasions, we have not been able to give relevant answers to it. If we reflect on the person and mission of Pope Francis ever since his election, the obvious response to this question that we get is that it is only by returning to the Jesus as we encounter him in the gospel and by bearing witness to him that we can become true Christians and apostles.

### **2. Developing more of the contemplative dimension of the UAC**

Let us not forget that the Pallottine charism was the fruit of an intense spiritual journey of a saint. Pallotti’s writings amply testify to the depth of his spiritual and mystical experiences

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *General Statutes*, p. 12.

and to his apostolic commitment. His desire for total transformation into Jesus, the Apostle of the Father was unparalleled in his mystical writings. At times we tend to reduce UAC to some sort of a theological, intellectual or even juridical construct devoid of such a deep spiritual content. Without having a taste of the spiritual experience of Pallotti, one can hardly understand what we mean by UAC. Hence, the priority should be placed on making a spiritual journey with Pallotti in view of a deeper apostolic commitment in service of God and of humanity. As UAC General Statutes state: “The specific spirituality of the Union is the following of Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. In faith and charity, the members of the Union are determined to remain united with the crucified and risen Christ ever present among them (Cf. Mt 18, 20); they strive to imitate his love for the Father and for all persons, seeking to live his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible.”<sup>4</sup> Returning to the very life of Jesus, living the gospel values in our daily life, is the only way of evangelizing ourselves and the entire Church. It all begins with a personal conversion, the change of hearts, *metanoia*, as Jesus wanted. In fact, the UAC which is marked by communion with God and others can never be realized without concentrating more on the mystical and contemplative dimension of the Pallottine charism.

### **3. Communion as the core of the ecclesial vision underlying the UAC**

We all know by now that the Ecclesial model that Pallotti followed was that of communion, participation, a novelty in his own time and a common vision after Vatican II. We are also aware that regardless of the courage and vision of Vatican II, such a model of communion is still a dream in many parts of the world. Hence it has become a pleasant mandate for the Pallottine family to work for the realization of such an Ecclesial model. The parishes are the privileged place for the realization of the Union. In this Ecclesial vision, a parish is the place where each faithful is able to realize his apostolic vocation as an apostle of Jesus. Such an Ecclesiology of communion should become the foundation of our personal apostolic mentality, of our communities and of our entire Pallottine Family.

*Are we working towards such an Ecclesiology of communion in all areas of our Pallottine life and apostolate? What will be the effect of such an ecclesial vision on our formation?*

### **4. “Pedagogy of the Cenacle”**

One of the urgent needs today is to develop an attractive and practical pedagogy of UAC formation. Perhaps, we may have to search for different models of formation, according to the particular situations of countries. But the essential elements will have to remain the same. We can draw inspiration and guidelines for a UAC formation from the original image of Cenacle presented by our Founder himself. We might rightly call it the “Pedagogy of the Cenacle” or the “Cenacle Model of UAC Formation”. The following are some of the elements of this model:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., n. 19.

- a) The Holy Spirit, the creative, transforming Spirit, as the principal agent of formation
- b) Mary, Queen of Apostles as the spiritual guide and example
- c) The Upper Room, symbolizes a community of believers gathered together
- d) Listening to the Word of God and breaking the Bread in a spirit of sharing and fraternity
- e) Inner transformation of persons into apostles of Jesus as the transforming experience
- f) Going forth from the Cenacle as apostles and missionaries to bear witness to the Good News
- g) The spirituality and charism of St. Vincent Pallotti as the inspiration as well as the spiritual and apostolic foundation. Hence, we can say that the Union of Catholic Apostolate, best exemplified by the Cenacle, is the crucible where apostles of Jesus are formed and sent out. Hence, the Cenacle can and should become the nucleus of Pallottine Formation at all levels.

The present meeting is held precisely to face the challenge of formation of the Union members. We need to learn from each other and enrich other through these days of sharing of our experiences in this field. Hence the question is: *how is UAC formation done in various parts of the Pallottine world?*

## **5. Missionary Dynamism**

The apostles never remained closed in the Cenacle. Transformed from within, they went forth until the end of the world to proclaim the Good News. The Cenacle experience has a strong missionary dynamism; it impels one from within. In fact, charity by its very nature urges one to go out of oneself towards God and others. Hence our motto: "the love of God urges on".

If the UAC has to become attractive and relevant as a means of formation for authentic Christian discipleship, it has to be followed with concrete missionary commitments. Otherwise it will never be more than pious thinking. Christian commitment is measured by concrete actions of charity, as it is mentioned in the last judgment. "I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was stranger and you made me welcome..." (Mt 25, 31-46). These conditions are the most ordinary and bare necessities of life. It is this realization that prompted Pallotti to become all

things to all. His prayer is also equally concrete. “I would like to become food to feed the hungry, clothing to cover up the naked, drink to quench the thirst of the thirsty...”<sup>5</sup>

There are so many needs in the world. There are cries for help all over. The nature of the needs might slightly differ from place to place but human nature as a whole remains the same. There is so much of spiritual poverty in the developed world; there is so much of human brokenness and material needs in the developed and developing world; there is terrible material poverty in many of the poor countries. Perennial wars only add to the misery. A spirituality that does not care for the human person created in God’s own image and likeness cannot be authentic. Therefore, every member of the Union, if he or she wants to be an authentic apostle of Jesus, will have to do what the Master himself did. There is no mission other than the mission of Jesus. Living the Pallottine spirituality means being filled with the spirit of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. This means constantly being aware of being sent, living for the other. Hence, let us remember, without the spirit of mission, we are destined to stagnate and die.

*What are the different missionary commitments that the members of the Union undertake in different parts of the Pallottine world?*

## **II. Concrete Challenges**

If we wish to realize our dream of transforming the UAC as an “Evangelical trumpet”, we have some real works to do. As concrete steps, I would make the following suggestions:

- a) *Discover St. Vincent Pallotti more profoundly – “the undiscovered treasure.”* It is no exaggeration if I say that our Founder is very much an “undiscovered treasure”, not only in the Pallottine Family but also in the entire Church. How come that this saint, so profound in his spiritual, mystical, theological and apostolic dimensions remain so unknown? The greatest obstacle to the realization of UAC arises, therefore, from the lack of profound knowledge and love for St. Vincent Pallotti. Much more needs to be done regarding it among the members of the Core Communities of the Union. There is, however, a growing awareness of Pallotti and his charism in recent years but there is still a very long way to go.
- b) *It is not possible to understand UAC without knowing Pallotti:* It is an impossible task to understand what we mean by UAC without knowing and experiencing the spirituality and charism of Pallotti himself. From my experiences of the many courses of Pallottine formation in Rome, I can testify to the fact that the participants were always receptive when we presented Pallottine spirituality and charism. But

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<sup>5</sup>OOCC X, p. 115.

countless questions were raised when UAC was presented. A sound knowledge and experience of the rich spiritual and apostolic heritage of our Founder will be the first step in the right direction.

- c) *Do not reduce the UAC to a mere intellectual or juridical constructs:* Many members get blocked by the General Statutes of the Union. We have to admit that the General Statutes speak mainly of the structural and juridical aspects of the Union. A serious reader can also find information on its historical development, its nature, its mission and organization. These statutes are certainly needed. But they have to be given “flesh and blood” by introducing more spiritual and apostolic contents and lived experiences.
- d) *Evolving UAC formation models:* Every attempt should be made to learn from the lived, world-wide experiences of the Union. Otherwise the danger is to reduce the Union to a theoretical construct, using the same language and terminologies again and again. The formation models need to be developed and should be based on the lived experiences of the Union. For that, we all need to be much more open to these international experiences. Pallotti and his charism will have to be continuously interpreted according to different cultures and situations. This is where much creativity is required.
- e) *Need for further study and research on the Pallottine charism:* It is a field where we need to do much more. There should be possibilities for deeper study and research on the spiritual, theological, and pastoral aspects of the Pallottine charism. UAC is not a finished project as far as its understanding and realization is concerned. With the recognition of it by the Universal Church on 28 October 2003, we have the definite answer to its authenticity and relevance for the entire Church. But our understanding of it and its practical pastoral applications are far from over. We have only just set on a journey of discovery. A theme of great urgency is the question of re-evangelization of the Western world. The question is: how can UAC respond to this challenge? I am personally convinced that UAC can provide a fitting response to this present challenge in the Church. As Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union, it is a theme that I wish to develop in the future with the help of the most prepared and experienced Pallotti experts, theologians, pastors and formators from the Pallottine Family.
- f) *Publication of Pallottine literature:* If we wish to know Pallotti, we need to diffuse Pallottine literature in all the official languages of our Pallottine world. Though some steps are taken, there should be a more organized effort in this regard. This is one area where all the members of the Union are to be involved – in producing new

materials, in translating them into different languages and in finding the resources for publishing them.

- g) Pallotti Institutes as centers of study and research on Pallottine Charism:* The Pallotti Institute in Rome as well as the emerging Institutes in Brazil, Poland, Germany, India and Cameroon are to become Centers of Study and Research for the entire Pallottine Family.
- h) Pallottine Academic Institutes as centers of formation in the spirit of our Charism:* Our Major Theological Academic Institutes in Poland, Brazil, Germany and India should certainly have a Pallottine profile in their academic curriculum and theologizing. Without such a profile, our Major Seminaries will be like any other diocesan seminary, without anything specific to offer to the Local Church.
- i) Courses of Pallottine formation in Rome:* After many struggles, in collaboration with many Provinces/Regions as well as with special financial contributions from the Generalate of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate and the Italian Province of Queen of Apostles of our Society, we have managed to set up an International Centre for Pallottine Formation (“Cenacle”) at Via G. Ferrari, Rome. Over the past years, numerous courses have been conducted for the priests, brothers, sisters and some lay members of the Pallottine family. There is also a course for one year on Pallottine spirituality. In fact, a new culture of international and intercultural Pallottine formation is evolving in the Pallottine Family. Our aim, today, should be to form universal, open-minded Pallottines, true to the universal spirit of our Founder. We must aim at forming such a new generation of Pallottines who will be able to transcend the barriers of culture, language and customs. Gifts of grace and nature should be shared among all the entities and members of the Pallottine Family for the common good of our Pallottine heritage and of the Universal Church.
- j) Pallottine pastoral centers:* There are a great number of Pallottine Pastoral Centers around the world. Some of them are constructed in view of animating and coordinating different pastoral activities in the Pallottine spirit. Sadly, there are very few which are able to accomplish such a goal. We need to work towards forming teams of animators truly in the spirit of the Union and should aim at pastoral activities specific to our charism. Formation of the laity for an effective participation in the mission of the Church should be given great priority. Such centers should have

the participative ecclesial vision as its very foundation. Further, “reciprocal listening and cooperation must be the basis of our style of apostolic life.”<sup>6</sup>

*k) Greater collaboration between the core communities of the Union:* It is an undisputable fact that the Core Communities of the Union have an added responsibility for the realization of our charism. There is a growing sense of this common responsibility, for example, among the three General Councils in Rome. We have even initiated a yearly meeting of the 3 General Councils with the General Coordination Council of the Union in Rome. Such practice is to be introduced also at the national levels. UAC and the members of the Core Communities are not separate realities. The Union is not something out there, away from the Core Communities. It is the same reality. There must be, therefore, greater collaboration at the levels of members, structures and components.

## CONCLUSION

There are indeed many challenges and questions regarding UAC within the Pallottine Family. We need to aim at forming a new generation of Pallottines who are imbued with the spirit of our Founder and who wish to realize his charism in service of the Church and the entire humankind.

Such a goal can be achieved only when we are able to multiply our efforts, always trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discover and implement as concretely as possible the rich spiritual and apostolic treasures contained in the Pallottine charism. UAC, then, shall become an “evangelical trumpet” inviting all, to the catholic apostolate in the Church. According to our Founder, the Union is to remain in the Church of Jesus Christ permanently “like an Evangelical Trumpet, which calls all, invites all, and awakens the zeal and charity of all the faithful of every state, grade and condition.”<sup>7</sup> To fulfill that, we ourselves will have to be first transformed into authentic apostles of Jesus, following the inspiration and guidance of our Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti. The Pallottine formative process is basically aimed at helping us to imitate and follow the untiring zeal of the Apostle of the Father, his undying thirst for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Therefore, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ is our rule. In the various circumstances of the day, from thoughts to desires, from desires to love, from love to trust, we need to follow the contemplation and action of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Séamus Freeman, *In a Constant Search for Faithfulness. Letter of the Rector General to all Members of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate*, ACTA SAC XVIII, Rome, 1996, n. 34.

<sup>7</sup> *OOCCI*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ratio Institutions of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate*, Rome, 2004, n. 90.

I conclude this paper with this message of hope given by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, His Excellency Archbishop Stanisław Ryłko, on the occasion of the consignment of the Decree of Erection of the Union of Catholic Apostolate and the approval of the General Statutes, at Vatican City, on 14 November 2003: “The nearly two hundred years of the history of your association has brought copious fruits of holiness and apostolic endeavor to the Church. With today’s act, the Holy See intends to express a new manifestation of trust in the *Union of Catholic Apostolate* that could, at the same time, be a spur to your commitment to the Church of the future.”<sup>9</sup> And now, indeed, is the moment to act!

12 July 2013

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<sup>9</sup> *General Statutes*, p. 58.