

**WHERE THE LORD
IS LEADING US**

The Word

**Redesigns
Our Journey**

ASIA - OCEANIA

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LOOKING AT OUR TERRITORY FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Presentation of the Superior General



Dearest Sisters,

One of the attitudes that accompanied us during our Enlarged Council Meeting in January 2009 was the effort to *“look at our territory from a worldwide perspective.”* But upon deeper reflection, we feel called above all to *“look at our territory from God’s perspective”* so as to contemplate his work in our unique story of salvation and thus interpret our situation wisely, in the light of the Word.

How does the Lord see us? What is his “dream” for us? Where does he want to lead us in this time, so rich in faith and opportunities, marked by a postmodern mentality dominated by sensitivity, emotions and a focus on the present moment, but which is also characterized by a sincere and profound search for God?

This affirmation emerged repeatedly in the circumscription and congregational projects presented during our last General Chapter. All underscored the need to give more emphasis to the principle on which our identity as consecrated Paulines is based, namely: *faith* (cf. *Chapter Document*, n. 7). Faith considered as a relationship with a living Person; faith as the capacity to find the meaning, impetus and reasons that enable us to take risks and to love.

In the Enlarged Council Meeting, we perceived that the Lord continues to come to meet us on our own “way to Damascus,” that is to say, in the concrete situations in which we find ourselves. To us too he extends the invitation to “get up, stand on our feet” and continue our journey so as to become women with universal hearts, open to diversity.

To get up and stand on our feet with a more vibrant faith, in the certitude that he, the risen Lord, is with us and will always be with us.

To get up and stand on our feet so as to contemplate, with the heart of Paul, the eternal plan of God in our unfolding Pauline history. And to realize once again, with wonder, that we are “apostles of Jesus Christ” in keeping with the Father’s mysterious plan for our life: “*I have been entrusted with this special grace, of proclaiming to the gentiles the unfathomable treasure of Christ and of throwing light on the inner workings of the mystery kept hidden through the ages in God, the Creator of everything*” (Eph. 3:8-9).

To get up and stand on our feet so as to continue the redesigning process we have initiated, basing our every reflection and decision on the Word and allowing the Lord, through that Word, to lead us and to create among us communion, solidarity and openness to our mission.

To get up and stand on our feet so as to accept the fact that we are not the protagonists of this project. Instead, to allow ourselves to be moved and “programmed” by the Spirit, in keeping with the illuminating words of Benedict XVI at the beginning of his Petrine ministry: “*My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord; to be guided by him, so that he himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.*”

And in this particular “hour” in which we are looking ahead to our Continental Meeting for Asia and Australia so as to begin new journeys of redesigning and a new quality of Pauline life on those continents, we want to allow the power and sweetness of the Word to help us become involved in this event, in unity with all our Pauline communities throughout the world, but in a special way with the communities on these two multi-ethnic and multi-religious continents, which offer the Church great hope for the future.

I invite us all to look attentively at our Pauline world, allowing ourselves to be enlightened by the Word, which shapes and gives direction to our existence, and which will cast light on the process of redesigning our presences.

Some directives with regard to method

- The first part of our itinerary consists of *lectio*, that is to say, a prayerful reading of the Word, which should be done personally, utilizing the Bible texts indicated.
- The second part consists of meditation: first carried out personally, and then shared on the community level.
- Afterward, each sister is invited to write a prayer to share with her community.
- Our meditation on the Word can then be expanded to contemplate our Congregation's situation on the continents of Asia and Australia so as to welcome the invitation of the Word to "*get up and go into the city....*"

I hope we will allow ourselves to become fully involved in this process on the spiritual and apostolic levels, looking to the future and above all trusting in the creative hand of God, who can "make all things new" in every time and place.

Affectionately,

Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General

Rome, 30 June 2009

1. FOR LECTIO



“GET UP AND STAND ON YOUR FEET”

The Command that Transformed Paul’s Life

Let us read the following Bible passage with the desire to let ourselves be questioned by the Word: a Word that is an encounter with a living and beloved Person—our Master.

I was going to Damascus, armed with full powers and a commission from the chief priests, and in the middle of the day as I was on my way, Your Majesty, I saw a light from heaven shining more brilliantly than the sun round me and my fellow-travelers. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you, kicking against the goad.” Then I said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason: to appoint you as my servant and as witness of this vision in which you have seen me, and of others in which I shall appear to you...” (Acts 26:12-16).

“Who are you?” The Lord and Saul establish a dialogue, an interpersonal relationship. “Who are you, Lord?” “Who are you, Saul?” “To whom do you belong?”

“Who am I?” Our identity lies in this call, which leads us to discover our “new name” and the profound meaning of our life.

This call is followed by an invitation: *“Get up....”*

The command *“Get up”* occurs 109 times in Sacred Scripture (even more if we include the various synonyms used) and although the phrase is used in different ways, it is always dy-

namic, that is, it is meant to involve the person in whatever is being proposed.

"Get up" (or *"Arise"*) is the invitation the Lord God extended to our fathers in faith: "Get up! Travel the length and breadth of the country, for I mean to give it to you" (Gn. 13:17). "Arise, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation" (Gn. 21:18).

"Get up"/"Arise" is a prophetic phrase: "The angel of the Lord touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you'" (1 K. 19:7); "Get up and make your way down to the potter's house, and there I shall tell you what I have to say" (Jr. 18:2); "Son of man, get to your feet; I will speak to you" (Ez. 2:1); "Arise, shine out, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Is. 60:1); "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you" (Jonah 3:2).

"Get up"/"Arise" is a loving request: "My lover speaks, he says to me: 'Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!'" (Song of Songs 2:10)

"Get up"/"Arise" is a plea to the Lord, asking him to participate in our prayer: "Arise, Lord, come to your resting place, you and your majestic ark" (Ps. 132:8).

"Get up" is the invitation of Jesus to be reborn: "Get up and go forth..."; "Courage, get up; he is calling you" (Mk. 10:49); "*Talitha cum*: Little girl, get up!" (Mk. 5:41)

"Get up" is what the Voice tells Paul to do: "Get up and go into the city...." Paul is told to get up so as to take "the shining light of the Gospel of Christ" (2 Co. 4:4) to the Gentiles.

"Get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason: to appoint you as my servant and as witness of this vision in which you have seen me, and of others in which I shall appear to you..." (Acts 26:15-16).

"Get up" so as to open yourself to the logic of love. The risen Lord not only appears to Paul in all his glory; he not only allows him to know him as the Living One, but he also reveals himself as a

personal power that intervenes in Paul's life. In the "hour of Damascus," Paul comes to know Christ as a light that permeates his existence and points him in a specific direction.¹ The young Saul is transformed into the Apostle Paul. In this experience, he feels immensely loved by God and he corresponds to that love with all the passion in his heart.

Although he never personally met Jesus, Paul feels "seized" by him (Phil. 3:12), conquered by his love. In fact, he calls himself an "apostle by vocation" (cf. Rm. 1:1, 1 Co. 1:1) or an "apostle by the will of God" (2 Co. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1), as if to emphasize that his conversion was not the result of an intellectual process but the fruit of a divine intervention, an unimaginable grace. With the firm conviction of being profoundly loved by the Lord, he recounts his experience succinctly, but in words laden with meaning: "God, who had *set me apart* from the time when I was in my mother's womb, *called me* through his grace and chose to *reveal* his Son in me, so that I should *preach* him to the gentiles" (Ga. 1:15-16).

Later in the same letter, he refers to Jesus as the one "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Ga. 2:20). And he invites his spiritual children to realize that they too are enfolded in the love of Christ: "The love of Christ overwhelms us" (2 Co. 5:14), that is to say, it surrounds us, embraces us and launches us into the apostolate. For Paul, Jesus is simply the one "who loved us" (Rm. 8:37).

In keeping with the *Song of Songs*, in which we read that "love is strong as death" (8:6), Paul cannot imagine that anything could possibly separate Christians from the love of Christ. In fact, he says: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rm. 8:31-37). Sustained by this faithful and unwavering love that loved him first, Paul feels capable of facing every problem and challenge: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

¹ Cf. A.M. Denis, *L'Élection et la vocation de Paul*, pp. 405-428.

“Get up” so as to live a relationship of love. The love of Christ both draws Paul and sends him forth. It was this inner “fire” that infused him with fortitude and passion, that supported him in his weakness and increased his energy, that rendered his love dynamic and creative. “My little children...I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Ga. 4:19)

The consecrated life, our Pauline life, germinates and develops in the context of a loving relationship, in the desire to respond to Love with love. We “fly off” to exist completely in God, in the place his love has prepared for us from all eternity and for all eternity. “Our vocation is to fall in love with Love” (A.M. Canopi) and it has a single motivation: to love the Loved One back so that everyone else can get to know and love him too.

Our Founder’s proposal was also illuminated by love from beginning to end: both the wondrous love by means of which God precedes and accompanies us, and the fragile, ephemeral love by means of which each one of us opens our heart to his call. Fr. Alberione situates the entire Pauline life in this climate of love, to the point of urging us to ask Jesus Life to replace our heart with his (DF, p. 40), thus enabling the love of Jesus himself to flow out of us. Our Founder always remained faithful to this point of view, so much so that he defined the religious life as “an act of perfect, continual and eternal love—a love that rises directly to God without any intermediary.”²

Fr. Alberione said:

You are Daughters of St. Paul and thus you must have great faith in the Apostle, who will obtain for you the grace to move from tepidity to fervor. Tepid people do not do well in our Congregation, which needs members who are active, generous and fervent. St. Paul wants ardent hearts, broad minds and spirits fired by great generosity.³

² *San Paolo*, October 1954. Cf. *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, p. 59.

³ *To the Daughters of St. Paul*, 1951, p. 206.

2. FOR MEDITATION



In a spirit of profound recollection, let us ask the Lord: “What are you saying to me by means of these words and by means of the events that touch our life today?” Let us dialogue with the Word, allowing it to penetrate our hearts and question us profoundly as individuals and as a community.

The Lord comes to meet us on our own “way to Damascus”—the place of his self-revelation—and he invites us too to get up, stand on our feet and set out on a journey of conversion that will lead us back to our first love, rekindle our faith and transform us into women of hope.

He extends to us the same invitation he extended to Paul:

“Get up/Arise” from your repetitious behavior, from your weariness and discouragement, from your daily routine...and allow yourself to be surrounded by the light and breath of the Spirit, who urges you to “go beyond” these things.

“Get up/Arise” with the faith of Paul, of Fr. Alberione, of Maestra Thecla, of the women and men who have been invited to “wake up” and move ahead, so as to discover or rediscover Love....

“Get up/Arise” with docility, vigilant and open to the signs the Lord has placed on your path. Allow him to freely use you according to his good will and pleasure, and to send you to proclaim the Gospel to those who are near (your own community) and those who are far away.

“Get up/Arise” so as to see the fatherly hand of God in your current situation. Let him take you by the hand, raise you up and make you a new creature.

“Get up/Arise and go forth,” in keeping with the Founder’s pressing invitation:

Onward—don’t remain stationary!
Our houses should move ahead, not remain stationary.
Our members should move ahead, not remain stationary.
The whole Congregation should move ahead,
not remain stationary.
The apostolate should move ahead, not remain stationary.
Our interior work should be marked by continual ascent,
not remain stationary.
Our study should move ahead, not remain stationary.
And the same should be true of administration
and vocations....
We have both young and old Paulines,
but all must move ahead, perennially youthful,
because those are the people who reach heaven.⁴

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1954, p. 56.

3. FOR SHARING



Let us share with our sisters what we feel the Lord is calling us to do in our own life and in the redesigning process.

In a community encounter, each sister can share how the Word she meditated on has resonated in her own life. In particular, she can share what she feels the Word is calling us to do with regard to the Congregation's journey of redesigning our presences.

4. FOR PRAYER



As a way of welcoming the invitation to "get up/arise," we could compose a prayer or write down the thoughts and/or feelings that the Word inspires in us.

What do the words "get up/arise" mean to me?

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Prayer

The Lord says to our Congregation:

In my eyes you are a treasure, and I love you.
I know your procrastinations and your many failures,
but I chose you as my bride and I will never forsake you.
I want you to realize, like Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher,
that I have risen, that I am alive and close to you,
that I welcome you and know you are anxiously
searching for me.
All too often you seek me as if I were still buried
in some remote place,
wrapped in the “burial shroud” of outdated customs.
Instead, I am alive; I am right next to you;
I call you by name and I want to send you
to your brothers and sisters.
I want you to be like the disciples
on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk. 24:32):
to feel your hearts burn when I speak
and explain the Scriptures to you.
I want you to realize,
like Jacob after he awoke from his dream (cf. Gn. 28:10-22),
that the ground you are standing on is holy ground,
that a “ladder from heaven” descends on today’s cities too,
and that angels are going up and down on it.

(Free translation of a prayer by Cardinal C.M. Martini)

ENTERING IMMENSE ASIA AND DIVERSIFIED OCEANIA WITH THE HEART OF PAUL



“Get up and go into the city...”

During these months in which our Congregation is looking more attentively at Asia and the parts of Oceania where we are present (Australia and Papua New Guinea), we welcome the invitation to become more familiar with these continents so as to get to know the context and cultures in which our sisters live and work, participate in their joys and in the challenges and worries they face, and carry them all in our prayers.

So as to get to know these situations better, let us do some research on our presence in these circumscriptions. We could almost make it a “contest” among ourselves to collect pictures, information and interesting news pertaining to these lands and our life there.

Asia: the “Youthful Face” of the Church

From the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 6:

Asia is the earth’s largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world’s population, with China and India accounting for almost half the total population of the globe. The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are “heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions.” We cannot but be amazed at the sheer size of Asia’s population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions, which comprise such a substantial part of the history and patrimony of the human family.

Asia is also the cradle of the world's major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The religious values they teach await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community. In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity. Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Without denying the existence of bitter tensions and violent conflicts, it can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures. Moreover, despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates.

All of this indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of “being Asian” is built. This “being Asian” is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in a spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way that is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul.

The Multi-ethnic Character of Australian Catholicism ⁵

Australia is a highly-secularized country-continent in which Catholics are a minority. But in spite of Great Britain's strong influence on the history of the country, the Catholic Church is now the most numerous Christian denomination there as a result of recent waves of immigration from various parts of Asia. In concrete statistics, this means that more than a quarter (27%) of Australia's 20.5 million inhabitants are Catholic—5.4 million people divided into 32 dioceses (data from 2006). The *multi-ethnic character of Australian Catholicism* carries within itself the seeds of great opportunity. In Australia, one can experience *true catholicity* and get to know, in addition to the traditional Catholicism imported from *Europe* (Ireland, Italy, Germany), expressions of *Asian Catholicism* (Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese)—all of which are extremely vibrant but which, due to the great geographical distances involved, are little known to other parts of the world.

Cardinal George Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, says that the Australian Church is in general very dynamic and creative—important presuppositions for fulfilling the missionary mandate of Jesus in a secularized world.

Speaking about secularization on World Youth Day 2008, Cardinal Pell said:

“There are important differences with regard to the different Western societies. From the sociological point of view, Australia's situation is similar to that of the United States and Great Britain. But there are also differences because in Australia secularism is not as far-reaching nor as deep-rooted as it is in Great Britain, for example. But although Australians are less hostile to religion than people in the United States, they are not as enthusiastic about it. Our problem is indifference, not hostility. In this sense, pastoral work is difficult: we have to find a way to move people from indifference or ignorance to active involvement in their Faith.”

⁵ Cf. Vatican Radio's *Dossier* for World Youth Day 2008, held in Sydney, Australia.

LOOKING AT OUR TERRITORY FROM A WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVE

THE FSPS IN ASIA AND AUSTRALIA

Circumscriptions	Foundation	Members	Communities	M. age
Phil-Mal-PNG-Th	1938	186	21	59.77
Japan	1948	146	14	71.35
India	1951	151	16	50.29
Korea	1960	188	14	47.43
Australia	1955	17	3	63.76
Taiwan	1959	18	3	56.17
Pakistan	1965	19	3	41.16
Macau	1969	6	1	52.50
Hong Kong	1978	6	1	47.83
Singapore	1994	7	1	49.29

Vocations

	Aspirants and postulants	1 st and 2 nd Year Novices
Phil-Mal-PNG-Th	14	2
India	40	11
Korea	9	10
Taiwan-Vietnam	3	2
Pakistan	11	3

**SOME CHALLENGES FACING OUR CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS
IN ASIA AND AUSTRALIA**

According to the latest statistics, our Congregation is becoming always more “Asian.” This is a great challenge and responsibility for our Asian circumscriptions, which must ensure that the Pauline charism continues to manifest its prophetic wealth throughout the continent.

Our Asian circumscriptions, above all, are called to redouble their commitment to:

- intense pastoral work for vocations;
- sound initial and ongoing formation;
- attention to China, the most populous country on earth, and to Indonesia, the world’s largest archipelago, with more than 220 million people from widely-diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds;
- a more inculturated apostolate, open to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- better collaboration among our circumscriptions in the spheres of the apostolate and formation, and improved collaboration among the communities dependent on the General Government.

OTHER IMPORTANT AND URGENT CHALLENGES

Our sisters and communities can make a contribution here by listing other aspects decisive for the development of the Pauline charism in Asia and Australia:

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“GET UP AND GO...”

The Risks of Faith Taken by Our First Missionaries to Asia and Australia



In the context of redesigning our presences, let us attempt to rediscover the poverty and faith of our first sisters who, lacking every means, nevertheless accomplished miracles through the grace of God.

LED BY PROVIDENCE

Our Foundation in the Philippines...

The Daughters of St. Paul arrived in the Philippines by means of the mysterious workings of divine Providence.

On 8 January 1937, Sr. M. Edvige Soldano, M. Elena Ramondetti and M. Maria Cleofe Zanoni left the FSP Motherhouse in Alba, Italy, for China. Their goal was to begin the Pauline apostolate in Nanking in collaboration with the Society of St. Paul, which had already opened a small house there.

In September 1938, the members of both Institutes were forced to leave the country because war had broken out between China and Japan.

At a loss as to where to go and unable to communicate with Prima Maestra, the three sisters moved from one border town to another, encountering many adventures. They finally decided to go to India, trusting that they would be welcomed and helped by the Society of St. Paul, which had opened a community in Delhi in 1935. The Pauline priests understood the situation of our missionaries and gave them all the help they could, but they warned the sisters that the Archbishop would not accept them into the diocese.

In spite of this, our sisters went to see the Archbishop personally, hoping to convince him to allow them to remain in the diocese in view of their status as refugees from the Sino-Japanese War, but his reply was a curt order to leave at once.

In the meantime, our missionaries received a letter from Prima Maestra, who told them that if there was no possibility for them to remain in India, then the Superior of the Society of St. Paul in the Philippines would be very happy to welcome them.

Comforted by this news, the sisters left Delhi and headed for Bombay, where they booked passage on a ship to the Philippines.

They arrived in Manila on 13 October 1938. Waiting to meet them on the dock was the superior of the Society of St. Paul, who took them to the city of Lipa, about 86 km. (53 miles) from Manila.

In Lipa, the Daughters of St. Paul performed domestic services for the Society of St. Paul since the Pious Disciples had not yet opened a community there. At the same time they began the propaganda apostolate, disseminating the books printed by the SSP. Propaganda in the towns and barrios gave them the chance to meet young women and soon local vocations began to enter our Institute.

This promising beginning gave our sisters great hope for the future. When the priests of the Society of St. Paul moved to Manila, our missionaries remained in Lipa, confident that they would be able to carry out their apostolate there and develop it. But this dream was shattered by the outbreak of World War II. Japan invaded the Philippines, sowing terror and destruction everywhere.

Our sisters spent the next five years (1941-1945) fleeing from city to city, fearing for their lives. They all came through the war unharmed, but the city of Lipa was almost completely destroyed and the house they had inherited from our Pauline priests after their departure was razed to the ground.

Although they had lost everything, the sisters were undaunted. They rebuilt the house and rejoiced to see it soon overflowing with vocations. In fact, they very quickly had to build another, bigger house to meet the needs of their growing family.

Maestra Thecla, who lovingly accompanied all the Institute's first foundations, wrote to Sr. Elena Ramondetti at the end of World War II:

Rome, 26.08.1946

Dearest M. Elena,

I have always loved you very much but I didn't know what was happening to you so when I wrote I didn't have a lot to say. Now that I have spoken with you and with the sisters, I understand your life and your needs better. You have suffered very much during these long war years. When you write to me, tell me everything. Nothing will shock me.

If I can help you in any way, let me know and I will do so very willingly. Many times a person feels uneasy but doesn't know why. Then she writes down her feelings and the uneasiness vanishes, like a dream. This is the grace of obedience; it means confiding in the superiors, who represent the Lord, right? So tell me everything. Sometimes I might not reply right away because I don't have the time, but I will send my guardian angel immediately to keep you company. So don't worry if it takes awhile before you receive an answer from me.

I always remember and pray for you all. Give my heartfelt greetings to each and everyone of the sisters. Special and very warm greetings to our many good and dear Filipino sisters and postulants. Tell them I love them very much and want them all to become holy.

May the Lord bless you all. My best wishes to everyone in St. Paul and in the Queen of Apostles.

Affectionately, M. Thecla

"A SPECIAL BLESSING FOR YOUR INTERIOR LIFE"

Our Foundation in Japan

In autumn 1946, the FSPs of Rome whispered excitedly among themselves that the Congregation would soon be sending its first missionaries to Asia—news that aroused high hopes in many hearts.... But those first departures were preceded by the arrivals of Pauline missionaries from abroad.

One of these was Fr. Paul Marcellino, on home leave from his mission in far-away Japan, a land that exerted a powerful attraction on everyone. He spoke about his life there with great enthusiasm, describing the characteristics of the country, its people, their customs, their religions, etc. He concluded by saying that he refused to return to Japan without the Daughters of St. Paul. He asked that four FSPs sent there immediately, followed by another four. He said earnestly: "It is necessary that you multiply throughout the country just as you have done here in Italy. You must open book centers, carry out the propaganda apostolate, help the people get to know the Bible."

Sunday, 1 January 1947, was observed as a day of prayer for Japan and for the choice of the first 4 FSPs destined for this nation. Fr. Paul gave two conference to the sisters that day on the theme: *The Problems of Japan: A Country To Be Converted*.

After supper, Prima Maestra announced the names of the sisters chosen to begin this new foundation: Sr. M. Irene Conti, who would be the superior of the community; Sr. M. Palmira Bernardini, Sr. Lorenzina Nota and Sr. Vincenza Prestofilippo (these last two were still novices).

But the sisters did not leave for Japan immediately, nor did they take a direct route there. Although the war was over, shipping lines between Italy and the Far East had not yet been reestablished, so our missionaries had to reach Japan via the United States.

Prior to their departure, the four sisters had a special audience with Pope Pius XII and when one of them said: "Your Holiness, we are going to Japan but we don't know the language or anything else about the country.... Please give us your blessing!" he opened his arms and exclaimed with a radiant expression, "Japan! Japan! How happy I am to hear this! I will give you a special blessing for all your needs, for the language, for vocations...!"

They asked the Holy Father if he could give them a particular blessing for their religious life and after recollecting himself for a moment the Pope replied: "Yes, for you personally, for your activities and for your apostolate—the interior life! I give you a special blessing for your interior life!" After speaking to each of the

four, he then said to the whole group: "I want to give you a second blessing for your interior life." Those fortunate sisters never forgot the Holy Father's gaze, his words or his blessing.

The Daughters of St. Paul of New York welcomed the new missionaries joyfully and the small group spent nine months in the United States. Because of their great yearning to reach Japan as quickly as possible, it seemed to them that the time passed very slowly.

At the beginning of January 1948, three members of the group left New York for San Francisco. Once there, they took a ship to the Philippines, the second stage of their long journey.

They reached Lipa in February 1948 and set sail once again on 7 July for Japan, accompanied by M. Elena Ramondetti. The ship stopped in Shanghai, where they were met by several members of the Society of St. Paul, who showed them around the city.

An extract from the diary kept by the sisters reads:

The last stage of our journey found us in good shape physically. None of us was seasick perhaps because we were so happy that our destination was close at hand.

We arrived in the port of Yokohama very early on the morning of 7 August. The missionary priests celebrated Mass and after that we were all ready and willing to descend the gangplank into our adopted homeland.

We had told Fr. Paul when we would be arriving, so we anxiously searched the crowd for him. At last we spotted him hurrying toward the ship. He raised his head and saw us. Immediately, all our worries and fears vanished. He met us at the bottom of the gangplank and gripped each of us in turn by the hand, exclaiming, "Finally! Finally! Finally!" These were our sentiments exactly so we fervently repeated his words.

We got out of the car, our hearts beating wildly.... At last we had reached our destination.

The house was surrounded by a decorative wall of trees and a beautiful Oriental garden. We were enchanted to see that in the middle of the garden was a small artificial lake with a small curved bridge arching over it.

At the front door, we were greeted by two young women whom Fr. Paul had hired to put the house in order. They were scrubbing the front steps in preparation for our arrival and they stopped their work to bow to us repeatedly. Silently we bowed back, although we were not able to bend over as profoundly as they did.

At about 3:00 in the afternoon, a distinguished couple arrived with a pot of steaming rice. Bowing deeply, the man greeted us in English, saying over and over again: "Welcome! Welcome! We have been waiting a long time for you.... We hope your mission here will be successful! Best wishes!" That warm greeting did us a lot of good.

*No one is so poor that she has nothing to give
from her poverty*

Rome, 04.07.1955

Dearest Maestra M. Cleofe [Philippines],

The Lord always provides us with opportunities to gain merits.

I want to ask you if you could send Maestra M. Irene in Tokyo a little money as a loan. The sisters want to open a book center⁶ in Kobe and do not have the money to do this. If you could find someone to loan you the necessary sum, they will pay you back. I am sorry I cannot help them myself but here [in Italy] we are up to our ears in debts. I am sure this book center will do a lot of good and will help our sisters improve their financial situation a little. [...]

My thanks as of now for anything you can do to help them. Are you all well? You are always in my thoughts and prayers. Be joyful and serene. Pray for the spiritual exercises of the superiors, which begin on the 6th of this month. We need to take a step forward. Warmest best wishes to everyone.

Affectionately, M. Thecla

⁶ The FSP book center in Kobe, Japan was opened on 28 October 1955, the Feast of Christ the King.

TORRID HEAT AND A CONFUSION OF LANGUAGES

Our Foundation in India

Rome, 20.03.1951

Dearest M. Elena [Philippines],

[...] For now, it is not possible to go to Multan⁷ because we have received permission to go to Bombay. Fr. Alfonso⁸ took a hand in the matter and now the Archbishop is expecting us. The only thing is that the Pious Society of St. Paul [in Bombay] wants to purchase a book center from the diocese and a lot of money is needed for this, so Primo Maestro sent M. Paula to America to collect some funds. Afterward, she will go to [India] for 3 or 4 months to help the sisters begin. P.M. also said it would be better not to lengthen the sisters' trip [to India] by sending them by way of the Philippines; so we have decided to send them there by the most direct route. In the meantime, Fr. Alfonso is waiting for instructions about what to do concerning their visas.

As you can see, there is time before you have to leave [for India] and so you can put things in order where you are. Instead, it would be a good thing if you have an English-speaking sister who can be sent to India for a time, and also if you have any provisions that can be sent immediately. The sisters already have a lot of books for propaganda, but they need someone who speaks English. [...] What do you think? If you feel it would be well for me to send Sr. Assuntina,⁹ who is a nurse, this could be done. But I want you to go there yourself once M. Paula leaves. Primo Maestro says it doesn't matter if Bombay is hot because it is on the seacoast so one doesn't feel the heat as much. See how good the Lord is. We wanted to go [to India] and he has prepared a place for us there.

Affectionately, M. Thecla

At 9:30 a.m. on 18 August 1951, a TWA flight from Rome landed in Bombay and four Daughters of St. Paul disembarked: Maestra Paula Cordero, Sr. Gesualda Aureli, Sr. Elena Tezzele and Sr. Virginia

⁷ A city in Pakistan.

⁸ Fr. Alfonso Ferrero (1909-1996).

⁹ Better known as Sr. Marcellina [Gaspari] (1909-2005).

Albini. They were not met by photographers nor greeted with garlands of flowers. In fact, the only people there to meet them were a priest and brother of the Society of St. Paul, but the two gave our sisters a warm welcome and helped them get through customs.

Our missionaries stayed with the Canossian Sisters for four days, then moved into a house owned by the Archbishop. The house, which they later bought, had stood empty for two years and thus lacked electricity, water and other essentials. It was also very dirty. Some neighbors helped the sisters clean the place from top to bottom and they also repaired the electrical system. They even did the shopping for the new arrivals, who were unfamiliar with the roads, shops and local customs.

Adventures? Problems? Our pioneers had an abundance of both. One of the first difficulties they had to deal with was the heat, which was so fierce that some of the first sisters just couldn't adjust to it and had to return to their own countries. Another problem was the language. Only Maestra Paula spoke English, but about 200 other languages are spoken in India (about 10 in Bombay alone). How many misunderstandings and inconveniences the sisters encountered because of the language problem!

Let us listen to their own account of the situation:

Our parish priest asked one of his lay assistants to bring us water from the local well, which was quite far from our house. You can imagine how hard it was for us to understand this young man and for him to understand us! Most of the time he brought us water when we didn't need it and failed to bring us water when we needed it desperately. And what about our shopping trips? The first time we tried to buy some ice, we repeated the word over and over to ourselves on the way to the store, but once we arrived there the magic word was no longer on our tongues.... We thought and thought. We looked around us. No ice. The shopkeeper listed all the items he carried, showing us up and down the aisles so that we could see the merchandise for ourselves. Finally, to the delight of the shopkeeper and to our own great relief, we spotted the ice. We will now never forget the word "ice" in that particular dialect!

While waiting for furniture and kitchen utensils to arrive from America, the pastor loaned us four chairs, four glasses, four plates, four sets of cutlery and two pots. Unfortunately, the glasses broke one by one and we had to visit many different shops in order to find replacements that were the same size, color and shape.

On the Feast of St. Thecla, 23 September 1951—a month after our arrival—our first Indian vocation, Filomena, entered. We welcomed our new aspirant with great joy.

WITH FR. ALBERIONE AND MAESTRA THECLA
Our Foundation in Australia

On Saturday, 13 May 1955, Primo Maestro, Prima Maestra, Sr. Redenta Commentucci and Sr. Laurenzia Casamassima flew from Manila to Sydney, Australia to open a new FSP community.

After 8½ hours, the plane landed in Darwin, a city in northern Australia. Here Primo Maestro celebrated a Mass in honor of the Blessed Mother for the new foundation and for the country that the Daughters of St. Paul were entering for the first time. Prima Maestra and the other two sisters acted as sacristan, Mass servers and assistants.

At 11:00 a.m. they reboarded the plane and traveled another 7 hours across the endless Australian desert until they reached the beautiful city of Sydney, brilliantly illuminated against the night sky.

The sisters spent that first night with the Good Samaritan Sisters, an Australian Institute, but the next day the Pauline priests accompanied them to a community of Dominican Sisters, where they remained as guests for a month.

At 11:00 a.m. the following Monday, Primo Maestro and the small group of Daughters of St. Paul met Cardinal Gilroy, the Archbishop of Sydney, who spent more than a half-hour with them, affably chatting in Italian. He gave his approval to the propaganda apostolate the sisters intended to carry out and asked Primo Maestro what he should say in the letter he was asked to prepare for the propagandists. He had three copies of the letter made, so that

three propaganda teams would be covered. At the end of the meeting, the Cardinal said: "Go ahead and carry out your propaganda mission and let me know in the near future how things are going." With that, he gave the group his blessing.

On Wednesday, 18 May, Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra left Australia to begin the long trip back to Italy, leaving the two remaining sisters on their own in their new mission land. The sisters immediately began the propaganda apostolate, using books in English that they had brought with them from the Philippines. Because they did not yet know the exchange rate of the local currency, they asked the people they met to simply give them a donation for the books they selected. The first home our missionaries visited was owned by a Catholic, who gave them a very warm welcome. But the sisters' joy did not last long. At that time, Catholics were still a minority in Australia and in a day of propaganda they would meet at the most five or six Catholic families. Another problem was the fact that in many families both husband and wife worked, so many homes were empty during the day.

In the meantime, the sisters tried to find a place to rent. The Redemptorist Fathers let them use an apartment free of charge for six months. On 2 July, three Daughters of St. Paul arrived from the Philippines, bringing with them a new supply of books. The first two pioneers had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the sisters since they had already finished off their original stock of reading material.

The climate in Sydney is cold and the Filipino sisters found it hard to keep warm. At one point the five members of the community had a total of 45 blankets on their beds—all gifts from benefactors. The day before the team from the Philippines arrived, a car had stopped in front of our house and two men, weighed down with 12 woolen blankets, got out. They said: "We've brought some blankets for the sisters who are due to arrive. They are sent by the mother superior of a local convent."

Since it was a Saturday, our FSP missionaries considered this to be a gift from Mary.

THE DOORS TO CHINA OPEN....

Our Foundation in Taiwan

The Philippines must provide vocations for all of Asia.
(Blessed James Alberione)

The request to open a house in Formosa (now Taiwan) was presented to Maestra Ignazia Balla (at that time Vicar General of the Institute) in December 1958, when she went to the Philippines to attend the blessing of Manila's new cathedral. The Inter-Nuncio of Formosa, Bishop Riberi, who also attended the event, presented her with his petition, saying with great simplicity: "Come fishing." He then added with great fervor: "Come to Formosa. Your mission is important. The doors to China will open. In the meantime, prepare your sisters, your vocations...."

He succeeded in convincing M. Ignazia, who made a quick visit to Formosa at the end of January 1959 on her way back to Italy. She returned to Rome with China in her heart.

The FSP community of Manila joyfully welcomed the news that Maestra Thecla had approved the opening of a house in Kaohsiung, Formosa. All the sisters wanted to be a part of the founding team. The four chosen to open the new community were Sr. M. Donata Bugnola, Sr. Maria Costanza Justo, Sr. Maria Giovanna Abuda and Sr. M. Timothy Villaram.

The group arrived in Taipei, the capital, on 5 May 1959 after a two-hour flight from Manila. From there, they continued their journey to Kaohsiung by train, where they were welcomed and assisted by the Apostolic Prefect. They spent their first few days in the city cleaning their new house and moved into it on 15 May 1959. The first thing our missionaries did was begin to study the language. Their book center was filled with books, but they could not understand their content! With the help of a Chinese woman who spoke English, the sisters inventoried their stock and learned to tell the difference between the books, while a young employee took care of the book center's clients.

The letters of the sisters were consoling. They wrote:

The Chinese people like to read. We offered a non-Christian young woman our catalogue and the next day she returned and purchased a large quantity of books. Poor souls! They are seeking the truth with such diligence. We will begin the propaganda apostolate as soon as we are able to understand something of the language and make ourselves understood to the people.

In July 1959, they wrote:

The Bishop came to celebrate Mass for us on the Feast of St. Paul. We also solemnized the feast by offering the Lord the first fruits of our propaganda apostolate. We [visited the families] for three hours and the first book we diffused was a New Testament in Japanese.

FROM TOKYO TO KOREA

The community of Seoul, Korea was opened in December 1960.

The founding team, made up of Sr. Eulalia D'Ettore (Italian), Sr. Veronica Varona (Filipino), and Sr. Cristina Kanemitsu (a Korean who was born in Japan), arrived in Inchon on 13 December. Sr. M. Irene Conti accompanied the group from Tokyo.

The sisters' first home was a small house in Myonsude parish, located in Huk Sond Dong.

For about two months, the three Daughters of St. Paul devoted themselves almost exclusively to a study of the language. On 22 February 1961, Sr. Lidia Meggiolaro arrived from the United States, followed by Sr. Fidelis Ochiai from Japan on 30 March 1961.

On 24 February, our missionaries received a visit from the Prime Minister of Korea, Dr. Chang, who was accompanied by his wife and retinue. Dr. Chang, a fervent Catholic, asked many questions about the Pauline apostolate and left the sisters a generous financial contribution. That same day, twenty-five members of the Legion of Mary offered to help our sisters by taking care of a display of books and religious articles every Sunday in the square in front of the parish church.

The FSPs opened a small book center in their house, stocking it with titles in Japanese, English, a few devotional books in Korean, and some religious articles.

They wrote that the vocation field was wide open and showed great promise.

TOWARD MALAYSIA...

Sr. Elisabetta Capello, Sr. Eulalia Bravo, Sr. Assunta Labay and Sr. M. Virginia Guevarra—the four Daughters of St. Paul chosen to open a community in Kota Kinabalu—left the Philippines on 21 January 1961 for northern Borneo. Because their ship did not stop in Kota Kinabalu, they disembarked at Sandakan and stayed with the Franciscan Sisters for several days. Three of the group then went on to Kota Kinabalu by plane, while the fourth sister accompanied their luggage on a merchant vessel to make sure it reached its destination.

Since they had brought a number of packages of English books with them, the sisters began the propaganda apostolate immediately. They ran into big problems on their visits to the villages, primarily due to their lack of knowledge of the native languages and the scarcity of means of communication. But thanks to their zeal and determination, the Pauline mission began well. These FSP pioneers visited all of northern Borneo: Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. Convinced that the Pauline apostolate was an irreplaceable need and filled with a great yearning to do good, they also paid periodic visits to Christians and non-Christians alike in the villages scattered throughout the jungle.

A TELEPHONE CALL FROM THE EMBASSY

Our Foundation in Pakistan

On 28 November 1964, Prima Maestra Ignazia Balla wrote from Bombay:

During my stopover in Karachi, I thought about our sisters destined for Pakistan and the problems they are having obtaining visas to enter the country. I sprinkled some holy water around me as I walked

around the airport, because I think that is what Prima Maestra [Thecla] would have done in my place.

On 29 June 1965, she received a phone call from the Pakistan Embassy:

This is the First Secretary of the Embassy speaking. I saw on the calendar that today is your feast day. Our offices are closed because it is a national holiday here in Italy, but I have some news for you that I'm sure will give you cause to celebrate the day even more joyfully. You can finally enter Pakistan. The authorization has arrived from our government. Come down to the Embassy with your passports and we will give you your visas.

On 15 August 1965, the first Daughters of St. Paul arrived in Karachi. The Archbishop and the religious institutes already at work in the country all gave the new arrivals a very warm welcome, exclaiming: "Our prayers have finally been answered!" In fact, the Archbishop had asked everyone to pray that the Daughters of St. Paul would receive their visas.

In the beginning, our pioneer sisters stayed with the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who, with exquisite charity, set aside the upper floor of their dispensary for their use and gave them everything they needed to furnish it.

"WE NEED TEN THOUSAND SISTERS..."

Our Institute spread throughout the world under the vigilant, attentive and maternal gaze of Maestra Thecla. Her letters reveal her concern for the needs of each sister, her yearning to reach everyone, and her interest in each community's journey.

In her simplicity and faith, Maestra Thecla points out to us once again, with great spontaneity, the criteria for every redesigning process, namely: community animations; the humility to not attempt to do what is beyond us; balance between our presences in a territory and the number of sisters available; mutual help; whole-hearted solidarity, and attention to each person so that she will pour the best of herself into her mission.

Rome, 03.11.1962

Dearest Maestra M. Cleofe [Philippines],

It would be a good idea to visit the sisters in the houses from time to time so as to encourage them and rekindle their fervor. See to it that a new house is built in Davao as soon as possible—the sisters need it and they have the funds to pay for it.

Be reassured by the thought that everything you [as a Province] give to our most needy sisters, the Lord will give back to you a hundred-fold. And our sisters in Korea really need help.

But you must not exhaust yourself either, otherwise you will have to stop. One thing at a time.... The Lord does not ask us to do what is beyond our possibilities. [...]

How is the Formosa community doing? Are the sisters managing to cover their expenses?

As for Vigan,¹⁰ yes, go ahead, but after that it would be better to wait before opening other communities, otherwise you will find yourselves short of personnel, especially superiors.

You should see all the bishops here! Not all of them are asking for our presence, but a good number of them are! We need ten thousand sisters....

On Sunday, the Bishop of Borneo came by. [...]

Be joyful and serene. We are always united in prayer. Be very maternal with the sisters. See to it that they eat properly otherwise they will get sick as time goes by.

Warmest best wishes to you and all the sisters.

Affectionately, M. Thecla

¹⁰ FSP community opened on 11 Jan. 1963 and closed on 4 April 1983.