



Rome, September 18, 2025

**Dear Major Superiors and Delegates of the Institutes aggregated to the Society of Saint Paul**

I hasten to share with you some information regarding the question of the juridical identity of our Aggregate Institutes. Perhaps some of you have been concerned or surprised after the latest communiqué on the activity of the General Council. As you will recall, we discussed this matter with the Major Superiors in March 2024 and with the Delegates during the meeting in October 2024. Msgr. Marco Mellino, who was present with us in Ariccia, presented the proposal we wished to submit for evaluation to the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in order to resolve a question that has been close to our hearts for some time and which the last General Chapter entrusted to us to address.

Subsequently, I contacted the Dicastery several times to obtain information on how to move the matter forward. Based on the indications received, I wrote a letter to the Dicastery dated July 14, 2025, in which I presented *"the question of the difficulties encountered in several local Churches in defining and clearly presenting the juridical identity of the Institutes that Blessed James Alberione created for lay people -men and women living celibately, diocesan priests, and married couples- according to their state of life, offering them a participation in the Pauline charism as consecrated persons united to the Society of St. Paul."* I summarized the history of the Pauline foundations, described the problematic issue in greater detail, and presented a proposal for a possible solution, according to the indications of Msgr. Marco Mellino.

In the conclusion of my letter, I added: *"In the light of the above, it follows that, according to the norm of can. 303 CIC, the current "Pauline Aggregate Institutes" take on the canonical configuration of "associations" (with the new designation of "Society" or "Union") of lay people who embrace the evangelical counsels with the profession of public vows (canon 1191ff. CIC). Therefore, they are "consecrated laity", according to their state of life, under the high direction of the religious institute "Society of St. Paul". We present this proposal to the Dicastery for consultation, grateful for its assistance in preserving and developing the charismatic legacy handed down to us by Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Family Pauline"*.

On September 11 the response of the Dicastery arrived, dated September 3, the day on which the Pauline Family celebrates the memorial of the Mother of the Good Shepherd. Is this not perhaps a providential sign for us? Well then, the Dicastery approved our proposal in its entirety.

**VICARIO GENERALE DELLA SOCIETÀ SAN PAOLO**

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Here are the most critical steps of the response received:

*"With regards to the proposed modifications, we confirm that we are in agreement with them. They, in fact, make it possible to preserve the two fundamental elements that characterize these Institutes: consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels and vital aggregation to the Society of St. Paul. In this way continuity with the tradition received is assured, while at the same time avoiding the terminological and canonical ambiguities that have created difficulties in the past. As for the choice of the most appropriate name to be given to the Institutes, after careful evaluation we consider the denomination "Union" to be preferable. It better reflects the nature of these realities as associations of consecrated laity who, while living in the world according to their state of life, are profoundly united to the Society of St. Paul and share in its spirituality and mission. The choice of the term 'Union' also makes it possible to avoid possible misunderstandings connected to the word 'Society', which could suggest a juridical autonomy or a distinct institutional structure, not corresponding to the actual reality of these Institutes. We are therefore in agreement with the direction you have set forth and we approve the canonical configuration envisaged according to can. 303 CIC, with the adoption of the denomination of Union for each of the aggregated Institutes".*

As we read above, the name "Union" has been chosen for our Institutes, which means that we will use the following names:

Union "Jesus the Priest" aggregated to the Society of St. Paul

Union "Mary Most Holy of the Annunciation" aggregated to the Society of St. Paul

Union "St. Gabriel the Archangel" aggregated to the Society of St. Paul

"Holy Family" Union aggregated to the Society of St. Paul.

I share with you this information, which, I presume, has been awaited by everyone. The most important thing is that in the new formulation of juridical identity the identity of the members of the Institutes has been confirmed as consecrated persons aggregated to the Society of St. Paul, just as our Founder desired.

The document we received from the Dicastery does not mention the steps we should take following the decision that has been made. Is it sufficient to modify the names of the Institutes in the Statutes? With such modifications, must the Statutes be approved by the Dicastery? Will deeper changes to the content of the Statute be required in relation to the new formulation of the legal identity of the aggregated Institutes? I will seek to find answers to these and other questions in dialogue with the Dicastery. I will keep you informed of the information obtained. It seems that in the current situation, the possibility is opening up to review the Statutes so that they may be more suitable to present times. At the same time, it is advisable to wait for the approval of the new Constitutions of the Society of St. Paul, so that both documents are compatible.

It will certainly be necessary to reflect on the process of formation in today's situation and on the implementation of the Dicastery's decisions. I ask you to inform the members of the Institutes about this entire matter, so as to avoid unnecessary misinterpretations of the facts. In short, we can say that they are consecrated laity of the Unions aggregated to the Society of St. Paul. We must help them to assimilate this new definition of their identity.

How can we explain the current changes to the members of the Institutes? Here is a brief description of the path we have taken.

First of all, it should be noted that from the beginning there was a certain ambiguity in the terminology. In the Statute of 1960 the terms "associations" and "institutes" were used interchangeably. However, it seems that this situation did not constitute a problem at the time, though it emerged as such later on. For the Founder it was clear that the four Pauline Institutes were Secular Institutes. With the new Code of Canon Law, was specified that the Secular Institutes have their own government and their own charism, which is not the case with the Pauline Institutes, since they are aggregated to the Society of St. Paul and live from its charism.

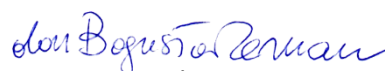
Therefore, regarding the question about the legal identity of our Institutes, posed in 2022 by Fr. Vito Fracchiolla to what was then the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, we received a response in which it states: *"Therefore, for these associations [i.e. Aggregate Institutes] the expression 'consecrated secular life' should be avoided, since it is an expression generally used to indicate the form of consecrated life proper to formally erected Institutes and therefore to Secular Institutes, whose members, precisely, are called 'consecrated seculars' or 'secular consecrated'. In this regard, it should be emphasized that it is not so much the term 'secular' that generates confusion, but rather that of 'consecrated life', especially when it is used as an expression of a specific vocation and when accompanied by the adjective 'secular'."*

It was not possible to ignore this opinion of the Holy See, but on the other hand it could not be allowed that the consecration enshrined in our Institutes be questioned, nor that a choice had to be made between consecration and aggregation. Both of these aspects, in fact, belong to the nature of the Pauline Institutes. For this reason it was necessary to find a way to confirm Fr. Alberione's project, who had created institutions that gathered lay people (men, women, married couples, and diocesan priests) and inserted them into a consecrated life similar to the religious one, while at the same time binding them to the Society of St. Paul through aggregation.

The proposal we presented to the Dicastery was aimed precisely at preserving the Founder's charismatic vision, while at the same time finding an adequate juridical configuration, consistent with the current Code of Canon Law. From this comes the proposal to change the name from "Institutes" to "Union", a name which, at the beginning of the Institute's existence, was used by the Founder himself and described their identity as associations of consecrated laity with public vows, aggregated to the Society of St. Paul.

I cordially greet you in the Divine Master and entrust this stage of our history to Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Good Shepherd.

Always grateful for your collaboration,

  
Fr. Boguslaw Zeman SSP  
Vicar General