



UNIONE DELL' APOSTOLATO CATTOLICO

Piazza San Vincenzo Pallotti, 204 – 00186 Roma, Italia

Tel. (+39 06.6819469 – Fax: (+39) 06.6876827 – E-mail: uac@uniopal.org

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THE HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

Mercy has no seasons

A Common Project for the entire Union
of Catholic Apostolate

“May the Grace, the peace, the Love and the Mercy of O.L.J.C., and the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Mother of God, Mary Most Holy be always with you in order to profit from all of God’s gifts, for all of the goals which please God, and as He wishes. May the infinite divine Mercy always be praised and exalted” (OCC XII, 427-428).

Dear sisters and brothers in the Union,

Mons. Rino Fisichella, coordinator of the Holy Year of Mercy shared the following experience about the genesis of this event: “During one of my private audiences with the Pope, in which we talked about different things regarding the new evangelisation, the Pope said to me: *How much I would like a Jubilee of Mercy!* From here came all that we know about today. It was August 29th, 2014.” A Holy Year which began on December 8th, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and which will finish on November 20th, 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, marked by various celebrations and different events.

The Jubilee Year is accompanied by a logo and a motto. The logo (*see above*), the work of Fr. Marko Rupnik SJ, is presented as a small summa theologica of mercy. The image was very dear to the early Church as it presents the Son who carries one who is lost on his shoulders. It is designed to bring out that the Good Shepherd touches our human flesh in its depths with a love which changes our lives. The Motto, “Merciful like the Father”, is taken from the Gospel of Luke. The call is to live mercy after the example of the Father who asks us not to judge and not to condemn, but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure.

Dear sisters and brothers,

with hearts full of gratitude, we bless God and thank him for the gift of the Jubilee of Mercy. Saint Vincent Pallotti wrote: “if God is in some way visible in creatures, it is in the works of mercy” (OCC IV, 319). Why? Because the works of mercy humanise and divinise us. This is why in describing his foundation experience on January 9th, 1835, St. Vincent confesses: “My God, my mercy, you in your infinite mercy grant me in a special way the gift to promote, establish, perfect and perpetuate [,] an institution of universal Charity for the practice of all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, so that, as far as possible, you may be recognised in human beings as infinite Love (OCC X, 198-199).

It is interesting to highlight here that Pope Francis too, in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy, wishes to promote the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. “It is my burning desire - writes Francis - that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, nr 15).

The works of mercy could be regarded as a Lenten theme, but it could be said that the Jubilee wishes to widen this horizon, to say precisely that mercy is not limited to particular seasons. The works of mercy are not, in fact, a “tax” to be paid: they are a liberation, from ourselves, from our fears, and they allow us to encounter our neighbour.

It is also interesting to point out that when St. Vincent invites us to exercise all of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, it is the consciousness and the experience of the Father of Mercies that he wishes to promote through these works. In fact, Pallotti writes: “..., so that, as far as possible, you may be recognised in human beings as infinite Love”. It can be said that performing the works of mercy has not only a charitable, but also an evangelising, dimension.

Eager to deepen this invitation of Pope Francis and of St. Vincent Pallotti to promote the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the General Coordination Council reflected on our common mission and decided to continue the Common Project on the works of mercy, inviting all NCCs, groups, individual members and collaborators of the Union to choose one spiritual and one corporal work of mercy, in each case what is most necessary and timely for your social and ecclesial context, and to promote them during the course of the Holy Year of Mercy, in the ambit of the Family and the context of the New Evangelisation.

The spiritual work of mercy chosen for last year, that of “promoting reconciliation”, remains an urgent priority for each one of us, both within and beyond the confines of our own families and communities and those of the Pallottine Family as a whole. The image of the Good Shepherd who goes in search of and carries home the lost sheep is complemented by that of the Prodigal Father who waits with infinite love for the return of his lost son, rushing to greet and embrace him while he is still a long way off. Reconciliation calls for movement, for someone to risk taking the first step, to risk encounter, and to continue taking that risk. There is an expression in English, “to chance your arm”, said to derive from a bold gesture of reconciliation during a violent feud in 1492 between two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and the Kildares. At one point, the Ormonds took refuge in the chapter house of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. The Earl of Kildare came to realise the senselessness of the feud, and tried to make peace, but the Ormonds were afraid to leave their sanctuary for fear of treachery. To prove his genuineness, the Earl of Kildare, took an axe, cut a hole in the heavy door, and extended his unprotected arm through it, putting himself at the mercy of those inside. Seeing the risk he was willing to take, the Ormonds were moved to accept the hand extended to them in reconciliation.

Applying this to our own lives and to the life of the Union:

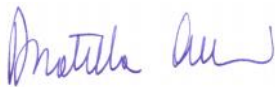
- How do we deal with hurt and division within and between families and communities in our Pallottine Family? How can we promote forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Are we willing to forgive? Do we place preconditions on others?
- Where there is division and mistrust, are we willing to be the ones to chance our arm, to extend our unprotected hand in the pursuit of reconciliation and communion, in order to heal and deepen the bonds between us as one large Family?

- How can we make an effective contribution in promoting reconciliation as a core value for constructing more healthy families and communities, and a more healthy Pallottine Family, Church and society?

Whichever spiritual and corporal works of mercy are chosen in particular contexts of the Union, this proposed Common Project for the entire Union for the remainder of the Jubilee of Mercy proposal does not simply have the objective of contributing with a *Pallottine flavour* to the mission of the Church during this special time of grace and favour, but also to nurture and develop the “common memory” of the Union which “sustains [our] communion [...] The adoption and implementation of this initiative as a truly common project for the entire Union depend on the goodwill and commitment of each one of us and of our communities. They depend in a particular way on those who are in positions of leadership in the structures of the Union and in the Core Communities, which, as an integral part of the Union, are called to be a particular animating force within it in a collaboration of equals with the other members of the Pallottine family (cf. letter regarding last year’s Common Project, 19/08/14).

“... I have felt o my God, my Father, my infinite mercy, that you [...] have deigned to destroy in me everything of myself, and to form and create in me a new miracle of mercy, and that you will make me into a new Miracle of Mercy in your Church [...] in such a way what is of the present moment is not that of the past moment, and that of the following moment ins not that of the present moment. I intend to believe everything in accordance with the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church” (OCCC X, 211-212).

Yes, the infinite divine Mercy - with our collaboration - always desires to create something new at the heart of the Church! Let us therefore seek to commit ourselves at every level of the Union in exercising all of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy so that, according to our possibilities, God, infinite mercy, may be more known and loved in the depths of every human heart.



Donatella Acerbi UAC
President



Frank Donio SAC
Vice-President



Rory Hanly SAC
General Secretary

