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Engaging Aging

A Journey of Discernment: Media Nuns on the Move

Sister Jacqueline Jean-Marie Gitonga, FSP

Sister Tracey Matthia Dugas, FSP



Sister Jacqueline Jean-Marie Gitonga, FSP, serves in Provincial Leadership, is Director of Pauline Cooperators, and a member of the Pastoral Communications team for the Daughters of St. Paul Province redesign efforts.



Sister Tracey Matthia Dugas, FSP, is the Director of Mission Advancement and a member of the Pastoral Communications team.

As Daughters of Saint Paul, we proclaim Christ through the most modern means of communication, whether in person or online. We desire greatly that everyone may know Jesus Christ and experience fullness of life in Him. Our evangelization takes different forms: printing and distributing books, blogs, posts on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok, podcasting, music, movie reviews and more. Over 1,900 “Media Nuns” serve in over fifty countries. In the United States and Toronto we have 120 sisters who live and minister in nine locations. This year, we celebrate our ninetieth anniversary of foundation in the US.

To carry out our Pauline mission well, we must constantly take the pulse of the people of our time by reading the “signs of the times” and identifying the “needs of humanity” that call for our response. To respond well, we must renew our communities, reexamine our processes and consider new structures. Blessed James Alberione, our founder, exhorted us: “How many times do you ask yourself this great question: where is humanity heading, how is it moving, toward what goal is it aiming as it continually renews itself on the face of the earth?”

Dreams and Realities

To align our dreams with our community realities and resources, we began a journey of discernment and renewal about six years ago. This process helped us realize that we had to reconfigure our presences. We needed to relook at the size and makeup of our communities, the variation of our apostolic activities, and care for our aging and infirm sisters. Drawing from meetings and feedback from our sisters around the Province over several years, our Provincial leadership moved forward with the decision for reconfiguration. This would entail strengthening nine of our locations in the United States and closing four, including our locations in Honolulu, Hawaii; Chicago, Illinois; Charleston, South Carolina; and San Antonio, Texas.

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The Nuts and Bolts of Learning, Listening and Living the Change

In November 2021, Provincial leadership appointed sisters to be part of a Redesign Core Team that would help carry out the pastoral communications, legal and physical tasks related to the upcoming redesign efforts. This Core Team of sisters would work with a larger network throughout the Province to carry out initiatives pertinent to each area of work, assisting the whole Province to unite in moving forward in the change process. In January 2022, a pastoral communications branch of the Redesign Core Team (two sisters and a consultant) was appointed to build communications about our re-configuration. Three steps became crucial: prayer, listening and writing.

Praying: Our founder, Blessed James Alberione, would say: “Prayer above all, in all, through all” because he saw prayer as the greatest contribution we could make in carrying out the Pauline mission. Therefore, a “Redesign

Prayer” was created and shared with our sisters around the Province. We frequently implored the Lord for light as together we discerned how God wanted us to adapt our life and mission.

Listening: The next crucial step was conducting listening sessions. The goal of these sessions was to listen to all our sisters as they voiced their concerns about the upcoming changes, shared their dreams, and proposed their ideas of how to move forward. These sessions were carried out in January 2022. The discussion about the redesign was guided by the following questions:

- Given our unique charism for evangelization, what are primary opportunities for us to meet the needs of people today?
- After bringing these opportunities to the Lord in prayer, what ONE opportunity do you feel the Lord is highlighting for us at this time?
- Since we are restructuring for the sake of mission, what are your three major concerns

Daughters of St. Paul gather in the chapel of their Motherhouse in Boston, Massachusetts. Newly professed sisters, Sister Carly Paula Arcella and Sister Chelsea Bethany Davis, are receiving a blessing. All photos used with permission of Daughters of St. Paul.



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about communicating the news and information surrounding closures?

- What are some of the questions you anticipate from the public?
- As we move forward, what areas of evangelization would you like to see develop in 2022? Describe your role in what you envision.

We received phenomenal feedback from our sisters. The greatest desire that emerged was the question at the heart of our mission: how can we get the Gospel to as many people as possible? We heard about the need to carry out even more faith formation among families. We also wanted to accompany people better as consecrated women and point to that prophetic hope that Christ gives. We heard the pain and sadness because of the closures along with the concern that we be present to people not just digitally but also in person.

Writing: This feedback was then synthesized and the Pastoral Communications team was expanded to include other sisters from around the Province. The expanded team prayed and worked together to create a core message based on what the sisters expressed. The core message included the following points that we would be committing to:

- Rededicating ourselves to excellence in publishing and content creation;
- Transforming our existing book centers into more dynamic centers of evangelization;
- Growing our digital platforms with visionary, relevant, and pastoral content to extend the message of the Gospel to a broader audience;

Sister Linda Salvatore Boccia, FSP, (right) a graphic designer, works in the Daughters of St. Paul Publishing House, Boston, Massachusetts. As she works on pagination of a new book, she must carefully organize the graphics with text in order to prepare them for printing.



- Fostering a culture of Christian communication, so that the baptized can live out their call to share Christ with others.

Communication: Two priorities emerged as critical for our application at this point: the messaging that we would create and the process for communicating it to all our collaborators in the mission. This messaging was key because it would communicate to the public our discernment journey and our determination to serve them well and reaffirm our commitment, as consecrated women religious, to accompany them in their faith journey. The process of communicating the core message was also important because we have various audiences that engage in our Pauline mission: friends, lay cooperators, benefactors, employees, volunteers, and family members.

Once the core message was complete, we shared it first with all our sisters and staff and gave them time to reflect upon it and seek any clarification. Then we launched it publicly on April 19, 2022, through our #OnTheMove website and other media outlets. As we shared the news about our redesign, we also made available printed and digital copies of a redesign prayer in English and Spanish. We invited our

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Daughters of St. Paul gathered on the steps of their St. Thecla Retreat House located in Billerica, Massachusetts. Pictured from left, Sisters An Mei Lam, Margaret Michael Gillis, Jacqueline Jean-Marie Gitonga, Gioan Linh Nguyen, and Allison Regina Gliot were enjoying some free time during their summer Encounter meetings, sessions designed for professional development.

The sisters strive to follow the example of St. Paul: to have untiring zeal, always seeking ways to help people know and love Christ.

friends and collaborators to join us in prayer, asking God for His continued enlightenment.

Learnings: Overall, we are learning that this synodal process helps us communicate the dreams we have for our Pauline life and mission with one voice. The sense of being heard, the opportunity to share what matters, the time taken to process together what was going on, to acknowledge that we do not have the full answers, and to embrace the changes are all important pieces to the puzzle. Our congregation, like many others, has been through a long process of discernment to arrive at these decisions. There have been numerous communication efforts with our Mother General and her Council in this regard and efforts at a Provincial level to align these changes with the plans for our congregation worldwide.

The process of talking and sharing about our reconfiguration among our sisters revealed many great possibilities for mission but also the

need to focus our efforts and have better synergy among ourselves. We acknowledge that some works are not sustainable because of limits in personnel or congregational resources. As we are able, we make concrete decisions to keep some things and let go of others. We acknowledge the fears tied with letting go while at the same time foster the creativity and zeal that enable us to try new apostolic initiatives. The tension is real, but we are working to keep the goal, as always, to share the Gospel message of Christ for the people of our time.

Reverencing the Past, Savoring the Present, Welcoming the Future

The responses from those we serve remind us that God worked in the past, continues to do so now, and will do so in the future. Our Pauline mission had its humble beginnings with inadequacies and uncertainties from every side. Still, that did not stop our founder, Blessed James Alberione, and all those who have collaborated

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in our Pauline mission before us from forging ahead. This year, as we celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of foundation in the United States, we recognize that much good has been done through our mission.

All through our experience of uncertainties, our feelings of inadequacy and a plethora of opportunities, God has remained steadfast in His covenant with us which he made with our founder. Would He stop now? Certainly not. Still, as we go through this moment of change together, our dispositions seem to constantly shift between fear of the unknown and faith in the God who has called us. Yet, even with the messiness, we choose to move forward in faith.

Impact on Community Life: Our redesign challenges us to foster the quality of our individual, communal and apostolic commitment. We must consider our aging sisters and their care, supporting professed sisters who actively carry out the mission, and strengthening the young

women in formation who are learning the Pauline life. Growth in these areas can only enhance how our vocational witness is communicated to young women who are discerning religious life.

We discern how to live these concerns through the eyes of faith with confidence in God's everlasting covenant with us. Our Constitutions remind us that "Consecrated by God forever, we have the responsibility of giving him a response that is more and more radical and dynamic... We commit ourselves to grow in the capacity for discernment, critical reflection, and apostolic fruitfulness. Thus, we will be able to respond to the ever new appeals of the Spirit and live the richness of our vocation lovingly, regardless of age or circumstance" (Const.110). This requires boldness for us to help each other make that gift of herself. We will age and enter different levels of activity in our Pauline mission. But no matter our age, we are still called to give of

Pictured below, from left, Sisters Julie Benedicta Turner, Orianne Pietra Dyck, and Regina Frances Dick are recording a podcast episode at the recording studio located in the Motherhouse. The podcast is "Dare to Dwell: A Podcast with the Daughters of St. Paul."



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Holding one of the books she authored, "Complaints of the Saints," Sister Mary Lea Hill, FSP, (left) is also an editor and contributor to the Crabby Mystic series. As you might imagine, she is noted for her dry wit and sense of humor.

ourselves to God in love of Him and our brothers and sisters.

The synodality we experienced during this process of redesign highlighted the need for every sister to be involved. We need to share and listen to one another across generations and levels of experience, including our young, middle-aged and senior members.

Contributions of Elder Members: In a particular way, we heard the awe-inspiring and challenging missionary experiences of our aging sisters. Our senior sisters have seen many changes in our history. Their wisdom helps us learn from the past and become better stewards of our Pauline life and mission for the future. Having lived through change, they encourage us to forge ahead, because change is necessary to meet the needs of people today. For instance, we have heard questions raised about how we will keep in touch with people that we have served, after we have left a particular location. How will we empower our collaborators and Pauline Cooperators who have the Pauline Charism and continue to carry it out?

These and other questions have helped our sisters to voice fears and address issues of

change. We have also been able to concretely put structures and technologies in place to foster communication with our collaborators in the Pauline mission.

Our senior sisters carry out various forms of apostolate as they are able. For instance, one of our sisters communicates with friends and benefactors through phone calls and written communication. Another helps in our shipping department to process packages, while another works part-time serving at our local book center, just to mention a few.

The one apostolate they are all very active in is the apostolate of prayer. Each week, they participate in the same internal communications meetings, or "huddles," held throughout the Province. Sisters share mission stories, the latest apostolic projects and upcoming events

Sister Mary Agnes Coniglio, FSP, (below) has been making rosaries and bracelets for years. She prays for those who will purchase them in the Pauline Book and Media centers.



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happening around the Province. These meetings provide all the sisters, especially the seniors, with the information necessary for prayer, that all our works bear spiritual fruit. Coupled with their offering of prayers, they also offer their sufferings for the fruitfulness of the mission.

We sought guidance from the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) to help us provide the highest level of care for our elder sisters. Through assistance from NRRO and with the state's approval for our infirmary as a Rest Home, we were able to provide healthcare staff and better medical care for our seniors who continue to make their self-offering to God for the sake of mission.

Our goal must always be to foster the self-gift of one another because we are all Daughters of St. Paul with the one mandate in this life: to live and communicate Jesus Christ, our Way, Truth, and Life. In our Constitutions, article number 111 states: "Consistent with the choice we have made, we accept in serenity and trust that with the passing of the years our strength fails us and we have to give up our duties one by one. Nonetheless we keep alive that availability to welcome the opportunities for renewal and updating that come our way. As the elderly sister approaches the fullness of her consecration, she should know how to make of her whole life an offering of thanksgiving. With her peaceful presence and fidelity, with her prayer and with her apostolic activity that

she can still perform, she has a precious contribution to give to the community and the mission of the Congregation."

What Remains Constant

In conclusion, our changing times challenge us to constantly discern our reality and adapt the expression of our mission so that we can communicate Christ more effectively. While some of our practices may change, what never changes is the core of our identity: we are consecrated women called to be faithful to our charism, and follow in the footsteps of our father, Saint Paul. As Blessed Alberione would say, "Jesus taught us not to wait for people, but to seek them out. Like the Teacher, the apostle must promote God's word in the cities, in the towns, and even in the most remote homes... because all are called to know the way of salvation." Any restructuring we do remains for the sole purpose of helping us live more authentically our consecrated life in our world today so that many more people may come to know and love Jesus Christ.



Daughters of St. Paul gathered to celebrate a final profession ceremony.

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Staff

Executive Director

Sister Stephanie Still, PBVM
sstill@usccb.org

Grants Specialist

Monica Glover
mglover@usccb.org

Program Associate

Karen Canas
kcanas@usccb.org

Education & Outreach Manager

John Knutsen
jknutsen@usccb.org

Affiliated Independent Consultants

Sister Anna Marie Tag, RSM
NRROConsult-AMTag@usccb.org

Ms. Dayna Larson-Hurst
NRROConsult-DLHurst@usccb.org