



Let us strengthen communion that moves us to mission

LETTER OF THE YEAR 2025

Gregoria Ruiz Alegarbes



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INTRODUCTION

We enter the year 2025 with hearts full and grateful for the blessing and privilege of being a Work of the Church, an instrument in the service of Christ's mission. The celebration of the 100 years of the Pontifical Approval of the Teresian Association has awakened renewed energy –not only from the members but also among our friends and collaborators– to cherish the vocation, commit to the mission and share the charism. The spirit of gratitude, the joy of storytelling and varied expressions of making memories reverberated from the different corners of the TA world. Relishing these graces received and pulsating with fresh vigor and rekindled hope, we press on to the new challenges and opportunities that await us in the year that is about to unfold.

It is truly heartening that as we ended the commemoration of the centenary year of the TA's Pontifical Approval, the Church ushers us into a Jubilee year, another «year of favor.» We know that the jubilee year in the Old Testament was decreed by God as a time of liberation, of forgiveness, of justice and of sacred rest for the earth. It is a time to make right one's relationship with God, with others, and with all of creation. And how urgently our world needs the comfort of God's promise!

As a community of faith affirmed in the dynamism and relevance of the charism we received, we answer the call of the Church to be bringers of hope as we put our hands to work in the building of a more loving, just, solidary, and inclusive world according to the dream of God.

In his letter on the Jubilee Year 2025, Pope Francis sounded this call,

*We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.*¹

Heeding the call of the Holy Father, we recommit ourselves to give witness to God's faithful love and to work for human and social transformation anchored on the values of Jesus's Gospel, right where we are and in the very realities we are immersed in.

I. THE WORLD IN WHICH WE ARE SENT FORTH

«The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age... these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ».²

With complete trust in the God who journeys with His people, we keep our feet firmly grounded in the realities of the people and places we are called to serve. It is an undeniable fact that we enter the jubilee year 2025 carrying on our shoulders the weight of increased political tensions and escalating armed conflicts, precarious economy, and unprecedented natural calamities. We can feel that, more than ever, the world urgently needs persons, groups and communities that witness how to live in fraternity and solidarity, where the common good takes precedence over personal gains and sectarian or national interests.

Jesus himself reminded us to live our discipleship with our eyes open, fully aware of the signs of the time. In the encyclical *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II made this prophetic declaration:

¹ Letter of the Holy Father to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, for the Jubilee 2025. February 2022.

² *Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1, December 1965.

*A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle.*³

Emerging technologies

Taking a closer look at today's world we realize that we are caught in frenetic changes that we could hardly catch up with, changes that are mainly driven by technology. Technological innovations are accelerating exponentially, presenting to the world unimaginable possibilities that can be used both for good and for harm. The challenge of AI is a case in point as we see its immense potential to improve human life, especially in areas like medicine, education and the advancement of scientific research, while on the other hand, it could be utilized –and has been utilized– to the contrary, posing a serious threat to peace, financial stability, the security of the digital economy, etc.

Pope Francis summed up the character traits of the present times:

*...what we are experiencing is not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change. We find ourselves living at a time when change is no longer linear, but epochal. It entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science.*⁴

³ John Paul II. *Post-synodal Exhortation Christifideles Laici*, n.3. December 1988.

⁴ Pope Francis address to the Roman Curia, Christmas Greetings, 21 December 2019.

Elusive peace

Another global reality with which the world is confronted is the deteriorating peace situation among and within nations. The raging war in the Middle East, between Ukraine and Russia, and the ongoing armed conflicts and violence in parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia have caused –and continue to cause– untold suffering to millions of affected populations. In fact, this reality touches us directly when we think of our own TA members in the Holy Land, living in the shadow of the current war.

Regrettably, in a world where millions live in abject poverty and underdevelopment, we see tremendous amounts of resources funneled into the purchase and creation of more weapons of destruction and the buildup of powerful and dangerous arms. The shakeup in the global balance of power with new alliances and rivalries emerging and impacting the peaceful coexistence of peoples, also put the world order on an uncertain foundation. Never have we felt so insecure about the future –on a global scale– as we do today.

Instability in the Economy

In the economic sphere, the world is trapped in a system that concentrates the resources of the world into the control of a few, thus giving them the power to manipulate the economic system that favors their own interests. While the wealth in the world has increased dramatically during the past decades, the scandal of poverty and marginalization has only intensified, with a big proportion of the world population left behind.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that *The goods of creation are destined for the **entire human race**...*⁵

And Pope John Paul II further emphasized:

*God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods.*⁶

The lamentable state of our common home

In regard to the environment, we have seen that the pace of production, consumption, waste and environmental exploitation has so stretched the planet's capacity almost to breaking point. Now, we have reached the stage where climate change is near impossible to reverse and countries all over the world are experiencing the devastating effects of severe changes in climate patterns. The recent experience of DANA (*Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos*⁷) that devastated the provinces of Valencia and Andalusia in Spain, are proofs that the threats of these *phenomena* are right on our doorsteps.

These are results of the long years of use, abuse and misuse of the earth's resources –especially by the rich and powerful economies– but it is the weakest and the poorest countries that are most vulnerable and are fated to bear the brunt. As a consequence, we continually witness scenes of mass migration of people in search of a safer place away from violence, or a place where they may have possible chances to rebuild their lives and find a better future for themselves and their families.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2452.

⁶ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 31, May 1991.

⁷ *Isolated Depression at High Levels*.

II. RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT TIMES

As an international organization of lay people with the vocation to be a humanizing and transforming influence in the world, the sphere of action of TA members is in secular affairs, in the everyday issues of society. *Lumen Gentium* puts it aptly:

*The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. ...in each and in all the secular professions and occupations. ... in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life... They are called there by God... led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world... as leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope, and charity.*⁸

Turning to ourselves, how can we respond to the realities around us? How can we reorient our outlook and viewpoints –all the way to the most elemental: our own lifestyle– such that we are able to offer a countercultural witnessing to the prevailing culture of violence, dominance of the strong and powerful, exploitation of the vulnerable, neglect and abuse of our common home, right there on the ground where we stand and in realities within our reach?

Creating a culture of encounter

One recurring theme in the addresses and writings of Pope Francis is the importance of creating processes of encounter, processes that help and enable people to accept differences; creating a culture of encounter which brings enduring stability; a culture of encounter which is forged through dialogue.

⁸ *Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium*, n. 31, November 1964.

In his address to the Delegation of the Universal Peace Council, Pope Francis underscored once more that «dialogue is the only path for peace, for encountering one another» and he encouraged us to «always engage in dialogue.»⁹ This dialogue entails approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understanding one another, to find common ground.

In the **19th General Assembly**, we affirmed this **culture of encounter** when we expressed our desire to embrace the synodal way as constitutive of being TA; that our responses to the call of the mission is from the «mysticism of the we» which implies the inclusion of all those we come in contact with. Hence, we resolved to **recreate our community spaces**:

*We want these to be open spaces where communication is in-depth and where the pursuit of the common good goes beyond divisions. These are spaces where forgiveness is experienced as a healing and learning process, where our vulnerabilities are accepted. All of this makes fellowship possible and also mutual love that gives witness and impels us to mission.*¹⁰

And so, this year, let the focus of our communal renewal be about recreating our community spaces by embracing the synodal way of dialogue and listening. By opening spaces where we share faith and vocation as Sectors and Delegations, as ACIT Associations and ACIT groups, as MIT and Alumni Groups/Associations, as Families and Teams, we knit together the community fabric of the TA at all levels.

⁹ Pope Francis: Address to the Delegation of the Universal Peace Council, November 25, 2024.

¹⁰ 19th General Assembly, “Resolution 2: To recreate community spaces”, August 2023.

The Synod final document affirms that synodality, practiced in humility, is prophetic in today's world:

The synodal style enables the Church to be a prophetic voice in today's world. [...] We live in an age marked by ever-increasing inequalities; growing disillusionment with traditional models of governance, disenchantment with the functioning of democracy, increasing autocratic and dictatorial tendencies and the predominance of the market model without regard for the vulnerability of people and of creation. The temptation can be to resolve conflicts by force rather than by dialogue.

Authentic practices of synodality enable Christians to be a critical and prophetic voice over against the prevailing culture. In this way, we can offer a distinctive contribution to the search for answers to many challenges faced by our contemporary societies in building the common good.¹¹

Challenging our lifestyle

We may not be able to offer big solutions to many of the world problems, but we can always start with something small and –most especially– start with ourselves. Can we challenge ourselves to an ecological conversion, a style of life that deliberately lives according to values that ask us to reduce over-extraction from the earth and that promotes the earth's regeneration? Can we deliberately choose to be happy with little or just enough? Do we have the courage to truly embrace a simple way of living that breaks away from wasteful consumption and a materialistic outlook?

¹¹ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document. n. 47, October 2024.

Strengthening communion

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, and they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.¹²

Communion and mission express the very nature of the Church. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. «As you, Father, are in me and I in You, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me» (Jn 17:21).

Jesus prayed that all his followers be **one** and then commanded them to go out and preach the Gospel to all peoples in order that the human race would become one family under the fatherhood of God, and in this family, love would be the fullness and perfection of the law.

Our own experience as an Association can attest to the strength and impetus that communion gives to our living out of the mission. Where members are united, regardless of their number, the mission flourishes. Our unity of spirit and our love for the vocation that binds us to one another have helped us overcome the many challenges posed by our present reality – diminishing numbers, geographical dispersion, declining physical capacities, and many others. That is why Father Poveda has repeatedly reminded us to preserve unity of spirit at all costs.

Strength is in union, and if union is the effect of charity, strength is invincible. The strongest kingdoms, nations, societies and communities are the most and the best united. [...] Wherever several people gather, there must be union if they are to

¹² *Christifideles Laici*, n. 32.

*constitute something, if they are to preserve it, if they are to make it progress. If we aspire to make our Work stable, we must make the greatest effort to live very united; if we wish to extend and prosper, we must strengthen this union [...] What shall we do to avoid desolation? Be ever more and ever better united. [...] The first Christians were few, and they formed a powerful society; they extended it throughout the world, and it has endured through the centuries. How? The acts of the Apostles tell us: by being of one heart and one soul...*¹³

Participating actively in the mission

One hundred years after its Pontifical Approval, the Teresian Association sees itself to be on a synodal journey with the Church, a people reaching out, oriented towards mission –our *raison d'être*. The invitation of the Assembly is for each one to take responsibility for the tasks and efforts to build communion. At the same time, we are all enjoined to enter and undertake a process of community conversion, a process of revitalization at the personal and group level.

As we strive to strengthen communion that impels us to mission, we also resolved in the Assembly to develop the **Lines of Mission**, to interpret them and bring them to life through the **Common Mission Project** (CMP) of each local context. Through the CMP, we continue to weave spaces of dialogue and inclusion; to engage with families, agents of social transformation; and to accompany young people in a changing society. Our CMP makes real and concrete the «walking together» that we desire in responding to the needs of the times from the perspective of our TA vocation. It also heightens our awareness that we are all responsible for the mission and no one is a bystander.

¹³ Pedro Poveda, *Works Volume I Creí por esto hablé* (CpH) [163], 1920.

Together with the whole Church in its journey of renewal, the Teresian Association makes every effort to live the spirit of synodality and let it permeate our style of working, of relating, of communicating, of collaborating with others.

*Synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working. [...] it is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.¹⁴*

III. THE TERESIAN ASSOCIATION'S OWN CALL TO RENEWAL

Throughout the synodal process and from all regions of the globe, the request emerged for a Church less focused on bureaucracy and more capable of nurturing relationships with the Lord, between men and women, in the family, in the community, and between social groups. Only a web of relationships that weaves together the multiplicity of belongings can sustain individuals and communities, offering them points of reference and orientation and showing them the beauty of life according to the Gospel. It is in relationships –with Christ, with others, in the community– that faith is transmitted.¹⁵

¹⁴ "What is Synodality?" Web Synodal Process.

¹⁵ How to be a Missionary Synodal Church. *Instrumentum Laboris* for the second session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, no. 21.

As bearers of the message of Jesus Christ in the world of today, we embark on the joyful task of renewing the Teresian Association by embracing the synodal way that calls for «relational conversion.» How do we translate this into the dynamics of relationships in the Teresian Association? By nurturing our relationship with the Lord, with one another (members and MIT), and among groups and associations that embody the charism; by showing mutual care, support and welcome; by fostering experiences of fellowship; by being present to one another, by giving accompaniment and companionship in all the stages and areas of our lives: companionship in personal development; companionship in faith and vocation; companionship in community; companionship in moments of difficulty that we encounter in daily living. These reflect what we are as an Association, a family caring for every member at every stage and in all circumstances she/he may be in.

Father Poveda told us:

*For the Work to be what it should be and in accord with the intention of the Founder it needs to be perfectly balanced. I have a comparison that suits what I want to present to you. The two forces, centripetal and centrifugal, acting on all bodies, maintain balance, and for my purpose these forces are **prayer** –centripetal – and **unity and fraternal charity** –centrifugal. If the first is lacking you will be dissipated, you will fly out of range, escape, you will not fulfill your task, If the second is lacking, you will not go out to the world, you will not enlighten it, and you will not fulfill your mission.¹⁶*

¹⁶ CpH [79], 1916.

Coming home to our center

The lay nature of our vocation supposes that our mission is aligned to the needs and realities of our context. And also, it is because of our lay nature –being in the world– that it is vital that our life is always attuned to the rhythm of the Spirit, to that «still small voice».

Pope Francis in his latest encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, wrote:

In this «liquid» world of ours... we find ourselves immersed in societies of serial consumers who live from day to day, dominated by the hectic pace and bombarded by technology, lacking in the patience needed to engage in the processes that an interior life by its very nature requires. In contemporary society, people 'risk losing their centre, «the centre of their very selves.» And he continues: Indeed, the men and women of our time often find themselves confused and torn apart, almost bereft of an inner principle that can create unity and harmony in their lives and actions.¹⁷

Pope Benedict XVI has eloquently expressed in one of his Angelus messages:

*Every person needs a **center** for his or her own life, a source of truth and goodness to draw upon in the events, situations, and struggles of daily existence. All of us, when we pause in silence, need to feel not only the beating of our own heart, but deeper still, the beating of a trustworthy presence, perceptible with faith's senses and yet much more real: the presence of Christ, the heart of the world.¹⁸*

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Dilexit Nos*, n. 9. October 2024.

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus. 1 June, 2008.

It is only in finding our center that we are able to know our true selves, experience real peace and delight in pure joy. And in that center God dwells, for «in Him we live, and move and have our being.» (Acts 17:28).

Nurturing the «heart» of our communities

Pope Francis in *Dilexit Nos*, wrote:

*The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.*¹⁹

I am sure that for many of us, the heart will never become an outdated symbol of love – not only of God’s love for us, but also of our love for one another. Notice how some people, instead of writing the word «love» would instead draw a heart? When I say, «nurturing the ‘heart’ of our communities», I mean to invite each one of us to evaluate ourselves in terms of our mutual responsibility to love one another and to build our communities in love.

Fr. Poveda, in speaking about love (charity), answered his own question:

Why do I recommend charity to you so much? Because I believe it to be the soul of the Association [...] I often think that the strength of the Association is in this. [...] so everything that is united by charity has a strength, a cohesion, which makes an indestructible defense.

¹⁹ *Op. Cit.* n. 2.

And he gave this reminder, which is also an order:

*[...] you are rooted in the early Christians. Imitate them, attune your spirit to theirs. What is said of them «Look how the Christians love one another.» The example they gave attracted the attention of the pagans. [...] Your efforts must go into imitating them. May people be able to say of you: «see how they love one another.»*²⁰

And, at another time he also wrote:

*As our undertaking is small, to be strong, it needs the unity and shared purpose of all its members. [...] Our Work is living in times of self-seeking, hatred, vengeance, and envy, and all of these corrode society. We must apply the healing balm of charity, which is the only true bond of perfection. Besides, the Association is scattered everywhere, one in one place, the other in another [...] We need that supernatural love, that connectedness, that mysterious glue that makes others ask themselves, «How is it that without living in community they are so united?» [...] And now I say to you, as an essential point, that the Teresian Association, if it is to be what it should be, if it is to fulfill its purpose, absolutely needs charity and fraternal unity.*²¹

These words from our Founder have great weight and urgency particularly when we consider the present demographic condition of our Association. We feel in our own flesh what Jesus said, «The harvest is great, but the laborers are few.» (Matt. 9:37). With more work than hands to do it, many of our members have to carry out multiple tasks, particularly our members in internal services and corporate works, sacrificing their time for rest. At the same time, we also see our members are advancing in age and many are facing health challenges and struggling with diminishing capacities. There is, therefore, the permanent invitation for each one of us to increase

²⁰ *CpH* [386], 1932.

²¹ *Idem* [507], 1935.

our sensitivity, stretch our patience and cultivate empathy. These challenges and realities could be the ideal setting to respond to the Assembly's call «to recreate our community spaces.» Yes, it is «our work that gives testimony to who we are», but it is our love, care and compassion for one another that give testimony to the fact that we are Christians, bearers of the Good News of Jesus.

IV. MARY: THE HEART OF OUR ASSOCIATION

There is no ambiguity in the mind of Father Poveda on the role of the Blessed Mother in the TA, or else he would not have boldly declared that he «would rather see the Work disappear than its devotion to Mary diminish.»²² How wonderful to think that the Son of God was conceived and formed beside the heartbeat of Mary's heart. And in the Gospels, among the very few events in Jesus's life where she was mentioned, she was described, thus: «Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.» (Lk. 2:19) and «his mother kept all these things in her heart.» (Lk. 2:51). This «pondering» and «treasuring/keeping things in her heart» has, without doubt, prepared her for her greatest trials. May we all learn from her example.

With so many people around us living without direction, without purpose and meaning, without anchor on the transcendent, and seeking escape from their empty lives and loneliness in things that only deepens the vacuum they so desperately try to fill, let us look to Mary to help us cultivate the attitude of attentiveness of the heart.

In this Jubilee Year 2025, with grateful hearts we will joyfully proclaim «the loving kindness of the heart of our God.»

²² *CpH* [243], 1927.

And with complete trust in His grace and mercy we will repeat this prayer:

Lord, your mission of love continues through us; make us Your instruments of communion and fellowship right where we are.

With warm good wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gregoria Ruiz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end of the name.

Gregoria Ruiz



ta teresian association