



Anadolu Havarisel Vekilliđi  
Vicariatus Apostolicus Anatoliae  
Vicariato Apostolico di Anatolia

Pastoral letter of the Bishop Paolo  
Vicar Apostolic of Anatolia  
for three years of **2018-2021**

« Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. »  
(St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, § 46)

To all the members of the Latin Catholic Church of the Vicariate of Anatolia - especially to women and young people - free love and peace from God our Lord and from me!

We thank first of all the Lord for all the gifts He has given us at this time, preserving our little Church of Anatolia in existence. He continues to trust us, nurtures hope in us and continues to love us, despite our closures, fears and our daily selfishness.

The Lord is faithful and since the time of the holy Apostles Peter, Barnabas, Paul, Luke, Timothy, Thecla and of all the other men and women who have witnessed an evangelical life over the centuries, he has always been close to us without making us fail to miss His Word, His Holy Spirit, His mercy, and His patience. He continued to send shepherds and helped to add new members to our Church every year.

He knows our difficulties, our labor as a small minority, often despised and marginalized, our fidelity to the gift of faith. He knows our commitment to live a good moral life, to raise our children in a Christian way, to be faithful in marriage, and to help those in difficulty. Every act of goodness, kindness, forgiveness, service ... is known and cherished by Him in His maternal and paternal heart. Nothing good will be lost. He also knows our sins well: some believe they are Christians, but they are actually worried about money, success, or making a good impression; they only deal with those of their family, they are closed to the poor and foreigners, and they harbor feelings of hostility towards people of another religion. They never have time to deepen the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, to serve the poor, and to establish gratuitous relations. The others « are lukewarm, without initiative, content with what they do, afraid of the change required by the new challenges or changed cultural conditions in society » (Pope Francis).

Everyone has received gifts from God (see the Parable of the Talents, Mt 25: 14-30). There is no one who has not received a talent from the Lord! According to St. Irenaeus, disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, the talent is firstly the life itself: a gift that should indubitably not be wasted or ignored. Some Christians do not live: they let themselves live! They follow like blind sheep, without understanding where they go and what they want. According to some oriental church fathers, the talents are the words of the Lord to be put



into practice until they can be sowed copiously on the earth that is the world. It is in fact easier to bury God's gifts rather than to share them; it is easier to preserve the acquired positions, the treasures of the past, than to create new ones; it is easier to distrust others than to take the initiative, and to meet them in freedom and love. Reading the Bible today does not mean solitary deciphering the score of a concert written by God himself; « It means letting an immense ocean of sound come to me, made of a thousand voices and a thousand instruments, and **have the joy of becoming a new tiny wave** » (J.-L. Chretien).

Origen wrote: « For what good is it to me if the WORD comes to dwell in the world, but I have no part in him? And what good is it for me that the Jews have freed themselves from the slavery of Egypt, if I myself can not be freed from the Egypt of my servitude? What good is it to me to read that Jesus has made paralytics walk, if I remain in front of that page, numbed and ankylosed, if my mind remains motionless and does not leap with alacrity from the stretcher of its prejudices? ».

**A prophetic church:** this is our special vocation.

As Christians in the Middle East and in Turkey we have a special prophetic vocation, for many reasons. I mention three of the most important for this time:

1. we are a small flock among people of other religions;
2. we are called to offer concrete signs that the unity of the Church is possible, overcoming the divisions among the various Christian confessions;
3. we are called to take care of our many brothers who have taken refuge in our country due to the situations of violence, destruction and death in their places of origin.

1. First of all, the Lord did not call us to preserve our small group but to be witnesses that Jesus is the Lord, the Living One, the Savior of all men. It is not enough to celebrate Christmas and Easter: we must get to live Pentecost. Continuously, in these last decades, after the holy Vatican Council II, the Popes call us therefore to put the new evangelization at the center of our personal and community life.

But in order to evangelize, **let us first allow ourselves to re-evangelize:** our faith is often poor, a repetition of gestures and words of which we do not know the meaning. It is attached to recent human traditions and ignores the beauty of God and of every man, even the most distant and the enemy.

Often we do not compare ourselves with the way of life of Jesus and with His Words - **those of the Gospels** - but with what we have learned as children, with what we do in our parish or diocese or ecclesiastical movement.

Hence **the need to return to the sources of our faith:** the Bible, the great Tradition of the Fathers of the Church, the Second Vatican Council and the very important encyclicals of the last four Popes.

In the last decades, the Lord has given us some holy pastors: St. John XXIII, St. John Paul II, and two marvelous witnesses of the Gospel like Benedict XVI and currently, Pope Francis. We must deepen their teaching and imitate their behavior.



Anadolu Havarisel Vekilliği  
Vicariatus Apostolicus Anatoliae  
Vicariato Apostolico di Anatolia

In many regions Christians are, or are gradually becoming, a "little flock" (Lk 12:32). This places them in front of the challenge of witnessing with greater force, often in conditions of loneliness and difficulty, the specific aspects of their identity. (St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, § 36).

Finally, everyone should be aware that the local Church is very important, but must constantly refer to the universal Church: we are in a worldwide network that offers many possibilities to which we must make our contribution. Since all the parishes of the Vicariate are held by priests who belong to a religious order, the strong danger is that the link between parish and religious order is too close: the parish must have its own independent life and must enter into a relationship with other parishes.

2. The second point, precisely because we live in lands where Christians have divided and fought for centuries, we are called to do everything possible to live in peace with other Christians returning to celebrate the Paschal Mystery together.

How could a person who did not care about the extreme desire and prayer of Jesus «That they all may be one!» (John 17,21ss) say that he/she loved a person?

How could a person who passively accepts a situation when Jesus hears from heaven some of His disciples crying for His death while others are celebrating His Resurrection say he/she loves Jesus? How could the God Father reconcile himself with having a divided family? And to see some of His children who fast and celebrate the death of their Elder Brother while others eat, drink and party?

If you have a heart of a father or a mother or a brother or a sister, you can not passively accept that the family is divided and that every group of brothers is more attached to their group than to the whole family.

Where there is division, Satan the divisor reigns, not the Lord: The Lord breaks down every wall of separation (see Ephesians 2: 13-18)!

3. Thirdly, how could a Father not be worried when he sees that some of His children suffer terribly having lost everything - the language in which they grew up, relatives, friends, culture, home, traditions, cuisine ... - and other disinterested children? How could Jesus - who was a foreigner, poor, persecuted, who had to flee many times, not only as a child - not identify himself with those who live his own trials?

Whoever says "Lord, Lord" will not enter the house of the Lord at the end of time (Matthew 7:22). What does the King consider whilst sitting on the throne of glory, formulating the judgment of today the last day? Matthew 25:31-46 answers thus: these are not issues that concern the fragility of humans, the evil doings triggered by human passions; even if there were sins. In view of salvation or perdition, they do not appear as causes of life or eternal death. Nor are sins against God listed, such as blasphemy or failure to observe religious traditions. The faults that cause exclusion or entry into the Kingdom are those that refers to how one relates to people in need or disgrace: hunger, thirst, alienation, nudity, sickness, imprisonment. Salvation plays a role here: in the concrete relationship with every other human being. The "process" already takes place on



Anadolu Havarisel Vekilliği  
Vicariatus Apostolicus Anatoliae  
Vicariato Apostolico di Anatolia

earth when in the face of those in need we do something - what we can and can do - or do nothing, because we go beyond ignoring the cries for help. In the judgment at the end of time, there will be only one sentence. This sentence breaks down every wall and overcomes every distinction, for example, between Christians and Muslims: both its disciples and those who are foreign to Christianity, all are judged according to the relationship with the little ones, brothers and sisters of Jesus, the little and the poor *par excellence*.

«Not in worship, not in the liturgy, one's life is saved, but in the relationship between the bodies, face to face, hand in hand, flesh touching the flesh. (...) The love that Jesus requires is not abstract, it is not made of intentions and feelings, it is not only “prayer for”: it is action, behavior, and concrete responsibility » (E. Bianchi).

If the liturgy, prayer and the sacraments do not lead us into this, then they are fruitless and useless; these realities serve to the extent that they help us to live in love, to love even the enemy, the unlovable (see Matthew 5: 45-48).

The wickedness or the goodness of an accomplished action arise from the way in which one lives the relationship with one's brother or sister, and not in reference to the God who is not seen (1 John 4:12.20). Blessing therefore for those who knew how to take care, with his flesh, of the flesh of brothers and sisters; curse for those who have gone beyond by means of perhaps whispering prayers, but not seeing, not recognizing the face of Christ, not approaching the other that was in need.

Pope Francis says: « It is when we say, “That doesn't regard me; it's not my business; it's society's problem”. It is when we turn away from a brother or sister in need, when we change channels as soon as a disturbing question comes up, when we grow indignant at evil but do nothing about it. God will not ask us if we felt righteous indignation, but whether we did some good. But to do no wrong is not enough. God is not an inspector looking for unstamped tickets » (Sunday Homily of 19 November 2017)<sup>1</sup>.

The refugees are also carriers of traditions, liturgy, culture, skills: they have something beautiful to give, they do not just need to receive. They must be valued for their talents, not simply assisted in their needs.

### **A Church with the lay protagonists**

As St. John Paul II said several times, the Church of the Third Millennium must return to being the Church of the laity, where priests, deacons, nuns, and monks are at the service of the People of God and not the caste that decides and commands. «In looking at the

---

<sup>1</sup> The teaching of the last Popes is very clear and constant. Benedict XVI: “Our duty is to help these people return to their homeland and build a worthy life there. This must be the perspective. But today, waiting for this return, we must offer them hospitality”. John Paul II: “Jesus wanted to prolong his presence among us in the precarious condition of those in need, among whom he explicitly includes the migrants” ... “Countries can not neglect the migration problem and even less closer borders or the exacerbate laws, all the more so if the gap between rich and poor countries, from which migrations originated, becomes ever greater”. Paul VI: “Wherever you stop, you are considered impious and foreign. And remain timid and fearful. Not here. Here, in the Church, you are welcomed, you are expected, greeted, celebrated”.



Anadolu Havarisel Vekilliği  
Vicariatus Apostolicus Anatoliae  
Vicariato Apostolico di Anatolia

past, you can clearly see how essential the role of the laity is to the life of the Church. How could we forget here the harsh persecutions which the Church suffered in the 20th century in vast areas of the world? It is above all due to the courageous witness of the lay faithful, often to the point of martyrdom, that faith was not erased from the lives of entire peoples. Experience shows that the blood of martyrs becomes the seed of confessors, and we Christians are deeply indebted to these "'unknown soldiers' of God's great cause"» (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, §37).

« From the crisis of today – back then as cardinal, J. Ratzinger said in the Christmas period – the Church of tomorrow will emerge, a Church that has lost much... She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning ... It will start again from small groups, from movements and from a minority that will put faith and prayer at the center of experience. In faith and prayer she will again recognize the sacraments as the worship of God and not as a subject for liturgical scholarship... But I am equally certain about what will remain at the end: the Church that will enjoy a fresh blossoming and be seen as man's home, where he will find life and hope beyond death ».

But you lay people must deepen your faith, starting from the Word of God heard and meditated; so you will become the protagonists of your life of faith. There is no future for a Church that is based only on pastors; **There is no future for a church that rests on shepherds coming from abroad** and must beg for an annual residence permit.

The priorities of the Vicariate of Anatolia are those of many other dioceses of the Church: young people and young families. We must stand next to them and listen to them, as Jesus did with the disciples from Emmaus, and accompany their paths that are no longer ours, in their search for a meaning of life offering them the best of the great tradition of the Church and not only the things of the last century.

« They (the youth) seek in many ways the “dizziness” that makes them feel alive. So, let's give it to them! Let us encourage all that helps them to transform their dreams into projects, and enables them to discover that all the potential they have is a bridge, a passageway to a vocation (in the broadest and most beautiful sense of the word). Let us offer them broad goals, great challenges, and let us help them to accomplish them, to reach their goals. Let us not leave them on their own. Thus, let us challenge them more than they challenge us. Let us not allow them to receive that “dizzying sensation” from others, who do nothing but put their lives at risk: let us give it to them ourselves; but the right dizziness that satisfies this desire to move, to go forward » (Papa Francesco).

As it has always been, the Church has a future when there is a community of people who know about the great and marvelous things that God has done and continually does for us, who can pray together, who know how to organize and invent together what is fruitful and beautiful for the community. When the Church is like this, then young people ask authentic and useful questions, first of all to themselves: how can I serve this wonderful community that has generated and nurtured me in the Good News, which has given meaning to my life, which has taught me what is good and what is bad? And parents must teach their children to ask themselves these questions, even before asking themselves which studies to undertake, what profession to do, how to get a good income, etc.



**If there are no vocations of Turkish people to the consecrated life and diocesan priesthood, there is no future for the Church of Anatolia.** However, vocations are not born from nothing but from a fervent, joyful, creative community. And those who are abroad seriously think about how to help the Church that generated them.

### **Operating lines**

I indicate operatively some decisions and guidelines to be implemented in the next three years, both for the constant formation of adult Christian life, but also as useful moments for some catechumens.

1. **Formative pastoral plan common to all**, for the next three years will focus on:
  - a. 2017-18: Gospel of Mark (a valid booklet has already been set up, ask J. Sadredin)
  - b. 2018-19: Luke-Acts (Gospel and Acts of the Apostles)
  - c. 2019-20: Some writings of the first Fathers of the Church (letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Didache, Epistle to Diognetus...) to meditate on a "ministerial church", on "testimony" in the context of other religions, on the relationship with society and civil authorities.
2. The **Alpha – Omega** course is an opportunity to be seized - together with other Turks - some Christians who can seriously be educated to become pastoral collaborators. First stage **28 February - 4 March (starting on the evening of the 28th and ending at 12.30 on the 4th)**, in Ankara. Registration deadline: January 14th.
3. **Pastoral service for the youth and young families are our priority.**
  - a. We have already decided to arrange two weekends for young people on the occasion of the “Conversion of St. Paul” (**26 evening - 28 afternoon in Mersin - Tarsus, 28 evening - 30 afternoon in June in Antakya**, with possibility to stay until Sunday, 1 July afternoon).
  - b. A serious pastoral activity directed to the youth, leads boys and girls to a availability to all vocations, especially the sacerdotal and special consecration, for the building of a local Church which would no longer be dependent on foreign countries.
  - c. A strong pastoral care of young families which allows us to create the natural environment for the education of children and to direct them towards the faith. When I see certain fathers who bring their children to the mosque and teach them - with patience, love and authority - the prayers, the positions of the body, the silence before God ... I ask myself: what do our Catholic parents do to educate the little ones? Do our young families pray at home, with spontaneity and fervor? Tell the beautiful stories of the Bible, written to educate children and adults?
4. The reopening of **Caritas Anatolia** offers the opportunity not only to witness a gratuitous love, without making differences between people or religions (which is a distinctive feature of Christian love), but it also provides service for the poor, in which Christ is present and educate us; therefore, it is a special opportunity not only for young people but for everyone. Through Caritas we also reach our



Anadolu Havarisel Vekilliği  
Vicariatus Apostolicus Anatoliae  
Vicariato Apostolico di Anatolia

Christian refugee brothers: a new opportunity to reinvigorate and rethink our communities.

5. The basic course of **introduction to iconography**, given the success of the first edition, will be repeated in August from 8 August evening to 16 August morning. For women only. Mariagrazia Zambon will still be teaching the course, much appreciated by all the participants of the first course. I will be present there, too. In the days after Christmas 2018, the second stage will be held for those who attended the course in July 2017 and August 2018.
6. **The national pilgrimage to Ephesus and Meryem Ana**, promoted by the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Turkey (CET), remains as the one way on which our parishes converge. The parish priests should make the necessary decisions so that there may be people from our Vicariate. It will be held on **Sunday 7 October 2018**.
7. At Christmas, Easter, Kurban Bayramı and Şeker Bayramı, in İskenderun, there will be **courses on Christianity for catechumens**, also for **Afghan and Iranian** Christians. The first course witnessed the participation of 33 people plus some children. If you meet potential people of interest, inform them of these practically unique opportunities.

A last note, taking up what was said above: we Catholics recognize in the ministry of the Successor of Peter the apostolic continuity between Jesus and us. For the formation of an updated theological thought, it is necessary to follow the documents of the Roman Pontiff, accessible in languages known by pastoral workers and also by various faithful:

<https://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html>.

In order to preserve our Catholic identity, it is necessary - in homilies and catecheses, as well as in the formation of catechumens or neophytes - to make known what the Pope says and writes. Many journalists and enemies of the Catholic Church make the perverse game of scandal, taking isolated sentences out of the Pope's thought, yesterday and today. In an era during which individualism prevails and many believe they know so much because they follow *social networks*, it is essential to maintain scientific seriousness and intellectual honesty that require the full reading of the texts.

We ask for the fraternal intercession of the saints and martyrs of our lands to help us to be credible, humanly and Christianly disciples.

We also rely on the Mother of the Messiah, stronger than any evil power.

Thank you all for your attention.

Bless you

+ Paolo

Solemnity of Christmas 2017