

Exploring Paulist Charism, Spirituality, and Mission

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October 13, 2026



Welcome & Agenda

It's a delight to be with you... again!

- Introductions and Prayer
- How the 2026 document on Paulist Charism, Spirituality, and Mission came to be
- Charism
- Spirituality
- Mission
- Wrap up by 8:30 pm EDT

"Paulists are missionaries of hope."

Introductions



Opening Prayer

*Breathe in me, Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.*

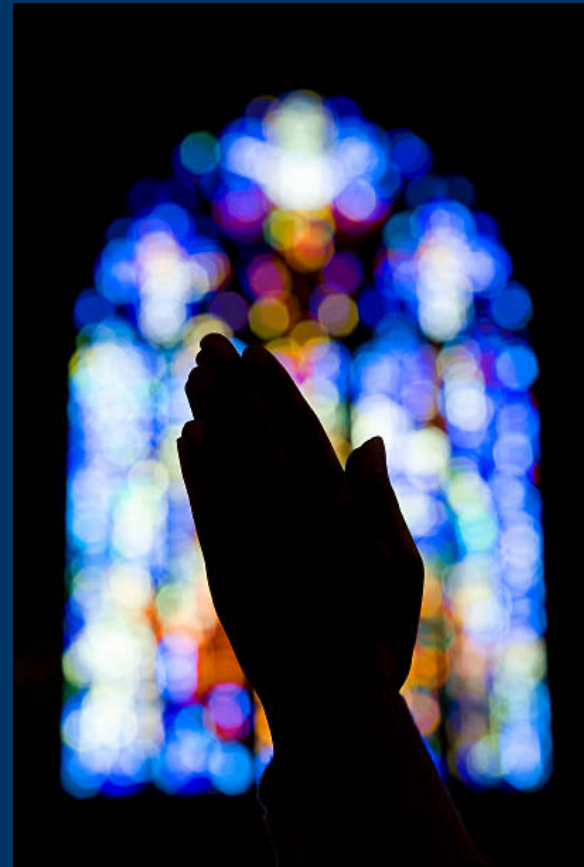
*Move in me, Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.*

*Attract my heart, Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.*

*Strengthen me, Holy Spirit,
that I may defend all that is holy.*

*Protect me, Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.*

- St. Augustine, Prayer to the Holy Spirit



The Journey to the 2026 General Assembly

Paulist Election Process

Leadership elected every 4 years

- Each administration starts with a General Assembly of ~30 Paulists
- For >30 years: Pre-Assembly Process to allow other voices to influence deliberations

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2025-26: Most Extensive Pre-Assembly Process Ever

- Greater role for laity (Francis, Leo?)
- >30 local listening sessions
- 3 regional meetings (Deb, Rick, Susan!)
- 7 study groups

The Journey to the 2026 General Assembly

Mission Direction Statements

1986 MDS — three pillars:

- Evangelization
- Reconciliation
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Mission Direction Statements

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2002 MDS — Evangelization, with two specialties:

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Since then:

- Tweaks around edges
- Use of the words *charism*, *spirituality*, & *mission* interchangeably

2026 General Assembly: CSM Document

Mission

2026 General Assembly: CSM Document

Mission

Everybody associated with the Paulists wants to talk about mission!

- It's about action. What do we do now? What do we do next? As circumstances change, is there a better way to say it?
- It changes over time. (Some organizations change their mission statement every 2-5 years.)
- It can be debated. Mark-David Janus, CSP: "The Paulists will end with the last two remaining Paulists on Hewit Island in Lake George, debating our mission."

2026 General Assembly: CSM Document

Spirituality → Mission

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Spirituality → Mission

In his dying days, Former Paulist President (and main architect of the 1986 MDS) Joe Gallagher, CSP sent an impassioned letter to the 2006 General Assembly, imploring them to write a **Spiritual Direction Statement** to accompany the Mission Direction Statement.

Paulist Spirituality is something we can define, but not succinctly. We've never really put it into writing before...

... but there's something that lies behind spirituality, something we've rarely discussed.

2026 General Assembly: CSM Document

Charism → Spirituality → Mission

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Mission actuates the concrete expression of the charism as it is lived in service of the Church and the world.

Charism:

Who was Servant of God Fr. Isaac Thomas Hecker, CSP?

Isaac Thomas Hecker

A Consistent Charism... of Hope!

Before Catholicism

- Age 3: “God has work for me in this world, and I shall live to do it.”
- Age 17: Felt God called him to serve cause of Loco-focos
- Age 22: Vision of the angel
- Age 23: Brook Farm, Fruitlands, “Earnest the Seeker”

After Catholicism

- Age 30: Redemptorist missionary, visiting homes to fill churches
- Age 37: Coffee at Caffè Greco
- Age 48: “Father Hecker, simply, calmly, joyfully, entirely Catholic.”
- Age 55: Wanted to expand Paulist mission to Europe

Paulist CSM Quotes

From the section on Charism:

“Paulists are missionaries of hope.”

“[Hope is] the unwavering confidence that the Holy Spirit is already active and alive in the hearts of all, drawing all people towards communion in Christ.”

Prof. Michael J. Himes

(Theology Professor, Boston College)

Optimism: secular value, future-based

Tomorrow will be better than today.

Hope: theological virtue, present-based

From the moment that God said “Let there be light,” God has been calling out to us at every moment.

Two questions for discussion:

1. How do you personally distinguish between hope and optimism?
2. *[Adapted from the Paulist discussion guide on the CSM document]* Pope Francis called us to share 'the joy of the Gospel,' to rediscover that the message of Jesus Christ is fundamentally a hope-filled expression of God's love offered to a suffering world. As you reflect on your journey of faith, where have you experienced God's hope breaking through difficulty?

We'll take 5 minutes of SILENCE (Ack!) to jot down our own thoughts. Then we'll discuss.

Spirituality: How do Paulists — and the people affiliated with them — hear the voice of Jesus?

Spirituality:

How have the Paulists — the first American community of Catholic priests, with individual devotion to the Holy Spirit — articulate a common way of life, prayer, and conversion that upholds the charism of hope?

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Until 2026, Paulists defining spirituality felt like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart writing about obscenity: “I know it when I see it.”

3 elements understood but not always articulated:

“Our spirituality is often most clearly recognized in the way we live out our vocation: with attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, by patterning our lives on the missionary witness of St. Paul the Apostle, and by allowing apostolic service itself to become a place of conversion.”

What's the difference between “attentiveness to the Holy Spirit” and “doing whatever the heck you want”?

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“Paulist spirituality is dynamic: it continually seeks to deepen our attentiveness to the many ways the Spirit is moving in our own lives, in the life of the Society, in the communities we serve, and in the world.”

2 – Paul

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“Recognizing his own weakness and believing that God’s grace was sufficient for him, **St. Paul embarked on his mission with great reliance on the Holy Spirit and an unshakeable hope.**”

3 – The Mission Itself

(arguably essential to Paul's spirituality, too)

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“Ministry becomes a place of mutual conversion: those we serve are invited into deeper openness to God, and Paulists are themselves renewed as we encounter the Spirit at work in their lives.”

Two questions for discussion:

1. What helps you notice the Holy Spirit at work in your life, in other people, or in the world around you? What tends to make that movement harder to recognize?
2. St. Paul was changed by an encounter with Christ and became willing to cross boundaries for the sake of the Gospel. Where do you feel invited to cross a boundary, take a risk, or become more available to others in your own Christian life?

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Mission:

**Taking a brief look at the new Mission Direction Statement
(which the Paulist Center Community can continue doing in the
upcoming months)**

Paulist CSM Quote

From the section on Mission:

“The current articulation of Paulist mission is the steadfast proclamation of hope in the world:

- **reaching out to those on the peripheries**
- **building bridges across divisions**
- **awakening the missionary vocation of all the baptized.”**

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What's different from previous formulations of the MDS?

Missing: the words evangelization, reconciliation, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue; naming specific groups.

Included: language of Francis & Leo, lay empowerment, a sense of reconciling between groups.

If time allows — one question for discussion:

1. *[Adapted from the Paulist discussion guide on the CSM document]* Fr. Hecker dreamed of “a future for the church brighter than any past.” What gives you hope today for our Church? What gives you hope today for our world?

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Next Steps

Where does the Paulist Center Community go from here?

THANK YOU!

Pulse check: how are we all feeling?

*3 words to describe
how you're feeling
as we close this
evening*



Closing Prayer

by Susan Rutkowski



Thank you for joining us!