

OPEN LETTER OF Msgr. Peter Lippomano – Bergamo, August 1, 1538

We, Sir Peter Lippomano, by the grace of God and the Apostolic See Bishop of Bergamo and Conte, etc., to the beloved children in Christ, the Fathers Alessandro Evanessi, Federico Panigarola, Agostino Barili, Angelomarco and Vincenzo Gambarana, Giovanni Belloni, Marco Strata, Piero Piemontese, to the laymen Mario di Lanza, Antonio da Monferrato, Giovanni Maria di Casale, Giovanni Maria degli Oldrati, Giovan Pietro Borelli, Giovanni Francesco and Daniele and Girolamo brothers from Bergamo, Giovanni da Milano, Giovan Pietro da Gorgonzola, to the citizens and laypeople of the town of Bergamo, Brescia, Milan, Pavia, Como and Genua, greetings and friendship in the Lord.

Not long ago we have received a petition from you.

Desiring to save your souls and serve God in sincerity of life, you have abandoned your fatherly professions and your worldly commitments. Now, in common agreement, you are asking us that you may live in common in order to apply yourselves to continuous prayer, to live on alms, as some people at the time of the Apostles used to do.

Without adopting the habit of any particular religion but persevering in your specific vocation, you ask us for the authorization to elect a perpetual or temporary superior who will be responsible for your society or congregation and have the power to govern and order what each of you must do.

You have asked that, taking into consideration the abilities of each, some of you could proclaim the Word of God, others take care of the abandoned boys and girls, of the sinner women, of the converted ones, and to serve in hospitals, especially the poor incurables or those struck by other illnesses, while some others, with the consent of their superior, could be sent to towns and villages as a consolation for the faithful and as a comfort for the churches, as the Apostles Paul, Barnabas, and Silas did.

In your petition mentioned above, you have also asked to be able to do any other thing that may give glory and honor to God and be useful to your souls' and your neighbor's salvation. You have explicitly declared that you want to exercise these activities with the authorization of the Ordinaries in whose diocese you will attain the permission to stay, under their obedience. In order to exercise the activities mentioned above with a clear conscience, you have humbly petitioned, as special favor, our consent and authorization.

Enkindled by the zeal of your devotion, We, as far as possible, want to cooperate with the Lord and would like to meet your requests. We well know the works you have accomplished so far in our city and diocese of Bergamo and in Somasca. We are sure that, with the Lord's help, both you and all those who will join in your society will be able to do even greater works.

For the reasons above, you are welcomed to come to our diocese of Bergamo any time you want; you may accept, temporarily or forever, all those institutions that with devout charity are going to be offered to you; you may have the faculty of keeping or relinquishing those you have already received, as you deem more appropriate. You may gather together and establish congregations and societies; you may live in common, pray publicly or privately, daily or nightly, alone or in common; you may elect a superior who will be presented to Us in order to be ratified. Each of your activities shall be submitted to his authority and discernment. You may issue all those statutes and ordinances that you deem right and advisable. The priest may celebrate and, if they are deemed suitable by the superior and authorized by Us, may preach the Word of God; at any rate, you must present to Us all the statutes and ordinances you will make for their approval.

We give you also the faculty that some of you, deemed capable by you, may take care of the orphaned and abandoned girls and boys, of the sinner women, of those converted, and especially of the incurable sick and of Christ's poor; some other may serve as a consolation for the faithful, for the devout people, and churches.

Also given to you is the faculty of choosing a confessor, be he a diocesan or religious from every order, who will hear your confessions and absolve you from your sins, even from those whose absolution is reserved to Us, and of course give you a sound penance. You may have a chapel with a movable altar in all those places which, as it has been said, will be given to you, and there you or another priest may celebrate when you want. And last, you may realize and accomplish everything you may deem useful for the glory of God, for the salvation of your souls and your neighbor's.

We exhort you to be submitted always to Us, to the Vicar and to our successors. Live under our and his obedience.

To all the pastors of the churches and their substitutes in the city and diocese of Bergamo, We order – in case of infringement they will incur immediate excommunication, however, only after a triple admonition – not to bother you, not to hinder you in any way and under any pretext, either directly or indirectly, either in public or in private, either because of them or others, and not to dissuade you from your commitment of undertaking and managing these pious activities; not to prevent you from reaching, enjoining, and using what We have granted you; on the contrary, We order that in these things they must encourage, defend, and assist you at your demand. However, you must endeavor in the Lord so that your ideals, your lives, your works of mercy for Christ's poor may shine before men. May Christians glorify God the Almighty Father for the witness you give and, spurred by your example, may they be converted to a better lifestyle. To all the faithful who will offer you help, advice, or favors in the things mentioned above, and to all those who will offer help to you who have decided to live in sincere poverty of Christ, by the ordinary authority We enjoy, We grant forty days of indulgence in the usual form of the Church. You, however, We enjoin to continue to pray for the happiness of our Lord, Pope Paul III, of the Most Serene Prince of Venice, and also for Us.

Bergamo, August 1, 1538

From the Bishop's Palace

In faith: Alexander Algerius