

# Profile of the c.m. visitor as leader

Joseph L. Levesque, C.M.  
Visitor of Eastern Province U.S.A.

## ADDRESS TO VISITORS

Dear Confreres, Visitors of the Congregation, I am very happy to be with you at the request of the Superior General and his Council, to speak to you on "**Profile of the C.M. Visitor as Leader.**" I was asked to present this topic in two parts, and I will offer three or four questions for reflection after each part.

## P R E F A C E

As I begin, I would like to speak to you about the topic/word *Leadership* itself. (I have borrowed many ideas from contemporary writers who focus on Religious Life today; I will provide a bibliography at the end of my second presentation.)

At the last Visitors' meeting in Rio in 1989, Fr. Alejandro Rigazio developed an excellent paper entitled "The Function of the Visitor." I urge all of you to obtain a copy of that paper from the General Curia. Many of Fr. Rigazio's ideas will be reflected here; his paper developed the functions of the Visitor under the headings of Teaching, Sanctifying, and Governing.

I borrow some introductory comments from Fr. Rigazio's paper; they are insightful remarks as we begin this topic of "Visitor as Leader":

"It should be noted that during the lifetime of St. Vincent, Provinces did not correspond to our present day definitions; rather they existed in an embryonic state . Something must have existed, since the Assembly of 1651 talked about Provincial Assemblies as Father Lucas mentions in his notes, 'It was decided that we would work on the rules of the Provincial congregation, in which it appears that everything will have to be corrected.' There were Visitors whose sole function was to visit the houses to which St. Vincent sent them with special powers.<sup>1</sup>

I choose two statements about *Outstanding Leaders* to illustrate the importance of leadership in the world today:

1. "*Outstanding Leaders* are more concerned with exerting power and influence *to attain congregational goals* and less concerned with supervising and counselling individual members..." On the other hand, "the most striking *deficit* among leaders of religious orders is their *inability to formulate a strategy* to achieve a purpose or mission"<sup>2</sup>

As we know, *congregational goals* are part of the larger vision; that is contrasted with strategies which focus on the details of "what and when and how and by whom" something will be done.

2. A "Think Tank on the Viability of Religious Institutes in the United States" in the Fall of 1994, and the leadership team of that study, discovered that it is the *quality of leadership that is the single most important factor in an institute's viability*.<sup>3</sup>

Leadership is *important*, and outstanding leadership is *essential* today!

May this story which I share with you be a strong image that stays with you throughout the time of my presentation:

"Once upon a time, the story goes, Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said, "Abba, as much as I am able I practice a small rule, all the little fasts, some prayer and meditation, and remain quiet, and as much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?" Then the old monastic stood up and stretched out his hands toward heaven, and his fingers became like ten torches of flame. And he said, "Why not be completely turned into fire?"<sup>4</sup>

St. Vincent spoke to us about fire also when he spoke about carrying God's love far and wide and inflaming the nations with fire. If this is our goal and our desire, then *we too must now burn with divine fire*, my Brothers. Why not be completely turned into fire?

## Introduction

I will begin with some important *foundational ideas* which are part of what must feed the fire and passion that one needs as an Outstanding Leader/Visitor today:

1. Refounding the Community
2. Charism
3. Vision
4. Mission/Purpose

I will explain each of these just a little because they are such strong, consistent ideas that weave in and out of the literature on religious life today.

### 1. Refounding the community

The person who writes a lot about this concept is Gerald Arbuckle, S.M. He uses this phrase instead of *rebirth or renewal* because for him it best expresses the most fundamental challenge confronting the Church - to guide the movement of *adapting the Gospel message to an ever-changing society* without losing continuity with the past, the roots of our identity.<sup>5</sup>

A Refounder must do two things, first: **a)** rediscover the power of Christ within himself coming from conversion; and **b)** discover, with renewed vitality, and identify with, the power of the *founding myth of the congregation* itself, and see, like the founder, himself, that it is to be applied to pastoral needs here and now.<sup>6</sup>

Moses was a refounder, and in Arbuckle's words, a very "successful organizational administrator". Also, Moses was able *to lead* his community through a wilderness, he protected his own people from the plagues by doing what Yahweh told him, and he recognized, as all good administrators should today, that if a renewed community is to emerge, the *good elements of the past must be carried over*, to allow the new to be built on sound foundation.<sup>7</sup>

Many changes are taking place in religious communities today. We have to close old works, works that were central to our Provinces, even seminaries, and people grieve over these significant changes; now they must prepare and plan for new challenges and undertakings, new ways of serving the poor. This can also be said about the Church today, it can be said about our own Provinces and in some of our specific works and houses. We Vincentians have our *refounding* to do all over the world.

*C.2: With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.*

Indeed, many of us here *feel* in our very bones that *continued* state of renewal, and we greet it as something difficult to do, but a blessing from God leading us to something renewing.

## 2. Charism

Our *Charism* is a particular grace by which we hear or reflect or become Christ in a particular, limited way; thus we are able to give service in a specific context in a particular part of the world in the same manner of Christ himself (*Lineamenta* #17 of the Synod on Consecrated Life)...a Charism implies a particular and concrete style of spiritual life, a determined form of apostolate, a specific experience of community life, and a particular involvement in the world (*Lineamenta* #16 and 8). A Community's charism is the unique contribution or gift that a congregation offers the Church.<sup>8</sup>

In C:101, we are told that our Superior General, together with the whole Congregation, must carry on the mission of our Holy Founder, adapted to diverse circumstances. He shall, accordingly, govern the Congregation with such care that the *charism of St. Vincent* will always stay alive in the Church. We are, like St. Vincent, to follow Christ evangelizing the poor, etc.(C:1).

*C:10: The Congregation of the Mission from the time of its Founder, and under his inspiration, sees itself called by God to carry out the work of evangelizing the poor.*

*In its own way, it can, with the whole Church, state of itself that evangelizing is to be considered its own grace and vocation, and expresses its deepest identify (cf. EN, 14).*

Furthermore, the members, individually and collectively, can rightly make use of the words of Jesus: "I must **preach the good news** of the kingdom of God for which I have been sent" (Lk 4:43).

### 3. Vision

Visioning involves reflecting on the messages of scripture and the messages of a community, so that one can see the future so clearly that others can, figuratively, see, touch, and taste it.

**Vision** is the *spirit* behind an organization. It defines the desired future state which motivates a group calling them to action. A vision asks where it is that we want to go. What is it that we want to achieve? Vision is not to be confused with the group's mission, which focuses on why an organization exists and describes its function with detail.

We can see our Vision described in our Constitutions very clearly:

C:5: *The spirit of the Congregation is a participation in the spirit of Christ himself, as proposed by St. Vincent: "He sent me to preach the good news to the poor."(Lk 4:18). Hence, "Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission" and shall be considered as the center of its life and activity (SV,XII,130).*

C:6: *Therefore, the spirit of the Congregation comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence.*

C:7: *The Congregation, furthermore, tries to express its spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely, simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. Speaking of these five virtues, St. Vincent said: "The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them" (CR, II, 14).*

### 4. Mission / purpose

—The **Mission** of each religious institute is a reflection of the mission of Jesus, a way of bringing the Gospel into the life of the Congregation. The passion for mission is a spark that ignites our Company; if that passion dims or is extinguished, the Congregation loses its purpose.

The mission of the religious institute is the focal point for all planning. It is on the basis of this mission that the group chooses its direction and its goals. What will enhance or further the mission of Jesus in our Community, our Province? Our mission makes us answer that very concretely:

C:1: *The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:*

*1° make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR I,3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (CR XII, 13);*

*2° work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned;*

*3° help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor.*

"Central to the Good News of Jesus is the priority of **mission** over maintenance. **Mission** looks at what is the enduring good we wish to accomplish which will bring peace, justice and love established by Jesus and preached by the early Church. **Mission** looks at the initial challenges which inspired our founders to risk their lives, reputations, and energies to bring a new way of living the Gospel to the Church and to the world. **Mission** asks why we run a school or hospital or a parish or a social center and how we can maintain each work only in so far as it genuinely promotes the values of our charism and meets the most universal needs of our times. Consequently, maintenance is a part of mission but never is a substitute." <sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

My Brothers, a personal exhortation from me to you based on these foundational concepts:

My Brothers, **Refound** the Congregation in your own Provinces by a renewal that transforms your Confreres and your work; may your own **conversion** and **vitality** encourage you to put flesh and bones on your Vision of evangelizing the poor. May Jesus, Evangelizer of the Poor, be your "rule of life," setting you on fire with our charism. Be humble and zealous Missionary Leaders and develop concretely what will further the **mission** of Jesus in your Province! Yes, why not be completely turned into fire!?

## **Profile of the c.m. visitor as leader**

### **I. Visitor as leader**

Two paragraphs from our Constitutions are helpful in understanding the role of the Visitor as Leader, C:97 and C:123.

A. C:97,§1 uses the Gospel image of the *Good Shepherd* and the title of *servant of the community*. These are important images for St. Vincent when he thinks of *Leaders* in the Government of our Congregation.

C:97, §1: *Those in the Congregation who exercise **authority, which comes from God, and those who have part in this exercise of authority in any way, even in assemblies and councils, should have before their eyes the example of the **Good Shepherd who came not to be ministered to but to minister.** Hence, conscious of their responsibility before God, they shall***

*consider themselves servants of the community for furthering its own purpose according to the spirit of St. Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life.*

Henri Nouwen offers us insight into this image of Good Shepherd, one figure that isn't that popular in our culture today, but one which symbolizes Christ's role of servant leader so well:

"Jesus says, *'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.'* (John 10:14-15). As Jesus ministers, so he wants us to minister. He tells Peter to feed his sheep and care for them, not as 'professionals' who know their clients' problems and take care of them, but as vulnerable brothers who know and are known, who care and are cared for, who forgive and are being forgiven, who love and are being loved."

"The leadership about which Jesus speaks is a radically different kind from the leadership offered by the world. It is a servant leadership in which the leader is a vulnerable servant who needs the people as much as they need him."<sup>10</sup>

*"The greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely. Yet here am I among you as one who serves.!" [Luke 20:26-27]*

### **Servant as leader - story**

"In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the *servant* who does their menial chores, but who also *sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence.* All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. *They cannot make it without the servant Leo.* The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering, finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as *servant*, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader."<sup>11</sup>

Robert Greenleaf's idea for his book, *Servant Leadership*, came out of his reading of Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. The story was important to Greenleaf because it tells clearly that the great leader is *seen as a servant first*, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. The leader is indeed a servant first, and above all, is so *because he was that deep down inside of himself.* Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was *by nature a servant.*

**B.** C:123,§2 provides the following description of the *responsibilities* of the Visitor as leader. "The Visitor,

1. striving for the *active participation* of all the members in the life and apostolate of the province,
2. should *allocate members and resources* for the service of the Church according to the purpose of the Congregation,

3. should *foster the ministry of the houses*,
4. should show that he is *solicitous for the personal development and activity* of each confrere,
5. and thus *procure a life-giving unity*."

## **ii. Responsibilities of the visitor as leader**

**A. "The Visitor, striving for the *active participation of all the members in the life and apostolate of the province*..."**

### **1. PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY**

C:143: *The provincial assembly, as a gathering of members who represent the province as delegates, has the following functions: 2° as a consultative organ of the provincial, to deal with matters which can promote the good of the province.*

The provincial assembly offers members an active participation in the governance of the province. The provincial assembly can *advise* the Visitor on matters which can promote the good of the province. If Assemblies are well planned, as well as facilitated by professionals (especially fellow religious), leadership and members always profit greatly. It is a great moment of life, and possibly even passion and fire, for the life of a Province.

### **2. Provincial Council**

C:127: *The consultors, who constitute the council of the Visitor, help him by their labor and advice in the government of the province in order to advance its unity and strength, to assure the effective implementation of the Constitutions and of decisions of the provincial assembly, and to foster collaboration among the houses and members in advancing the works of the province.*

The Visitor *must collaborate closely* with his council who by their labor and advice help him to govern the province. This close collaboration demands regular council meetings and planning sessions. Sometimes there is unnecessary tension when team members (Council) are not told before the advice is sought, what form their participation is to take; is it simple consultation, consensus, or majority vote? <sup>12</sup>

Some other advice that Sofield/Kuhn offer us for our leadership team (i.e., Visitor and Consultors):

\_ Clarify roles and use delegation, subsidiarity

Whatever team members are able to do for themselves ought not to be removed from their competence and taken over by other people (e.g. Visitor)

\_ Team members are to be *accountable* for their respective tasks; they should *want* to be accountable for it is a sign of their own leadership and competence

\_ Foster good skills for the Team as they work together  
-are they communicating easily with one another?  
-what skills do members have for the tasks that are set before them?  
-what skills must be brought in from the outside to make up for the group's lack of necessary qualities?

\_ Use consultants and facilitators

\_ Support Conferences of Major Religious Superiors

The Visitors should also see themselves as part of a national voice for religious life; national conferences usually provide Visitors with *support* in some very strong and professional ways as well.

\_ Nurture your Group Life humanly/spiritually

-spend time praying with one another  
-have a meal together  
-plan for some fun together

\_ Always face your own powerlessness and need for God's help. It is only through a shared faith in the Resurrected Lord that members can learn "*...to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things*" (I Cor.13.7).<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Active Participation

C:96 tells us most clearly that dialogue is indeed necessary if we are co-responsible: *All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have **the right and responsibility**, according to the norms of our own law, of **working together** for the good of the apostolic community and of **participating in its government**. Consequently, members should cooperate actively and responsibly in **accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects, and carrying out commands**.*

The Visitor and his council should work together to *create new ways* to enhance the active participation of confreres in the life and apostolate of the province, e.g. convocations, superiors' meetings, standing committees or ad hoc committees, regional meetings, questionnaires, etc.

### 4. Dialogue

C:97, §2: *They [those in the Congregation who exercise authority] should, therefore, **engage in dialogue with members**, while retaining the authority to decide and command what is to be done.*

C:37.§1: *To participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ requires us all to seek, as a community, the will of the Father. We do this through **mutual sharing of experience, open and responsible dialogue** in which differences of age and outlook interact, so that common directions may surface and develop, and lead to making decisions.*

The Visitor should **dialogue** with confreres about decisions. Consultation is a necessary part of the decision-making process. If change only comes from the Visitor and Council, you have a recipe for failure. Participation empowers the Vision.<sup>14</sup> This process can sometimes be messy, but something is usually wrong if there is no dissension before important decisions are made. We should listen carefully to what Confreres say about new pastoral needs. Effective leadership remains effective only if we learn the art of listening and dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

The National Center for Pastoral Leadership in Annapolis, MD, in consultation with over 500 religious leaders, developed a "Pastoral Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century". From their study leaders also asked about "what isn't working" in the Church today. The clear response was that it was *the lack of collaboration and dialogue* in the Church. Without hesitation, the participants pinpointed this lack as the *foremost barrier* to the improvement in Church Ministry.

**B. "The Visitor...should *allocate members and resources* for the service of the Church according to the purpose of the Congregation..."(C:123 §2)**

**1. Mission and Apostolic Planning**

C:2: *"With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the Gospel, and always **attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent needs of the Church**, should take care to **open up new ways and use new means** adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to **evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.***

C:13: *The provinces themselves will decide the forms of apostolate to be undertaken so that, faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent, their apostolate may be incorporated into the pastoral activity of the local Church in conformity with the documents and instructions of the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, and the diocesan bishops.*

According to the Constitutions and Statutes, our mission can be fulfilled through a variety of different apostolic activities, e.g. popular missions, foreign missions, seminary work, ministry to the Daughters of Charity, parishes, universities, etc. However, it is up to each province to determine the forms of apostolate to be undertaken with usually limited personnel and financial resources. Hence, we need to evaluate and plan our works and ministries in order to be in a continual state of renewal for mission. It is the function of the Visitor as leader to foster this process of evaluation and planning of works.

Reflecting on C:2 and C:13 reminds me of a practice that I am told is used/was used in Ireland:

***Grieshog: Death/New Life***

"The Irish have a word "grieshog" and gaelic speakers tell us that this is the process of burying warm coals in ashes at night in order to preserve the fire for the cold morning to come. Instead of cleaning out the cold hearth, people preserved yesterday's glowing coals

under beds of ash over night in order to have fast starting new fire the next day. The process is an extremely important one. Otherwise, if the coals go out, a whole new fire must be built and lit when morning comes, an exercise that takes precious time and slows the more important work of the new day. The primary concern then was that the fire from yesterday not be permitted to burn out completely at the end of the day. On the contrary, coals hidden from sight under heaps of ash through the long dark night were tended carefully so that the fire could leap to life again at first light. The old fire did not die: it kept its heat in order to be prepared to light the new one."<sup>16</sup>

As we missionaries evaluate and plan our works we are, as it were, burying warm coals in ashes, i.e., we are evaluating what must next be done, what changes must take place, what renewal calls for. *Our* practice of "Grieshog" allows us to move from past to present and, most importantly, to the future. We can't let those coals of past connections and plans and evaluations go out or we will risk not knowing where we stand or how we can move into the new day, the future, with light and clarity.

And once the *fire* is going, we must work patiently and steadfastly to keep it burning brightly. Our creative fidelity is what is asked for. And again we can ask, why should we not be completely turned into fire?

## 2. Provincial Plan

S:69: *It is the function of the Visitor: 1°: in accord with the provincial norms and with the consent of his council, to establish the provincial plan.*

This should always be a most collaborative effort with the Confreres of the Province. This plan is for all of us and should be prepared by all of us. Also, apostolic planning should always be part of the provincial plan.

## 3. Assignment of Personnel

C:96: *All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government. Consequently, members should cooperate actively and responsibly in accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects, and carrying out commands.*

Some of the most important decisions made by the Visitor are the assignment of personnel to works. In making these appointments, the Visitor must always keep the *mission* in mind, while he must also know the special talents and needs of the individual Confrere.

## 4. Other Resources

C:148, §1: *The Congregation of the Mission possesses temporal goods for pastoral and community needs. It uses them as support for the service of God and the poor, according*

*to the spirit and practice of its Founder; it administers these goods, however, as the **patrimony of the poor**, with solicitude, but with no attempt to grow rich.*

Provincial decisions on finances and property should always be in service of the *mission*. The Visitor and Econome must work closely together in very open dialogue, always sharing important information with one another in and outside of Council meetings.

## **C. "The Visitor...should foster the ministry of the houses..."**

### **1. Community Plan**

*C:27: Each community should work at developing a **community plan**, according to the Constitutions, Statutes, and the provincial norms. We should use this plan as **a means of directing our life and work**, of fulfilling the recommendations we receive, and of examining periodically our life and activities.*

*S:16: The **community plan** which each community draws up for itself as far as possible at the beginning of the work year, **should include all of the following**: apostolic activity, prayer, the use of goods, Christian witness where we work, ongoing formation, times for group reflection, necessary time for relaxation and study, and an order of day. All these should be revised periodically.*

*S:69.5°: It is the function of the Visitor...to **approve the community plan of each house** prepared by the local superior and his community.*

The community plan is the basic planning tool that directs the ordinary life of confreres in a local house. The Visitor should pay special attention to these local community plans which should be developed by *all members* of the house. Each Confrere should also have his own personal plan and these elements should be part of that plan: personal conversion, fidelity to the Lord, commitment to evangelization, community life, prayer, vows, ongoing formation, health and cultural development. The Confrere should share his personal plan with his Superior.

[1989 Meeting of Visitors, Rio de Janeiro]

### **2. House Visitations**

*C:125.6°: It is the function of the Visitor...to **visit the houses and the members frequently**, and to **make official visitations at least every other year**.*

*S:69.6°: It is the function of the Visitor...to **send the superior general reports about the affairs of the province and about official visitations of houses which he has made**.*

The house visitation offers an excellent opportunity for the Visitor to see the ministry of a house first hand. During the visitation, the Visitor has a chance to speak with each man individually and he should seize the opportunity to speak with all the members of the house gathering them together as a community.

### **3. Appointment of Superiors**

C:125.4º: *It is the function of the Visitor:...having consulted the members, and with the consent of his council, to appoint superiors of houses, and to notify the superior general about these appointments.*

The Visitor should take great care in appointing the local superior because he is the "center of unity and animator of the life of the local community" (see C:129,§1). In a certain sense, the Visitor appoints the local leadership of the province. The life and spirit of the Congregation should thrive, in microcosm, in each house.

The *Visitor* can help the Superior in the *animation* of the local communities, as the Visitors in Rio detailed {1989} by:

- making frequent efforts to be near the Confreres and to be dynamically interested in their life and work
- writing them letters of animation
- fostering retreat days for all the Province or for regions
- arranging for "Days for the Province" for celebration, sharing information, etc.
- having regular meetings with Superiors (at least once a year)
- paying attention to younger Confreres and being interested in their efforts
- encouraging faith sharing, communal prayer, regular meetings, meals together, simplicity in the use of material goods, communal penance, and times of relaxing together.

## **D. "The Visitor...should be solicitous for the personal development and activity of each confrere..."**

### **1. Ongoing Formation**

C:81: *The formation of our members should be **continued and renewed all through life.***

S:42: *Individual provinces, through the help of their formation commission, should organize and promote both common and personal continuing formation.*

The Visitor must provide provincial opportunities for the ongoing formation of the members of the province. Some further ideas on what can be done had been developed by the Visitors in Rio {1989}:

#### **ON-GOING FORMATION POSSIBILITIES (from Visitors' meeting in Rio, 1989):**

- Professional updating courses
- Select a director who can study questions and set up programs
- Formation Days organized for the whole Province and repeated several times
- Acquiring books and periodicals for keeping up to date
- Days with brief presentations
- Annual formation weeks more or less obligatory on theology, sociology, moral issues, liturgy and Scripture
- Study weeks or other annual courses
- Well-planned sabbatical years to be offered to confreres

Formational and informational bulletins  
Reading and communal reflection on Vincentian documents  
Sessions for studying our spirituality  
Participation in a Vincention month, weeks, or study sessions  
Setting up a Provincial Vincentian library  
Communal retreats with obligatory participation

\* \*\*

I am adding some thoughts here about *seeking vocations* and *initial formation* in light of the related topic of *Ongoing Formation*.

Sr. Joan Chittister has some interesting words for our reflection:

"To seek vocations now, to form for religious life now, to create a prophetic religious life now, we must form for single-minded centeredness...We must form for wild caring...We must form for risk...We must form for social critique, for blistering, for searing concentration of any system that makes the poor, poor and keeps the poor, poor...We must form for community, building beyond ourselves for the shaping of the community of strangers in a global world. We must form for enoughness, not for a poverty that is based on "permissions..." We must form for locusts and honey in a world full of business suits. We must form for voluntary marginalization, for separation from the system rather than for privilege in it. We must form for the prophetic rather than for the obedient, for the pastoral rather than for the ecclesiastically proper. We must form for prophetic presence...*We do not have a vocation crisis...we have a crisis of spirituality and a crisis of significance. No vocation program in the world can make up for those.*"<sup>17</sup>

I admire Chittister and those who write about "vocation recruitment", or better, bringing new members to the Congregation, when they focus on the *quality of our life* as prophetic and compassionate Missionaries. For some Provinces we must practice *Grieshog* as we plan for vocations and bring new members into our "Little Company":

"We must bury the coals, carry them to new places so that they can flame again... Banking and burying coals are simply different parts of the same process call the God-Life, called growing in commitment, in spirituality, in holiness, in wisdom, age and grace... The question is...does...our generation have...the spiritual heat enough left for *Grieshog*... We are not the first generation for whom this is the content of our lives, but unless we do it with all our hearts, then other generations may not get the opportunity to do the same, to warm themselves at the same fire, to heat the world with the coals of their lives."<sup>18</sup>

I also add here some valuable points developed at the Meeting of Visitors in Rio de Janeiro, July 3-17, 1989 regarding THE VISITOR AND ANIMATION OF FORMATION:

He should have real quality contact with formation personnel and with the young;

He should encourage some essential factors for formation for the mission, namely identification with Christ and the will to follow Him;

A serious, deepening, on-going study and appreciation of the life, the charism, and the intuitions of Saint Vincent;

Contact with the poor and with ministries and service of the clergy and laity;

Those in the internal seminary should have times of active presence in the local communities and those local communities should have the novices share in the responsibility for the spiritual, Vincentian and missionary formation of those sent to them;

The formation team should be concerned that our candidates come to know languages and various cultures and mentalities so that they might be prepared for the universal character of our mission.

Our missionary vocation and our activities demand a specific formation so that we might deal with change in the world, the particular problems in our apostolates, the need of various groups and the new developments in religious and other kinds of knowledge.

## **2. Sick, Infirm, and Aging Confreres**

*C:26.§1: Sick, infirm, and aging confreres should have a special place in our hearts, since their presence is a blessing on our houses. Consequently, besides medical care and personal attention, we should provide for them the means to share in our daily lives and in our apostolate.*

*S13: Our sick and aging confreres, united in a special way with the suffering Christ, cooperate with the rest of us in evangelizing the world. We should try to take care of them in the house which enjoyed the benefit of their labors. The Visitor, however, having weighed all the circumstances, should provide whatever is best for them.*

The Visitor should see to it that very *special care* is given to sick, infirm, and aging confreres, even, as Fr. Maloney has said, in the words of St. Vincent, to sell the chalices if we have to, as we care for the sick members of the Company".<sup>19</sup>

## **3. Confreres Who Are Struggling with Problems**

*C:123.§2: The Visitor...should show that he is solicitous for the personal development...of each Confrere...*

*S:14,§2: We should strive with brotherly and timely concern to help confreres who are struggling with problems.*

The Visitor should provide whatever resources are necessary to help confreres who are struggling with problems, e.g. spiritual direction, psychological counseling, substance abuse program, time away for rest, etc. The time and special attention, including follow-up phone calls and visits, of the Visitor is an ideal. The understanding, of course, is that this should not take up *most* of the Visitor's time; he must always balance mission and maintenance.

## **E. "...thus procure life-giving unity."**

## 1. *Unity of the Province*

C:123.§2: *The Visitor, striving for the active participation of all the members in the life and apostolate of the province, should allocate members and resources for the service of the Church according to the purpose of the Congregation, should foster the ministry of the houses, should show that he is solicitous for the personal development and activity of each confrere, and thus procure life-giving unity.*

The end result of good provincial leadership will be a sense of life-giving unity and corporate mission in the province. On the other hand, if bad provincial leadership is present, then the morale of the province will suffer, and that is always almost immediately sensed by everyone. The key to this phrase is "life-giving". What a tremendous challenge for a Visitor to assure not only unity, but *life-giving* unity for the entire Province.

\* \* \*

As I come to the end of this talk, I would like, once again, to focus on leadership and especially the **qualities** of leadership. I present the following material as a help, a guideline so that Visitors might reflect on their own leadership qualities and style of leadership.

### SELF EVALUATION TOOL FOR ONE TO EXAMINE THE QUALITIES OF HIS LEADERSHIP:

- \_ *Lighten up and loosen up. Do not be so intense.*
- \_ *Learn to trust the people you work with.*
- \_ *Do not be frightened of people, relationships, and intimacy.*
- \_ *Do not be afraid to grapple with people's grappling.*
- \_ *Do not insulate yourself from people and their problems.*
- \_ *Open yourself emotionally.*
- \_ *Do not be afraid to expose you own anxieties, your own vulnerability, and your own humanity.*
- \_ *Be approachable and available.*
- \_ *Do not isolate yourself from the problems and conditions of the people you purport to serve.*
- \_ *Exude life and energy.*
- \_ *Retain you idealism and freshness.*
- \_ *Project a sense of hope.*
- \_ *Take risks and do things to create new life in new directions.*
- \_ *Do not despair.*
- \_ *Avoid becoming secure and lazy.*
- \_ *Live among the people and allow them to change you.*
- \_ *Broaden your life experience.*
- \_ *Be less rigid, open up and expand your horizons.*

from The Collaborative Leader:

## **Listing of *outstanding qualities* in the literature found in the bibliography of this talk:**

1. The quality which has to be listed *first*, because it is so basic, is the desire and ability of the Visitor TO LISTEN, the foundation of all ministry. It reveals the leader's *wanting to learn and grow* through the understanding of the wisdom which others offer.

Bob Maloney, in his book *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul*, has indicated that *listening* is the foundation for spirituality. He speaks of qualities that characterize good listeners: *humility*, allowing one to acknowledge that everything is gift; *prayerfulness and reflectiveness*, since only when what is heard is pondered is its full meaning resolved; *respect for the words of human persons*, just as St. Vincent himself became gradually convinced that "*the poor have the true religion*" and that we must be evangelized by them; and *attentiveness*, one of the most important signs of respect for the human person. In our community life, and especially in meetings, we have many opportunities "*to pay close attention to the opinions and needs of each confrere, humbly and fraternally*" (C.24.3°).<sup>20</sup>

2. The heart and essence of all leadership rests in one's capacity to be COMPASSIONATE.

Compassion begins in our hearts, which we must open "so that they become responsive to the sufferings and miseries of the neighbor. We should pray God to give us a true spirit of mercy, which is in truth the spirit of God. The Church says that it is the nature of God to be merciful and to confer this spirit upon us."<sup>21</sup>

Our outward demeanor, said Vincent, should reflect our inner attitude, like that of Jesus, for instance, who wept over the coming fate of Jerusalem. Or in personal address to the neighbor: "*We should use compassionate language to make our neighbors aware that we truly have their interests and sufferings at heart.*" Finally, there should be action, "*as much as we can to bring about a partial or complete end to their sufferings, for the hand must be directed as much as possible by the heart.*" Vincent's biographer, Louis Abelly, observed this body language in the Saint: "When people would speak to him about some particular misery or necessity of the poor, he would sigh, close his eyes, and hunch his shoulders like a person weighed down with sufferings. His face would reveal the deep suffering by which he shared in the misfortunes of the poor."<sup>22</sup>

Vincent continued, encouraging his missionaries to wear this badge of recognition: "*Ask this grace of God, that he may give us this spirit of compassion and mercy, and that he may so fill us with it that as soon as anyone sees a missionary, he immediately will think, there goes a person full of compassion.*" {Abelly,III,p.118} One can never feel satisfied that he has done enough. Even Vincent lamented in his own case: "*Alas, the seventy-six years of my life seem now only a momentary dream. What remains now is only the regret that I have used this time so poorly. Think of what unhappiness we will have at the moment of our death if we*

*have not used this brief time of our lives to show **mercy** to others." The lesson, he told his brothers, is "never meet a poor person without seeking to console him, or an uneducated person without seeking to help him understand, in a few words, what he must believe and do to assure his salvation. O Savior [he prayed]...do not withdraw from this Company the spirit of **mercy**"<sup>23</sup>*

An important word in Vincent's thinking here is **heart**. Our heart first knows the misery of others. It is our heart that is moved into action, especially when we know that it is God who has first loved us and touched our hearts. It is the heart that senses the needs of others and keeps the charity of Christ alive.

*"Missionaries above all other priests should be filled with this spirit of compassion."*  
<sup>24</sup>

C:6 reminds us that The spirit of our Congregation must have those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our founder recommended to the Confreres from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence.{C:6}

Indeed we should long have been completely turned into fire, my Brothers.

3. To develop and share your **VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY**
4. Communicate **HOPE AND JOY** so you can realize Christ's wish, "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*" (*The New American Bible, John 10:10*)
5. To be **SELFLESS** and **HUMBLE (C:7)**
6. To be **FORGIVING** and **REQUESTING FORGIVENESS** of others
7. To be a person of **PRAYER**, keeping God central in our life (C:41: *Give me a man of prayer and he will be ready for anything* (Coste, X1, 83). In his study Nygren stresses the importance and centrality of the spiritual life, radical dependence on God, and the absolute need for prayer for Outstanding Leaders<sup>25</sup>
8. To be **BALANCED**
9. To be **OPEN TO CHANGE** and capable of growing when you face new situations
10. To be gifted with **PASTORAL EXPERIENCE**
11. To **PLAN FOR COMMON GOALS** with others, challenging others to see their goals and objectives in the light of wider corporate needs and goals
12. To be able to **EMPOWER** individuals and groups to act

**13.** To develop your administration into a **LEADERSHIP TEAM**, always being open to creativity or pastoral innovation, especially from Confreres of your Province; the Visitor should invite and encourage them to be so creative and inventive

**14.** To be a **LEARNER**

**15.** To be a **COMMUNICATOR**

**16.** To be a **UNIFIER** like a symphony conductor who artistically draws forth the music of each person, lends the tone, keeps the rhythm, and orchestrates the crescendos and diminuendos

**17.** **TAKE RISKS** for the sake of the mission

**18.** To be **ENTHUSIASTIC** about the ministry of leadership during this time of transformation so as to encourage others to be available for leadership

**19.** To have a clear **VISION** of the future

**20.** To be able yourself, or through others, to **STRATEGIZE YOUR VISION** into concrete plans for action

**21.** To treat members as **EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE** for the life of the Congregation

**22.** To **EXPECT MORE** rather than less of your members and provide the framework for constant expansion of the *mission*

**23.** To know how *to be INTIMATE* with others

**24.** To be able to facilitate **GAINING VOCATIONS** and drawing candidates to the Community

**25.** To have **FORESIGHT** i.e., a better-than-average guess about what is going to happen and when (Don't just react to immediate events). Father Pedro Arrupé, on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee in the Society of Jesus (Jan.15,1977) was asked: "Where is the Society heading?" Arrupé said that his reply has always been "Where God is leading it." In other words, "I do not know."

**26.** To be a **HEALER** in the sense of making whole by helping others to a larger and nobler vision and purpose than they would most likely attain for themselves; simple healing of discord and past hurts is also needed.

**27.** To be a **LEADER AND MANAGER** (mission and maintenance); or, as some would say, the Visitor has the Vision and others must be chosen by him to be the administrator, planner, and detail persons

**28.** To be **AWARE** that some people want to obstruct creativity and change and you should know how to deal with them "FORTITER ET SUAVITER"

**29.** To be very **WELL INFORMED** about the **PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES** of the Province

**30.** To develop your **SKILLS** necessary for **ANIMATION OF THE PROVINCE**

**31.** To have **SKILL IN WORKING WITH PEOPLE**

**32.** To **ACCEPT PEOPLE AS THEY ARE**

**33.** To be an **INNOVATOR**, requiring patience, skills and openness

**34.** To be *most SENSITIVE* to the *DIGNITY OF ALL PEOPLE*

**35.** To be **RESPECTFUL** of the **POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE** to be agents of their own growth (and to help some of your Confreres to be future leaders of the Province)

**36.** To be **GRATEFUL AND GRACEFUL**

**37.** To be sure to have **ADEQUATE SUPPORT** for your **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP** (Consider some of these recommendations by the U.S. Provincial of the Sulpicians, Fr. Gerald Brown, at the 1995 *Conference of Major Superiors' of Men* National Assembly Address in Anaheim, CA):

- **Read** and be more aware of our world, more connected to the sufferings of people, more alert to truth, more alive

- Keep in close **Contact with Friends**

- Seek **Spiritual Direction and Mentoring** (of yourself as Visitor)

- Seek **Support from Peers**, especially within professional groups or support groups, as, for example, members of Religious Superiors' Conferences, Peace and Justice Organizations, Regional Support Groups for Priests, Emmaus Programs, etc.

My dear Confreres, Brother Visitors, I would like to end with this statement which a Confrere offered as his encouragement to Visitors; it is a wonderful and hopeful statement; it should indeed help us to become more completely turned into fire in our lives as Visitors:

"Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. And he serves by giving his life. Jesus reminds his apostles of this repeatedly. *"Let those who would be first among you be the least of all and the servant of all"* (Mt.10:43). On the night before he dies he washes his apostles' feet, and he says to them: *"Do you understand what I have done? You call me Lord and Master. And that is so. But I have given you an example, that as I have done, so also you may do."* (Jn.13:13-15).

"Saint Vincent understood this Gospel truth very well. He tells us that the poor are our lords and masters, and that we are their servants. In a sense, like Jesus, he saw the world upside down. He used to tell his followers: *"In the Kingdom of God many things are the opposite from the way they appear in everyday life. The ranks are different, the measures are different, the rewards are different. In the Reign of God, everything is reversed: the real*

*kings and queens are the poor men and poor women to whom you carry food and clothing. How excited people are, he would say to them, when they see the king, or even more, when they visit him. And we have that opportunity every day when we meet the poor!"* My Brothers, Saint Vincent saw things as they really are. He knew what the Kingdom of God is really like. He knew that on the deepest level of things the poor are at the center, and we approach God when we approach them. They are the masters, we are the servants."

"May I encourage you to be faithful servants. Let me suggest two means for doing that:

1. As leaders in your Provinces, be sure that the service of the Confreres is **competent**. If they need to learn a language to serve the poor, let them learn it well. If they need to learn the use of a computer to do their work, let them learn it well. If they need to re-learn theology or liturgy or preaching, let them re-learn them well. Do not hesitate to give Confreres time off for on-going formation. It is worth the price. A few months spent learning, re-tooling, imbibing new thoughts, or a new spirit, can produce years of labor by revitalized men. A seed sown now can produce a mighty oak tree later. Let the renewed formation of our Confreres be a high priority. Help them to be competent.

2. Be sure that your own service is **creative**. I encourage you to reflect on our central values in that light: our service, our common life, our prayer:

- Try to find effective ways of serving the most abandoned in your countries. Some of the old ways are surely valid, but search out new ways too, with courage.

- Try to find creative ways of creating joy, brotherhood and communication in our houses. Some of the old ways are surely valid, but search out new ways too, with courage.

- Try to find ways of making our prayer something beautiful - beautiful for God and attractive to those who join us. Let young people who come to our houses say: "The Vincentians really know how to pray."

Enough, my brothers. Let our service be competent and creative. If it is so, the spirit of Saint Vincent will live on in us and the Congregation of the Mission will grow.

Fr. Robert Maloney, newly-elected Superior General, spoke these words as his Homily on July 25, 1992, at the conclusion of our General Assembly in Rome.

**NOTE TO TRANSLATORS:** This Self Evaluation Tool page should be a *written translation* so that these pages can be used as a handout. Please send these written translations to Fr. Patrick Griffin or Fr. Ignacio at the Curia Generalizia who will get the translated texts copied.

1. Pierre Coste, Éditeur, Correspondance, entretiens, documents (Paris: Gabalda, 1920-25), Vol. XIII: pp. 293, 295-296, 326-327, 348, Vol. II: pp. 208-209.

2 David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1993), pp. 59, 94.

3 Sr. Andrée Fries, CPPS, Transformative Leadership - Key to Viability (Joint Assembly of CMSM/LCWR, 1995), p. 3.

4 Joan Chittister, OSB, The Fire in these Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), p. 52.

5 Gerald A. Arbuckle, C.M. Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 4.

6 Ibid. , p. 148.

7 Gerald A. Arbuckle, C.M., Change, Grief, Renewal in the Church: The Spirituality for a New Era (Westminster MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1991), p. 151.

8 David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, FORUS (Westport CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 8.

9 Howard J. Gray, S.J., Challenge to Religious Leadership: Maintenance or Mission (Address to National Assembly of Conference of Major Superiors of Men, 1985). [Found reproduced in Philibert OP, Paul J. "Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life" (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 50-51.]

10 Henri Nouwen and Bill Van Buren, In the Name of Jesus (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 42-43.

11 Robert K. Greenleaf, Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 7.

12 Loughland Sofield, ST and Donald H. Kuhn, "The Collaborative Leader: Listening to the Wisdom of God's People" (Notre Dame IN: Ave Maria Press, 1995), p. 207.

13 Ibid., pp. 207-216.

14 Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM, Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 203-204.

15 Joan Chittister, OSB, The Fire in the Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), pp. 36, 37.

16 Ibid., p. 54.

17 Ibid., p. 178.

18 Robert P. Maloney, C.M., On Selling The Chalices: Vincent de Paul on Aging (Review for Religious, March-April 1996, Vol. 55. N\_2.) p. 172.

19 David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, FORUS (Westport CT: Praeger, 1993), pp. 246-247.

20 Robert P. Maloney, C.M., *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), pp. 22-26, 27-29.

21 Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul* (Three Volumes), (New Rochelle NY: New City Press 1993), translated and edited from the Premartin Edition of 1891, p. 118.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 119.

24 Ibid.

25 David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, *FORUS* (Westport CT: Preager, 1993), pp. 91, 245.