

The Vincentian mission

A Vincentian Response To the new Evangelization

Final Document

The participants to the Vincentian Month

I. Introduction

Vincentian Priests and Brothers, Daughters of Charity, religious, and lay collaborators from different parts of the world gathered for a month in Paris from 7 July to 2 August 1997. We came together to share our experiences in this foundational work of St. Vincent, the Popular Mission.¹ Our experiences were as diverse as the group which represented 5 continents, 26 countries, and 35 provinces. Rather than create real barriers or difficulties, differences in race, culture, language, and sex, generated a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm.

The Month provided ample opportunities for conferences, liturgies, visits to Vincentian sites in and outside Paris, and dialogues both in small and large groups. These dialogues proved most formative in leading us to the height, depth, and breadth of the Vincentian mission: from the jungles of Mozambique to the sidewalks of New York, from the Altiplano of Bolivia to the city of Dublin, from the island of Cuba to the subcontinent of India. This offered us a real sense of the "world-Church."² In the spirited exchanges among ourselves, we learned innovative ways of presenting, understanding, and doing the Popular Mission. We were witnesses of ingenuity and creativity at work in the lives of our missionaries. More than the differences, we saw healthy commonalities that allowed us to affirm that what we were doing was truly Vincentian.

The high points of this encounter were the visits to places directly connected with St. Vincent. This was climaxed by a retreat at the Berceau, led by the Superior General. We drew very close to the "source" of the Vincentian Family, a homecoming of sorts. Fr. Robert Maloney, in his conference, boldly uttered for us what can only be described as the heart and soul of our vocation and of the Month:

It is not diminished numbers in the Church that we must fear. It is not the loss of institutions. What we must really fear is the loss of fire in our hearts. What

¹Robert P. Maloney, C.M., homily delivered in the Berceau, France on 19 July 1997 during the Vincentian Month on the Popular Missions.

²Karl Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council" in *Theological Investigations* XX, 90-102; cf. also, "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future" in *ibid.*, 103-114.

*burns in the heart of the true missionary is a deep yearning, a longing to follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor.*³

II. The popular mission: "An evangelical response for our times."

A. Description

"Evangelizare pauperibus misit me." The richness and creativity of the call to evangelize which we have felt during this meeting have made possible our finding common elements which facilitate a description of a Popular Mission.

1. A prophetic, extraordinary, and intensive proclamation of Jesus Christ and of the Gospel by words and works.
2. Carried out during a specific time frame, following, generally, a pattern which includes preparation, realization, and follow-up.
3. Ordinarily realized by the local community and the Mission Team.
4. Aimed at reaching every person, inviting each one to be converted to Jesus Christ.

B. Vincentian Characteristics

Based on our Vincentian identity, and reflecting on what we have learned during this meeting, these are the most prominent characteristics of our Popular Mission:

1. It is directed, first of all, to the poor and with the poor.
2. It proposes a new image of the Church as a communion of communities where the laity are promoted.
3. It stimulates lively and participative liturgies.
4. It fosters affective and effective charity within the community.
5. It promotes the social doctrine of the Church in order to sensitize the local mission community.
6. It is incarnated in each local reality.
7. It awakens and strengthens Marian devotion.

³Robert P. Maloney, C.M., "The Vincentian Missionary Spirit: Yesterday and Today," Conference given at the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul, France, 19 July 1997.

C. Missionaries

The Mission is a collaborative action among various types of actors. We have enumerated them as follows:

1. The priests and those responsible for the mission community are the principal missionaries.
2. The Vincentian Missionary Team in collaboration with the local missionaries animates and coordinates the mission activities.
3. Collaboration among the various members of the Vincentian Family and others enriches the mission activities.

D. Formation

It seemed to us that one of the key points of the Mission today is formation. It must be realized on the following levels:

1. To equip the missionary team with the necessary skills to respond to the needs of the mission community.
2. To form the laity of the local mission to insure the work of evangelization.
3. To evaluate periodically our missionary activity.

III. Proposals

1. Empower the ministry of popular missions in our Provinces by aiding the mobility of our missionaries, and in the renewal of our works.
2. Set up an *International Secretariat for Popular Missions*, which would promote information, formation, and development. The same should be done on an interprovincial level wherever possible.
3. Foster the interchange of missionaries among the provinces of the C.M. and with other missionary groups, both on national and international levels.
4. Help in the creation of mixed teams of missionaries (priests, brothers, Daughters, Vincentian laity, and others) in each of our provinces.
5. Study, in the General Assembly, the participation of the entire Vincentian Family in the Popular Missions.
6. Assure the inclusion of preparation for Popular Missions in the initial formation of our candidates.

7. Invite specialists to participate in our provincial mixed mission teams in order to foster collaboration, strengthen our charism, and facilitate mutual communication.
8. Promote periodic meetings of Popular Mission Teams, both on regional and international levels.
9. Create, on the provincial level, a fund for helping the ministry of the Popular Missions.
10. Study, in the General Assembly or in an international commission, the theme of "Justice and Charity" in the life of the Congregation.

IV. Conclusion

We, participants of the Vincentian Month '97, discovered many signs of hope for the future. In our exchange of personal experiences and dialogue, we have learned of the great diversity and creativity in the proclamation of the Gospel by means of the Popular Mission in different parts of the world. In the coming years we wish to stimulate and encourage new initiatives which include priests, brothers, sisters, laymen, and laywomen as members of our evangelizing teams.

As missionaries of the Vincentian Family, we will actively participate in the "New Evangelization" of the world in the Third Millennium. Our recommendations and proposals have been guided by the 1984 Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. Together with all the members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, we wish to continue to search for the means to give new vitality to the Popular Mission where we live and work.⁴

Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple of Jesus Christ and evangelizer, inspires us to be open to the Divine Providence of God. We give thanks to all holy men and women missionaries, especially St. Vincent, St. Louise, and our Vincentian Saints. In their lives we are challenged to become more holy and effective men and women for evangelization today.

As we return to our missionary work we recall the words of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M., to us during our day of retreat at the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul:

To be missionaries _ that is our calling. Breathe deeply, my brothers and sisters, of the missionary spirit that St. Vincent inspired in his followers. Let it fill your minds and hearts. Then, go. "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."⁵

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⁴CM Constitutions 14.

⁵Mk 16:15.

