

A Vincentian Missionary Parish

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The main purpose of the Congregation is the evangelization of the poor. Parish pastoral ministry is a major means to achieve this purpose. It is so because a synchronization of various ministries can effectively be done under parish ministry and all the members of the Vincentian community can effectively witness in word and deed, through multiple ministries under the banner of the Vincentian Parish Ministry. This is true of mission as well as established parishes.

A Vincentian missionary parish should have quadruple presence

Four vital factors that make a missionary parish truly Vincentian are the presence of Christ the Evangelizer, the poor, the local church and the Vincentian community. If any one of these factors is absent from the mission then there is no Vincentian mission. Christ is at the centre of all activities and the poor reflect the presence of Christ. Zeal for the mission, emerging from the grace received through a life of prayer and sacraments, will move us by love to love and serve the poor as our masters. The spirit of St. Vincent should be vibrant in the community and in the mission – the virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and Zeal for souls. And the Queen of the Missions must reign as the queen of all our missions, for where the Son is present the Mother ought to be present as well. A Vincentian pastor cannot but be a genuine representative of the local ordinary and all the activities in the mission need to be done in line with the diocesan program and policies.

Every Vincentian missionary parish should have a vision

The vision is a clear understanding of the present reality and a commitment to what the reality to be in the future. It is within this vision that our mission has to be accomplished. The vision of a Vincentian missionary parish is '**an evangelizing community**'. Through various ministries (goals and objectives) in our mission parishes what needs to be achieved is an 'evangelizing community'. By 'evangelizing community' what is meant is the poor, those living in situations of spiritual, material or in any other new forms of poverty, who are evangelized by us, in turn, become agents of evangelization. In other words, from

within the group/groups that has/have been once our target, emerge evangelizers who, with or without us, become capable of moving forward with the ministry of evangelization. It becomes an on-going process.

At the very start of a mission parish we can ask three simple, yet vital questions

1. Where are we now? (The present reality)
2. Where do we want to reach after five years? (What the reality will be)
3. How do we reach there? (The strategy)

A clear understanding of these questions and definite answers to them would clearly delineate our vision and mission (based on our charism), goals and objectives (based on our major and minor ministries), and strategies (activities). The 'we' in the above questions includes the poor, the object and subject of evangelization; the evangelizers – the Vincentian family, the diocese; other religious and civic groups; governmental and non-governmental organizations; and every system that has a role to play, directly or indirectly, in the life of the poor.

1. *Where are we now? (The present reality)*

This question is of vital importance. Here we analyze all the factors involved in the entire process of evangelization. This brings a clear understanding of the ground reality of everything: the poor at the centre of all Vincentian missionary activities, not only as object, but the subject of evangelization; various situations and forms of poverty; evangelizing agents such as Vincentian Family; the local ordinary and the clergy; governmental and non-governmental organizations; and available material and human resources. We consider all concerns: spiritual, social, cultural, educational, health, personal, and economic. At this, and every stage that follows, we can make use of the systemic change methodology to bring in a better clarity in our vision and mission. This can simplify our endeavors and insure transparency, sustainability, and replicability. A systemic change method at this stage can also help us to look for new forms of poverty and their root causes, enabling us to focus on them and later, to address them.

2. *Where do we want to reach after five years? (What the reality will be)*

This is what we hope the mission will be after a specific period (five years) of pastoral ministry in a Vincentian missionary parish. Having analyzed the present reality, we envision a stage where 'we'

should reach. What we look forward to is a better future for all; our purpose for presence among the poor. It is the practical living of our charism and the result of our missionary work. It is the outcome of the collective witness of a Vincentian community who follow Christ, evangelizer of the poor, by actively engaging themselves in ministries of preaching and witness.

Thus, we need to outline our vision and to state our broad tasks. It will keep us focused and tell us clearly what to do and what not to do. It will help us in any resolution of conflicts. Our distinctive identity as evangelizers of the poor, country people must be delineated when we answer the above question. Our service to the poor, living and preaching Gospel values, collaboration, and networking must figure into the answer, as we set our goals and objectives.

The Vision and the Mission

The vision of a Vincentian missionary parish is that of an 'evangelizing community'. The Mission is to be conscious of our Vincentian charism to follow Christ, evangelizer of the poor, and to evangelize poor country people, by building up a community of people of God (in the given area and parish), by actively being involved in the struggle of the poor. We do this by addressing various forms of poverty; empowering them by promoting their human dignity as God's children (in the family, church and society); collaborating with the poor themselves and networking in all possible directions (social, cultural, ecclesiastical, civil), with everyone who has a role to play; and relating in a simple, transparent, holistic, and progressive manner.

From the above mission statement we can derive the goals and objectives of a Vincentian missionary parish and streamline major and minor ministries. Some of the most needed goals of a Vincentian missionary parish (I am stating these in the context of the mission parishes in India, especially in the Northern Indian Province as my experience is limited to working in these missions) fall under the following categories:

- A) Spiritual
- B) Social and Cultural
- C) Educational
- D) Health
- E) Personal
- F) Economic

A) Spiritual Goal

The spiritual goal is a progressive formation of faith through direct and indirect evangelization which results in a spirit filled community, living Gospel values - a practicing Catholic community. This is the most

important of all the goals and the most important ministry. All other goals directly or indirectly contribute to achieving this goal. The objectives to achieve this goal are:

- Evangelization of new villages, formation of Catholic families to strengthen their faith;
- Formation of committed groups of men, women and youth at various levels (village, cluster villages, whole parish) to create a missionary spirit and leadership qualities;
- Formation of children's associations (Holy Childhood, Altar Server etc.) to create a missionary spirit and Catholic knowledge in children to promote vocations to the C.M. and others groups;
- Formation of Vincentian associations (Confraternities of Charity, SSVP, MMA etc.) and popularizing Vincentian devotions to create the Vincentian spirit and spirituality;
- Formation of a liturgy-centered community, where a meaningful liturgical celebration becomes the culmination of all the activities of the week;
- And formation of a Popular Mission Retreat team.

B) *Social and Cultural Goals*

The vision of an evangelizing community can be achieved by creating certain social and cultural impacts on the poor. Vincentian presence among the poor cannot be an isolated one devoid of the social and cultural significance of the people in the mission. The preaching of the Gospel and living gospel values need be socially and culturally palatable to the people. The social customs, traditions, habits, and the cultural heritage of the people need to be strengthened in the process of establishing an evangelizing community. The objectives to achieve these goals are:

- Acculturation of the gospel values into local traditions;
- Identifying with the people and adapting to new social and cultural situations;
- Inculcating social and cultural values.

C) *Educational Goal*

This is an important goal to achieve the vision of an evangelizing community (especially in India). As education plays an important role in transforming persons and systems, educating the poor and the marginalized will have a lasting impact on our missionary endeavors upon the people. Some of the objectives to achieve this goal are:

- Reach out to people through Catholic education (formal and non-formal);
- Reach out to the youth through higher and technical education.

D) *Health Goal*

Health and hygiene play an important role in the life of the people. Therefore, we need to make health facility available to the poor in our mission parishes. This goal should emerge from the Vincentian way of finding God in the sick and serving them as Christ did. The objectives are:

- Eradication of Malaria, HIV, etc.;
- Natal and maternity care and care of the elderly people;
- Awareness programs on hygiene and health education.

E) *Personal Goal*

In order to build up an evangelizing community we need to empower people and promote their human dignity in the families, the Church and society. Leadership has to emerge from among the people at all these levels. They also need to be aware of their own rights and duties at the level of family, Church, and society (including civil and political rights and duties). The sustainability of the mission depends on the efficacy of achieving this goal. The objectives to achieve this goal are:

- Capacity building and promoting lay leadership;
- Vocation promotion;
- Collaboration and Networking (with various agencies).

F) *Economic Goal*

The growth of any mission and the actualization of the vision also depend on a financial back-up. Sustainability ensures financial stability as well. Therefore, we need to lay a strong foundation for an economic self-reliance as we move forward. It is an area where we need to involve all, and to promote transparency at all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Some of the objectives in this regard are:

- Generating income by diverse and original methods;
- Collaboration and networking (government projects and programs that are available);
- Donations and grants.

3. *How do we reach there? (The strategy)*

Having outlined the goals and the objectives to actualize the vision, we need to formulate our strategy by answering this question. A step by step action plan, its implementation, outcome, methodology, persons responsible for each action, a time frame for completion, and the resources needed have to be carefully drawn up for each objectives of the above stated goals. Done in this way, each activity is a step forward to achieving a particular goal. Each goal achieved is a partial accom-

plishment of the vision. Therefore, a meticulous planning of each activity is of paramount importance. Similar activities would continue till the goal is achieved.

An action plan in like manner needs to be drawn up for each of the above objectives of all goals. They must be monitored and evaluated periodically. This leads to construction of a yearly plan (short-term) and a five year (long-term) plan. The yearly plan may be split into monthly plans. Besides a parish pastoral council, there should be two teams: a 'mission team' comprising of a confrere (parish priest or associate), selected members from Vincentian Family, lay leaders, catechists and youth for evangelization; and a 'core team' with a pastor and associate priest, a representative of the religious sisters, parish pastoral council and lay associations to evaluate and monitor. The second may be replaced by the executive body of the parish pastoral council.

Thus, called to evangelize the poor as the principal task of the Mission, we need to make known and expand the Kingdom of God by building up a community of the People of God. Our involvement in this mission is necessarily a challenging one that calls for courage, tolerance, deprivation, renunciation, and a spirit of sacrifice. Their greatest reward is the most simple, but profound: they bring joy in our service to the poor.