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The Vincentian Missionary Parish of Today

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

Table of Contents

Introduction

- 1 Editor's Note

From the Superior General

- 3 Letter on the Feast of the Miraculous Medal
- 7 Meeting of Pope Francis with the Superiors General – *Vatican Press Office*
- 12 Foundation Day
- 14 2014: Lent and the Lesson of Lampedusa
- 19 Recent Homilies

From the General Curia

- 25 Tempo Forte Meeting Summary (December 2013) – *G. Gregory Gay, C.M.*
- 33 Meditation Moment on the Constitutions. Apostolic Activity of the Congregation of the Mission. Constitutions, Part II, Ch. 1, # 10-18 – *G. Gregory Gay, C.M.*
- 39 New Appointments – *G. Gregory Gay, C.M.*

Spotlight Interview

- 45 An Interview with Fr. Toshio Sato, C.M. Member of the Western Province of the United States – *John T. Maber, C.M., with Toshio Sato, C.M.*

Theme: *The Vincentian Missionary Parish of Today*

- 53 Editor's Note
- 54 Vincentian Missionary Parishes in the Province of Argentina
Juan Carlos Gatti Octavien, C.M.
- 60 Our Vincentian Mission in Tunis, Tunisia. St. Augustine and St. Fidelis Parishes
Firmin Mola Mballo, C.M.
- 65 Living the Vincentian Mission in a Mission “ad gentes”. International Mission, El Alto, Bolivia – *Aidan R. Rooney, C.M.*
- 70 Journeying Together: An Indigenous Vincentian Parish in Panama
Joseph G. Fitzgerald, C.M.
- 75 The Experience of the Missionary Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Armand Ntoutou, C.M.
- 79 Vincentian Parish Ministry in the Chad Mission – *Onyekachi Sunday Ugwu, C.M.*
- 83 A Vincentian Missionary Parish – *Babu Oonmukallinkal, C.M.*

Of Current Interest

- 89 Vocation and Mission of Laity in the Church and in the World
Félix Álvarez Sagredo, C.M.
- 105 The French School of Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

This first issue of 2014 has as its theme “Reflections on the Vincentian Missionary Parish”. If this sounds familiar, it is, as last year’s first issue focused on the qualities associated with Vincentian parishes. However, at the July 2013 International Visitors Meeting, amidst discussion if a ‘practical guide’ for confreres in parish ministry was necessary, one point emerged: there is a greater need for reflection and discussion what constitutes a Vincentian parish today.

You’ll notice a key difference in this issue. We inserted the word “missionary” and for good reason: to emphasize a central element of our vocation and apostolate. To be Vincentian is to be missionary. To be true to our charism, we must know what constitutes a “*Vincentian missionary parish*”. Those three words are distinct elements, worthy of reflection and discussion. Who knows better than Vincentian missionaries and pastors as they share their experiences?

You’ll hear from confreres serving in “Vincentian Missionary Parishes” who are from varied provinces, nations and continents. Working with indigenous peoples and people in the under-served areas, they show remarkable dedication and innovation in advancing the Kingdom of God and the Vincentian charism. Their work is inspiring and instructive, well worth reading.

Ministering to and with the laity is a key element in the life in today’s Church and our Vincentian charism. Our confrere Felix Alvarez, drawing upon the documents of Vatican II and papal and biblical texts, highlights the development of a theology of the laity. The article explores a spirituality of the laity and ways to assist in their formation. It is a “must-read” for anyone who wants to gain an overview and framework of lay ministry in the Church today.

This issue continues with ‘Meditation Moment’, a reflection on our Constitutions, and ‘Spotlight Interview’ with a confrere living our charism in a unique way. We have a new feature that will periodically surface: selected homilies of the Superior General. Fr. G. Gregory Gay logs many miles traveling the world over, meeting confreres, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian Family members. Besides informal talks, he offers homilies and addresses that often leave his audience asking for copies of the text. So, here is a small sample, with more to come.

May 2014 truly be a blessed one, as we seek to follow the Lord Jesus and St. Vincent!

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter on the Feast of the Miraculous Medal

To the members of the Vincentian Family

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ dwell in your heart today and always!

A short time ago I received a letter from a Daughter of Charity who wanted to share with me her thoughts with regard to the manner in which we, as a Vincentian Family, might respond to Pope Francis' call to pray for peace in Syria and for peace throughout the world... doing this through means of our historical heritage, the Miraculous Medal. As I read her letter I felt that the Holy Spirit was touching my heart. I asked this Sister to do some further thinking and to develop her idea and to send it to me so that I could share it with the Vincentian Family on the occasion of the feast of the Miraculous Medal. In this letter you will find her idea that I whole-heartedly support, and that I recommend to you for your reflection and practical application.

As I stand before the statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and the image of the crucified Christ (images which are probably found in every Vincentian chapel and church), I see a reflection of what is happening in our world. Almost everywhere we are able to perceive the presence of evil: the power and domination of money, human trafficking, sexual abuse, extortion, modern forms of slavery, and so many different forms of violence, including war. Evil has become so noisy and loud that it makes people afraid. Once again we see repeated the scene that occurred at the beginning of time when Adam said: *I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself* (Genesis 3:10).

Today, men and women are also afraid of God. They fear God's demands, and willingly accept the seductive and enticing proposals of the Evil One, even though they know that those proposals are deceitful and lead to enslavement. The narration of the events surrounding creation as found in the book of Genesis is not simply a description of sin. We also find there the promise of hope for humankind! Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal is a concrete expression of that hope because in her we discover a woman who is clothed with the sun and who crushes the head of the serpent. This image assures us that God always has a solution for our situation.

At times I am in awe before reality: throughout the world we will find reproductions of distinct and beautiful images of the Virgin, but the image of the *Virgo Potens* with the globe in her hand... that image is part of our Vincentian Family heritage. The image of the *Virgo Potens* crushing the head of the serpent who roams the earth is a powerful symbol. We do not fight with just human means as we confront evil in all its clever and powerful forms. We are also provided with the “modest” means of God and are invited to trust in God’s assistance. This is an urgent demand, and I pray we may open ourselves to this blessing of God that is offered to all of us.

During the apparitions to Saint Catherine that occurred on November 27, 1830 in the rue du Bac in Paris, Our Lady presented her role in the plan of salvation. In the first image, Our Lady is standing on the globe. Beneath her feet is the serpent whose skin is green with yellow blotches. In her hand is a golden globe with a small cross.

Saint Catherine noted the green color of the serpent with yellow blotches: this serpent has crawled through the whole earth. Those colors provide the serpent with a good disguise and therefore, it can difficult to recognize the presence of evil in our life.

Fr. J. Eyler, CM, in his book “Mary and her Medal”, stated that when we analyze the content of the apparitions of the Virgin that have been recognized by the Church, we should not simply focus on the words that were spoken. The words were accompanied by movement and symbolic gestures which reveal the teaching that should be the real focus of our attention.

In a dialogue with Sister Dufés, Catherine described her first vision: *The Virgin had the globe in her hands. I had never seen this image before!* Sister Dufés understood the meaning: *This is about the mystery of the Mother, Queen of the Universe. The Virgin guards the world and brings it to God as an offering.*

In the second image, the Virgin appears with rings of precious jewels and her hands are extended over the earth while the jewels emit luminous rays that are extended over the earth. *The beauty and brightness of the rays are the blessings that are bestowed on those who request such blessings. The jewels that emit no light are the blessings that people forget to request.* Catherine added: *She made me understand that we will experience joy when we request her intercession. Mary is gracious toward all those who ask for her blessings and rejoices in being able to bless us.*

A sort of oval picture formed around Our Lady. At the top of this image, written in gold, were the words: ***O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!*** Then Catherine heard a voice that said: *have a medal made according to this model; those who wear it with confidence will receive abundant blessings.*

The gift of the Medal is a magnificent gesture of confidence. It is a great sign of God’s goodness. It is also a call to collaboration that

respects the dignity and the freedom of the human person. God sent the Immaculate Virgin bearing in her arms countless blessings so that we, who are deceived by the evil one, might see the path of salvation that is illuminated before our very eyes. Mary helps us to discover the astuteness of evil. She has received the mission to crush the head of the serpent. Men and women, through their own effort, cannot free themselves. Yet while God respects our freedom God also requests our collaboration. The words inscribed on the Medal call us to prayer. This is our contribution to collaboration. Those who accept the Medal and confidently recite the words inscribed on it will receive many blessings through Mary's intercession. She does not impose on us any blessings that we do not request.

In 1830 during the dialogue that took place on the nights of July 18-19 the Blessed Virgin referred to many things that would be fulfilled in due time. It is important to refer back to those words in order to obtain the strength and the light to confront the present situation. The Blessed Virgin's words are tender and encouraging: *I myself will be with you. I will always watch over you and grant you many graces. The moment is coming when the danger will be great. It will appear that all is lost. There, I will be with you! Have confidence. You know of my visit and the protection of God and that of Saint Vincent for the two communities. Have confidence! Do not be discouraged!*

How good to hear those words. Nevertheless, Mary places one condition on her words: our fidelity. We can think that those promises were made in light of the difficult times that resulted from the French Revolution but, in fact, those words have been given to both Congregations and therefore refer to both Congregations everywhere and at every time.

In his circular letter of September 8, 1843, Father Étienne wrote: *We ought to recognize the clear intervention of the Immaculate Virgin who has given us such extraordinary signs of her love. Through her powerful intercession before God she has seen to it that our two spiritual families did not perish in the calamities and upheavals that God utilized in order to bring about a renewal of the faith.*

Throughout our history, the Vincentian Family has often experienced the help of Mary Immaculate. She will also help us now if we ask her. The Miraculous Medal is a great gift and a treasure that has been entrusted to us but this gift and treasure is to be shared with everyone. Thus the Medal has been distributed throughout the world, but in our family the Medal is the source of special devotion and esteem.

At this time we are concerned about the future of humanity and we experience the need to respond to the call of Pope Francis to pray for peace in Syria and throughout the world... to pray so that conflicts are resolved through dialogue and not on a battlefield. We can respond to

this call in the spirit of the great mystery that has been given to us, and therefore, I invite our Vincentian Family: Let us be united in the prayer that Our Lady, the Mother of God and our Mother, has given to us. Each day let us frequently repeat those words: ***O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!***

Let us pray to the *Virgo Potens* for our sisters and brothers who are suffering. She understands the meaning of suffering: the cross, the letter "M", the heart of Jesus and Mary... these signs that appear on the medal are indeed very eloquent.

The Vincentian Family is very large and spread throughout the world. If from all parts of the world this prayer is lifted up on high, then the Virgin will guide our troubled world toward God. This simple prayer can be said by everyone wherever they may be: at work, driving, in the fields, in a hospital, when serving a poor person... in fact, the prayer can be said with that poor person.

Let us become as magnanimous, diligent and creative as our Holy Founders. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Immaculate Virgin and become involved in the struggle against evil. Let us spread devotion to the Miraculous Medal and, as the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity did when the medal was first made, let us teach people to say that brief but powerful prayer. Let us meditate on the mysteries that God has entrusted to our Congregations and let us engage in collaborative action on behalf of the world's salvation.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Meeting of Pope Francis with the Superiors General

The Union of Superiors General held its 82nd General Assembly in the Salesianum in Rome from November 27-29, 2013. The story of three experiences provided the basis for reflections and encounters of the various linguistic groups. Fr. Janson Hervé of the Little Brothers of Jesus spoke of “the light that helps me be at the service of my brothers and how Pope Francis strengthens my hope”. Br. Mauro Jöhri, Capuchin, explained “how Pope Francis is an inspiration to me and a challenge for the office I hold within my Order” Finally, Fr. Hainz Kulüke, of the Society of the Divine Word, spoke about “leadership within a religious missionary congregation against the background of an international and inter-cultural context following the example of Pope Francis”.

The Holy Father chose to meet with the Superiors in the Vatican for three hours, rather than the short encounter normally foreseen: no address was prepared in advance, but instead a long, informal and fraternal discussion took place, composed of questions and answers. Various aspects and problems of the religious life were tackled. The Pope often interspersed his speech with personal stories taken from his pastoral experience.

The first set of questions related to the identity and mission of consecrated life. What kind of consecrated life do we expect today? One which offers a special witness was the answer. “You must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing and being. You must embody the values of the Kingdom”. The Pope stated that a radical approach is required of all Christians, but religious people are called upon to follow the Lord in a special way: “They are men and woman who can awaken the world and enlighten the future. Consecrated life is prophecy. God asks us to fly from our cozy nest and to be sent to the frontiers of the world, avoiding the temptation to ‘domesticate’ them. This is the most concrete way of imitating the Lord”.

The Pope continued by saying that to be prophetic is to strengthen what is institutional in consecrated life that is the charism of the Congregation, without mistaking it for the apostolic work which is carried out. The first remains, the second will pass. The charism remains because it is strong. Sometimes there is confusion between charism and its practical implementation. The former is creative, always looking for new paths. The charismatic witness must be realistic and include the possibility of being sinful witnesses “We all make mistakes.

We have to recognize our frailty. Accepting to be sinners does us a world of good”.

One of the participants asked “Pope Francis, you have often invite us to go to the **peripheries** of the world. How can we do that?”. The Pope answered that the world perspective is different if seen from the outskirts rather than from the centre. This forces us to continuously rethink our religious life. He mentioned a letter by Fr Arrupe to the Jesuit social centres in which he stated that in order to make a preferential option for the poor it is necessary to live with the poor. “We have to look at things from the periphery. We have to go there in order to really know the life of the people. Otherwise we tend to embrace stern, fundamentalist positions, based on a centralised vision. This is not healthy. For example: those who work with youth cannot give a regimented vision of reality all the time because that is like water off a duck’s back. Today God asks us to leave our nest. Even those who choose the cloister receive the mandate to pray for the spreading of the Good News. This is the most concrete way of imitating the Lord: to go out!”.

When asked about the **situation of vocations and training**, the Pope emphasised that there are young Churches which are bearing new fruit. All cultural setups can produce vocations. What is to be avoided is the “traffic in novices” whereby some congregations go “candidate hunting” in countries where they are not present so that they can send them to the ‘home country’ where vocations are scarce. It’s also important to try and fathom the right intention of any young man or woman wanting to join. There could be a rather spurious intention at the beginning and this has to be purified during the formation years. One must always be alert: is this young person looking for a shelter, some kind of safe nest? This naturally gives rise to a re-evaluation of the inculturation of the charism which is specific, but at the same time, it interacts with the different cultures.

The Church must ask for forgiveness and look with shame upon apostolic failures caused by misunderstandings in this field like in the case of Matteo Ricci in China who was grossly misjudged. Intercultural dialogue must push for the introduction of persons of various cultures in the governance of religious institutes, thus expressing different ways of living the charism. It has nothing to do with folklore but it’s rather a question of mentality, of different ways of thinking. You cannot train a person for the religious life without taking into account his/her culture, his/her world view. One cannot lose his/her cultural and personal identity during his/her period of cultural dialogue must prahrough this meeting. om dsfunctional damental to be fully equipped tion for Religious institute formation.

The Pope insisted upon the **importance of training for religious life which he presented as being founded upon four fundamental**

pillars: spiritual, intellectual, communitarian and apostolic. It is indispensable to avoid every form of hypocrisy and clericalism by means of a frank and open dialogue on all aspects of life: “Formation is an artisanal craft, not a form of policing”, he commented; “its aim is to form religious persons with a tender heart, not bitter like vinegar. Time allotted to training varies according to one’s gifts and culture. Otherwise we’ll produce “little monsters”. We mustn’t forget that “young people use a different language and categories. It’s not a question of geographical differences but of a cultural change which is in answer to an epochal transformation”.

We must train young people so that they may be witnesses of the Resurrection, of the Gospel values, so that they may lead and train the people of God. That is the aim of training for religious life: it’s for the faithful people of God that we enter such life. Thus, if a seminary accepts a candidate who has been sent away from a formation house for serious reasons, it’s a case of not thinking about the people of God and that is a serious problem.

The courage shown by Benedict XIV in dealing with cases of sexual abuse must encourage us to be serious about the formation of our candidates. And he concluded by saying “we are not training administrators or managers but parents, brothers and travelling companions”. When asked about the **vocation to become brothers**, the Pope said that “this is not a lesser choice but a different call”. It’s necessary to reflect on the matter and to highlight the importance of such choice. “I don’t think for a moment that this type of vocation belongs to the past” said Pope Francis but “we must understand what God wants from us”. There is a document on the brothers which is being reviewed by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life. It’s been there for a long time and it’s necessary to look at it again. On the question concerning brothers as Major Superiors in Clerical Institutes, the Holy Father replied that it is an issue pertaining to Canon Law and that’s the realm where it should be addressed.

Another set of questions addressed community life. Pope Francis remarked that it has a great force of attraction, and presupposes the acceptance of differences and conflicts. There are different forms of community life depending on the various institutes. At times it is difficult to live in fraternal love, but without it no fruit may be borne. “Someone who is not capable of community life is not fit for the religious life”. At times one notes a certain tendency towards individualism which is often a flight from community life. How to combine mercy and compassion though with firmness towards those confreres in a difficult situation?

The Pope went on to say: “Even in the best families there are some members who go through a rough time. Community conflicts are necessary: we can’t dream of a community or any human group which is

free of conflicts and we must tolerate them and overcome them not by eliminating or ignoring them but by facing them. At times, we can be very cruel to each other. We are all tempted to criticise either because we think we are better or for some personal gain". In certain cases, accompaniment may be required, especially in the case of mental or physical illness. In any case, "we must never act like managers when faced with a brother's conflict: but our charity must reach out like a gentle touch", said the Pope.

When faced by conflict we mustn't react like the priest or the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan who simply ignored the problem: we can't avoid conflict but we mustn't remain stuck in it either: we need to tackle it and behave like wise people trying to find possible solutions. Patience and tenderness are the virtues we need. It is painful but it's the only way forward. Certainly, if there is no resolution of the problem, other solutions will need to be found such as a transfer or even leaving the order but everything must be done in a gentle and caring way.

At this point the Pope mentioned a personal experience. A young man, 22, an alcoholic who suffered from depression, was rescued by his mum's loving and tender care. Now he's a successful person. We must pray for the gift of loving care. "In the Office readings on the feast of St Joseph's there is an expression that I liked a lot which said that Saint Joseph treated his family with a *Eucharistic tenderness*. That's how we should treat our brothers" – concluded the Holy Father.

Some questions tackled the mutual relationship between the Religious and the local Churches in which they work. Pope Francis stated that he knows from experience that there are problems. "We, the Bishops, ought to understand that consecrated people are not just helping hands but they enrich the Dioceses with their charism. Dioceses need your charism" – he added. The insertion of religious communities in a Diocese is important and the bishop must acknowledge and respect this charism. Conflicts generally appear when dialogue is lacking. Here the Pope gave some examples from his own experience. He also noted that the issue has been dealt with several times and that the Prefect for the Congregation for Religious institutes is working on a shared document

The final questions regarded the frontiers of the mission of consecrated persons. "They must be sought on the basis of the charism of each institute", answered the Pope. He mentioned Fr Arrupe, former Superior General of the Jesuit and the choice he made in favour of the refugees. "Situations of exclusion remain the first priorities but they also need discernment. The first criterion is to send the best and most gifted people to those situations because of the risk implied which requires men of courage and prayer. It's necessary that the superiors keep in close touch with the people involved in this type of work".

Alongside these challenges, he mentioned the cultural and educational mission in schools and universities. These are sectors where consecrated people can give a tremendous contribution. “When the fathers from (the magazine) *Civiltà Cattolica* came to see me, I told them about the frontiers of the new philosophies, like the ‘Weak Thought’ and the ‘Pensée unique’. I also reminded the Superior General of the Salesians of the frontier of Patagonia which was the dream of Don Bosco”.

For the Pope, **the pillars of education are “transmitting knowledge, transmitting methods, transmitting values.** By these means, faith is communicated. The educator must measure up to those he educates, and must give careful thought to how to proclaim Jesus Christ to a changing generation”. Then he insisted that the educational task is of paramount importance. He recalled some of his experiences in Buenos Aires and how it is fundamental to be well equipped when receiving into an educational context children and boys/girls who come from dysfunctional families. How do you proclaim Christ to these young people without inoculating them with a “vaccine against the faith”?

Before taking leave of the 120 Superiors General present, the Pope announced that 2015 would be a year dedicated to consecrated life. He concluded by saying: “Thank you for the act of faith you made by coming to this meeting. Thank you for what you do and for your spirit of faith and your service. Thank you for your witness and also for the humiliations through which you have had to pass: it’s the path of the Cross”.

*This article was supplied through the courtesy
of the Vatican Press Office*

Foundation Day

Rome, 25 January 2014

To all the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear Confreres:

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

As the universal Church observes the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, we celebrate the anniversary of our foundation, given us through the conversion of another disciple of Jesus:

“But there was such a great crowd that I could not handle it with just the one other priest who was helping me... Father Portail, another priest, and I took residence at the College des Bon Enfants... From there all three of us would go around preaching and giving missions”, Conf. 180, 2, Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents, Paris 1920-1925.

On this day, we recall with gratitude the charism and community entrusted to us by St. Vincent. The challenge before us today is this: how can we better follow Christ, Evangelizer of the poor?

The theme of the 2010 General Assembly, “Creative Fidelity to the Mission” was adapted to guide our Congregation forward. The Curia devised a strategic communications plan to infuse the objectives of the “Lines of Action” yearly and thematically into our provinces and works. Foundation Day is a good time to review and renew our commitment to this strategic plan.

“Creative Fidelity to our Mission and Ministries in following Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor”, guides the five years of this plan with yearly objectives and specific strategies for Visitors, provinces, and confreres. The full plan is on our web site, www.cmglobal.org. Today, I direct you to the objectives and strategies for 2014: “Dialogue with the Poor” and “Initial and Ongoing Formation”. A brief explanation of each with their main points is below.

2012-2016: DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR

To enable confreres to listen to the voices of the poor and make practical, ongoing efforts to participate in their lives. Specific strategies include:

- To favor works that promote systemic change in society;
- To provide legal assistance to defend the poor and promote justice;

- To create programs to counter human trafficking, promote access to universal health care, advocate for the environment, the dignity of women and children, and rights of migrants.

2014: INITIAL & ONGOING FORMATION

To encourage regional and provincial appraisal of available resources, so as to enhance the quality of initial and ongoing formation in the Vincentian charism of the Congregation. Specifically, as stated in the “Lines of Action”:

- To study, disseminate, and implement the revised *Ratio Formationis*;
- To create formation programs that strengthen Vincentian vocational fidelity and our response to the needs of the 21st century;
- To assume ongoing formation as our daily commitment, embracing prayer, reflection, on our experiences in living out our ministry;
- To foster openness to opportunity offered by new languages and techniques of the digital world in view of the Mission;
- To foster exchange of formation experiences with Conferences of Visitors and confreres;
- To reflect on and encourage the vocation of the Vincentian Brother in local communities, provinces and the Conferences of Visitors.

On this Foundation Day 2014, I ask Visitors, provincial councils, local communities, and confreres to focus on dual objectives of *Dialogue with the Poor* and *Formation – initial and ongoing*. Reflect earnestly on ways you can apply them to your local community, apostolate, province, and region. This plan is for the benefit of our Congregation, and it is easily adaptable.

Our two Vincentian-based web sites, “Fam-Vin” and “CM-Global” both offer resources for ongoing formation, be it personal reflection, inquiry, and activities for groups of confreres. In the ‘Vin-Formation’ section of Fam-Vin (www.famvin.org), and the ‘Virtual Library’ of CM-Global (www.cmglobal.org), you will find many opportunities to enrich your understanding of our charism and spirituality. You will also find resources to assist you in preaching and teaching.

As we celebrate our Vincentian vocation today, we give thanks to God for the life and example of our Holy Founder. Seeking the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, let us be creative in fidelity to our Mission and ministries, following Christ, Evangelizer of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

2014: Lent and the Lesson of Lampedusa



A wreath placed by Pope Francis floats in memory of the dead at Lampedusa, Italy

To all members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

Let me begin with these words from Sacred Scripture to frame our focus for Lent:

“For you know by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

We may wonder at times what it means to be poor or to be rich. But as Lent begins, these words of St. Paul remind us that this season calls us to see poverty and riches through the eyes of God.

The ‘Riches and Poverty’ of Lent

Viewing riches and poverty from the lens of contemporary society may seem a waste of time. Today, to be rich is always associated with material wealth, a desired goal granting power, privilege, and access to the finer things of life. Poverty, on the other hand, is seen as a scourge and mark of inferiority, often dehumanizing the poor and scape-goating them for society’s woes.

What a difference it makes when viewing poverty and riches in the way of Jesus Christ! The Lenten Scriptures tell stories of wealthy people whose lives are turned upside down by Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, a rich young man is attracted to follow Jesus, but when asked to give away his earthly treasures to the poor, he "went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mk. 10:17-27). In Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor man has a name and place in heaven, while the rich man is consigned to anonymity and damnation, due to his indifference to the beggar in his midst (Lk. 19:16-31). One seeks, but cannot come to conversion; the other cannot see beyond his life of ease. St. Paul offers us a sobering image on worldly wealth: "Their end is destruction. Their god is their stomach... their minds are occupied with earthly things" (Phil. 3:19).

St. Vincent de Paul saw poverty not only as a means for ministry, but an evangelical end: achieving a life of union with Jesus Christ. Members of the Vincentian Family who take the vow of poverty, along with our laity whose baptismal vows commit them to our charism, must strive for conversion to Christ before we can walk in the world of the poor. To ready his first followers for this path, Vincent said: "Let us seek to lead strong interior lives, to make Jesus Christ reign in us...let us seek the glory of God and the reign of Jesus Christ" (Vol. XII, Conf. 198).

This season of grace is a time to seek and savor both the riches and poverty that Lent offers. Its riches are many: a treasure trove of Gospel and daily Scriptures for reflection and prayer; devotions centering on Jesus' passion, death and resurrection; moments of quiet in the presence of the Lord assessing the direction of our lives; and sharing in the sacramental life of the Church, including the sacrament of penance. Lent is a season providing great spiritual nourishment.

Lent is also a time of confrontation, as we come face to face with the poverty in ourselves. What holds me back from living as a disciple of Jesus and follower of St. Vincent? What worries and fears lurk in the dark places of my mind and heart, blocking God's grace, and keeping me from serving those in need? In experiencing emptiness, Lent leads us to Jesus, who helps us pray from the heart, discipline our desires, and give generously of our time, talent, and treasure. When we do this, we act in solidarity with the Lord who comes in the least among us.

The 'Logic' of Love

In his first *Message for Lent*, Pope Francis described the Incarnation of Jesus as "the logic of love". Christ entered the human condition to "be among people who need forgiveness, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. In this way, he chose to comfort us, to save us, and

to free us from our misery” (Message, 2014). It might seem strange linking ‘logic’ and ‘love’ in the same phrase. But in accepting the Father’s mission of salvation, Jesus reveals its purpose: to manifest fearless love and selfless service to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

What motivated and drove Jesus’ mission was his unity with the Father, and a desire to share God’s unceasing love with all, especially the poor. Pope Francis noted that “love makes us all similar, it creates equality, and it breaks down walls and eliminates distances”. In the Incarnation, “God did this with us” (Message, 2014). At its core, Jesus’ love for us is a truly sacrificial one, a “love unto death” (Rom. 5:8). Lent is the time to ponder and remember that love.

St. Vincent came to believe in and to embrace this ‘logic of love’. As the Lord gave him deeper faith, it freed him to love God, serve the poor, motivate and equip his Missioners, Daughters of Charity, and laity to do the same. In the poor, Vincent met the suffering Christ and became a true disciple and servant. He reminds us that despite their outer appearances, the poor “are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor”, and that “we ought to have the same spirit and imitate Christ’s actions... take care of the poor, console them, help them, and support their cause” (Liturgy of Hours, 27 September, Office of Readings). Vincent’s Christ-centered spirituality became the genius of his apostolate in serving the poor.

This Lent, I suggest you take time to read and reflect on the life and writings of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Many excellent printed and digital resources are available to us. Renewing the bond we share with our Holy Founders deepens our understanding of them and an appreciation of our charism, awakening a desire to be more and to do more as disciples of Jesus.

To recognize and encounter ‘People on the Periphery’

The ‘logic of love’ Jesus modeled by his life led Vincent and Louise to serve the poor and the ‘people on the periphery.’ In a meeting with the Union of Superior Generals, Pope Francis challenged us to motivate our members to go out to the margins: “We have to look at things from the periphery. We have to go there in order to really know the life of the people” (Vatican Press Office, November 2013). I know this is easier said than done, so where do we start?

We can start with the Lenten Sunday Gospels. They provide opportunities to reflect on the ‘people on the periphery’ before we encounter them in ministry. Beginning with the story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert (Mt. 4:1-11), we see how Christ chose to enter the periphery by going to the desert, a place of danger and desolation to fast, pray, and endure temptation. But Jesus overcame it all. Thus, the periphery became a springboard for the public ministry of Jesus.

There are many Lenten scriptural passages that speak of the “people on the periphery”, but two in John’s Gospel stand out. They are the encounters of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4), and the man born blind whom Jesus heals (Jn. 9). Jesus sees two people stigmatized by society and religious officials, due to behavior or illness. He enters their lives, heals them, binds up their wounds, and leads them from the periphery back into the community.

The lives of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were a continual journey to people on the periphery; to help, guide, lead, and empower them. Perhaps this Lent can be a time to reflect and pray on new ways to seek out people on the periphery in our own settings. Pope Francis said there is but one true poverty: “Not living as children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ” (Message, 2014). Let this Lent guide us to seek and serve the poor in Christ and Christ in the poor.

Challenging the “Globalization of Indifference”

The theme of this letter and the image displayed on the first page highlight Lampedusa, a small island off Sicily that has become a flash-point for asylum-seeking refugees. Tragedy struck recently when an overloaded boat sank, killing hundreds of men, women, and children from Libya and Eritrea. Fr. Zeracristos, our Assistant General, was called away from our retreat to go to a morgue to identify some of the dead who were from his village in Eritrea. Like millions before them, they are anonymous ‘people on the periphery’, relegated to the ash heap of history.

Pope Francis made his first trip of his papacy outside Rome to Lampedusa. There, he prayed, visited survivors, thanked those caring for the refugees, and put a wreath in the ocean in memory of the dead. In his homily at a Mass that day, the Holy Father coined a poignant phrase defining the reason for the plight of these and countless other ‘people on the periphery’. He called it the “globalization of indifference”. Here is an excerpt from his homily that day:

“The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, indeed; it even leads to the **globalization of indifference**. We become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect or concern me; it’s none of my business! Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?” (*Homily*, 8 July 2013).

As with poverty, war, violence, and acts of terror, indifference also kills: not only people, but the human spirit as well. Overcoming the “globalization of indifference” starts when each member of the Vincentian Family recognizes one’s riches and poverty before the Lord and then decides to put them at the service of our Vincentian charism for

the good of God's poor. This Lenten season, we who share the heritage of hope – our Vincentian charism – should see these words of the Holy Father as a clarion call to conversion. On Ash Wednesday, the Scriptures tell us what makes for a Lenten conversion: "Rend your hearts, not your garments" (Joel 2:13).

Lent's gifts are paradoxical, but they reaffirm a great truth: in bringing both our poverty and riches to the Lord, we are renewed and strengthened as followers of Jesus in the Vincentian way. May Christ's riches and poverty be yours, bringing you blessings and a fruitful Lent!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

*Quotations of St. Vincent taken from Liturgy of the Hours
for the Congregation of the Mission*

*Quotations of Pope Francis taken from publications
on the Vatican web site: www.vatican.va*

Recent Homilies

Editor's Note

Periodically, VINCENTIANA will print homilies of the Superior General as he speaks to various groups of confreres and members of the Vincentian Family.

HOMILY FOR PRIEST-STUDENTS STUDYING IN ROME VISIT AT THE GENERAL CURIA

December 1, 2013

My brothers in Jesus and St. Vincent:

This first Sunday in Advent is a new day in a new month, and it starts a new liturgical year. This past year has been one of many new beginnings: a new Pope who captured the minds and hearts of people the world over; a 'Year of Faith,' calling us to recommit ourselves to Christ; a year to recall the 50th anniversary of the start of Vatican II; a year when our Visitors met mid-way between General Assemblies to review our goals; and a year when we initiated a new program to provide training to Vincentian Family leaders to increase their awareness and practice of our Vincentian charism.

As student priests studying and dealing with the rigors of academic work, you might view what I have just stated as interesting, but not of pressing concern to you as you attend lectures, write papers, and move forward with your degree programs. That is understandable, to a point. But our gathering today is a reminder of our concern and support for you in these crucial years of your education. For you all will be called to lead, serve, and "*put on the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 13:14), as Paul invites us to do in today's second reading.

That is why the topic of our conference today is crucial to your education: reflecting on our Constitutions, namely, "Apostolic Activities". It is where much of our lives are focused. The readings of this first Sunday of Advent help us to better see what the Constitutions tell us is the true goal of all our apostolic activity: "To make the Gospel really effective" (Const. Ch. 1, N. 11).

At first glance, this may not seem so. Jesus' words in today's Gospel have a tone of fear and foreboding. He speaks of what we might call 'doomsday scenarios' such as thieves breaking into a house and people from field and mill who vanish into thin air. But there is a deeper reality at work here. Jesus uses ordinary examples of home and work to alert us on how quickly life can change, and keep us from being lulled into a false sense of security. We "stay awake" (Mt. 24:42) by keeping our minds and hearts attuned to Christ, so we may recognize and

respond to his presence in our midst, especially in the poor. What sounds like a warning in this Gospel – “*You must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come*” is really an invitation. To welcome Jesus into our lives is a goal and constant hope of every Christian heart!

Our Constitutions frame this great goal to welcome Christ through the active apostolate in the ministry of evangelization. At our core, we Vincentians are called to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to the poor. This reality stretches from our community seal – “*Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me*” to our virtue of “zeal for souls” which our Constitutions call us to achieve every day. The Constitutions are not only words on paper, but a concrete way to interiorize our call to Christian discipleship and living out our Vincentian vows.

Advent is a short liturgical season, but a wonderful time to ponder the past year and forge our future faith journey. Isaiah gives us beautiful images in today’s first reading: the mountain of the Lord; a place of peace, harmony, and unity among peoples and nations. It shows us an ideal world: “*They shall beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor train for war again*” (Is. 2:4). This scriptural image is such a powerful one that it is inscribed at the entrance of the United Nations building!

But we know the reality of life so often intrudes on the ideal world we hope for: global conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, poverty, exploitation, and constant natural disasters. How then, are we to heed the last line of Isaiah: “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord”? (Is. 2:5). We can use Advent to delve into God’s Word and our Constitutions, notably the section on ‘Apostolic Activity’. As a student priest, you may find it difficult to reflect on ‘apostolic activity’ given your present duties.

However, I also point out to you a part of this section of the Constitutions that apply to all of us, no matter our age or apostolate. Under “characteristics” of the “work of evangelization”, it states that we must all “*strive to live in a state of continuous conversion, both on the part of the individual member and of the whole Congregation*” (Const. Ch. 1, N. 12-6). Use this Advent as a time to pray more intensely with the Scriptures, and to meditate on our Constitutions.

Next year it will be thirty years since our Constitutions were promulgated. Take time to ponder its words and ideals. Ask the Lord Jesus and our Holy Founder to guide and inspire you to discover new meaning in its rich text for you to live by. I pray that in that in reading and reflecting on our Constitutions you may grow in fidelity to “the kingdom, that is to say... a new manner of being, of living in community which the Gospel inaugurates” (Const. Ch. 1, N. 11, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* N. 23).

HOMILY TO CLOSE NEW VISITORS MEETING IN ROME**January 14, 2014*****“Authority and obedience in service of our Mission”***

My dear brothers in St. Vincent:

We are at the end of our time together, and I hope it has been an experience for you of “information for formation”. Over these last nine days, you have had to absorb much pertaining to your ministry of leadership as Visitor. Perhaps it has seemed overwhelming. But what has been given you in these days is not presentation and information for its own sake. As brothers in the Lord Jesus, who follow St. Vincent, we have a charism forming us in love of God and service of the poor. For these two great gifts – love of God in discipleship with Jesus, and a Congregation with an apostolic and communal life to serve the poor, – for these, we should be ever grateful.

The two key words framing our meeting, – authority and obedience – are not popular ones in today’s world. ‘Authority’ is a word often seen as suspect, both in ecclesial and civic circles. It can conjure up images of heavy-handedness, or of power-hungry leaders unwilling to assist those they serve. Similarly, ‘obedience’ can seem an outmoded idea, one that robs people of the free exercise of their rights. Seen in this way, the misuse of authority and obedience, either in a civil or ecclesial context, could be akin to the “unclean spirit” affecting the man in today’s gospel.

But both readings today help us to grasp how prayer, discernment, and servant leadership create a mature awareness and appreciation of authority and obedience. They offer a stark contrast to a solely human viewpoint. In the first reading from Samuel, we find a heart-rending story of supplication in Hannah, a woman of faith, clearly in distress, who wants a son. She prays desperately to God, promising to dedicate him in service to the Lord. But as Hannah prays fervently, the temple priest Eli, the authority figure, initially dismisses Hannah as a drunken fool. He is overbearing and judgmental, and who does not encourage much confidence in authority.

But Hannah, united deeply in prayer to the Lord, still respects Eli’s authority, pleading with simplicity and humility. Her purity of intention leads Eli to recant his mistaken judgment, and offer a prayer and a blessing on her behalf. This is a powerful lesson on the difference of authority driven by human egotism and obedience motivated by spiritual unity with God.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus inspires obedience, as he offers “a new teaching with authority” (Mk. 1:27). But it is not only what Jesus does, but how he does it that makes this passage a lesson on Christian authority and obedience. Jesus first commanded respect because of how he

taught in the synagogue. Why? Outwardly, Jesus was not an educated Jew, certainly not a learned scribe. Yet, his words resonated with the people. How does Jesus use his authority when the man with the unclean cries for help? Jesus calls for quiet, prays, and removes the unclean spirit. He uses his authority simply, sparingly, and with the Father for the good of the suffering man.

There is a lesson here for all of us, including me. How? Well, as Visitors, you have to do the difficult and time consuming work of planning for your province, administration, visitations, assignments, and other tasks. But you will each have to deal with your share of 'unclean spirits' which often arrive in the guise of thorny problems that take time and sap energy. How will you do so: like the temple priest Eli, with predisposed ideas, or like Jesus, with an open and loving heart committed to service? Will your time as Visitor be marked with 'my ideas and my way' or "a new teaching with authority"? Only you can decide this course of action.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of our Constitutions. I am using the occasion to urge confreres to read, study, and pray with this vital text, both personally and in common. As you know, our Constitutions offer not just a framework, but an enduring way to live and serve the Lord Jesus as brothers in St. Vincent. We are told in the section on vows that "*to participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ requires all of us, as community, to seek 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*" (C. Pt 2, Ch. III, N. 37).

Like Jesus and Vincent, your goal as Visitor must be to "seek the will of the Father" in all you do. And it is by a spirit of prayerfulness and recollection that you will be able to do so. Once again, our Constitutions are of help, as we are told: "*Sanctified in Christ and sent out into the world, we too should try to seek out in prayer the signs of God's will, and imitate the responsiveness of Christ, discerning everything according to his mind*" (C. Pt. 2, Ch. IV, N. 40-2). So, as you return home, perhaps you can celebrate this 30th anniversary of our Constitutions by reflecting on them in your own prayer, and urging confreres of your provinces to do the same.

As we come to this table to partake in the Lord's Supper today, let us be strengthened by Jesus' love for us, a love that motivated and sustained our Holy Founder Vincent. In hearing God's Word and celebrating this Eucharist, we truly find the nature of our authority: deep trust and obedience to the will of the Father lived so faithfully by his Son, our brother Jesus Christ.

**HOMILY FOR CLOSING MASS
AT VINCENTIAN FAMILY MEETING IN PARIS**

January 19, 2014

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus and St. Vincent,

Let me begin with a quote from today's Scripture to sum up my feelings as we end our time together: "*I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord; my God is now my strength!*" (Isa. 49:5). Today, we celebrate the Eucharist as members of the Body of Christ and the Vincentian Family. "So we, though many, are one body in Christ" (Rom. 12:5). Our oneness with the Lord, so near and dear to St. Vincent, enables us to continue his charism of love of God and service to the poor. It is glorious sharing this time with you, and this experience gives me the strength to go on!

In coming together, we find strength and unity so essential and needed in our Church and our world today. The constant specter of war, civil and international; the economic and spiritual poverty and its effects on people, especially the poor; the vast numbers of refugees; and the terrible natural disasters the world over; these forces tear at the psyche of humanity, despoil human dignity, and fray the bond of community we share as members of the human family.

That is why it is good to join together as a Vincentian Family to work and worship. We "return to our roots" and drink from the deep spiritual well of our Vincentian heritage; namely to find the poor in Christ and Christ in the poor. Today's readings help us to focus on that goal by stressing two crucial virtues in the Scriptures: the value of servant-hood and Christian witness.

We know that both Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac served the poor with fidelity throughout their lives. But what kept them faithful to this task? Isaiah's first reading gives us a key insight: they found strength, conviction, and endurance not in earthly treasures, but in being attentive to their relationship with God. In other words, Vincent and Louise found in Jesus what St. Paul realized when he was imprisoned: "*I have strength for everything through Him who empowers me*" (Phil. 4:13). The Lord tells Isaiah that servant-hood, not self-importance, is the pathway to God. Once we embrace this way of following Jesus, he opens our minds and hearts to a new reality. In giving of ourselves, we receive more than we could ever have imagined.

Thus, the Lord tells Isaiah that whoever willingly embraces the role of God's servant is transformed as a "light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6). Today, we see the "lights" Vincent and Louise lit burning brightly and steadily in the works of mercy, evangelization and service to the poor by the Vincen-

tian Family. It is our responsibility to fan those flames of hope, so they do not turn into embers of a past fire no longer giving heat or warmth.

The Gospel shows us what a true servant does: bear witness to the power and presence of God. And we have none other than John the Baptist, a witness “par excellence”, whose entire life and death was a ministry of witness preparing the way for Jesus. In today’s Gospel, John sees Jesus coming toward him and makes a statement now firmly implanted in our liturgy: “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (Jn. 1:29). It is not just the beauty of his words that is captivating. John shows us what it truly means to be a servant witness: “*A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me*” (Jn. 1:30). At least twice in this brief passage, John tells us “I did not know him” (Jn. 1:31-33). Most of John’s life was spent announcing a Messiah he never met. From a human point of view, this is quite a sacrifice!

But John is a stellar example of a servant who witnesses: “*Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God*” (Jn. 1:34). And what is the secret to his intense and enduring witness? It can be found in a simple thought of his in a later chapter of this Gospel: “*He must increase and I must decrease*” (Jn. 3:30). In those few words, we find a summation of John’s ministry as a servant witness, and what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Those few words were the paradigm for the spirituality of Vincent and Louise, who spoke, wrote, and showed that Jesus was central to their lives. They witnessed to this reality in lives of Gospel service to Christ in the poor.

As we go our separate ways, prophets such as Isaiah or John the Baptist can seem distant from our daily realities of life. Yet on this Sunday, so early in the New Year, what Isaiah and John stand for; namely, servant-hood in God’s way and witnessing to Christ, should rekindle our commitment to the charism we share as members of the Vincentian Family. Vincent told his first followers: “*It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him. I must love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of his love...*” (CED, Vol. XII, Conf. 207).

The Word of God we have heard, and the bread of life and cup of salvation we will share are what impelled and sustained our Holy Founders. Let us give ourselves to the Lord Jesus, so that we may, in the words of St. Vincent “*seek the glory of God... and the reign of Jesus Christ*” (CED, Vol. XII, Conf. 198).

FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

Tempo Forte Meeting Summary

December 2013

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

The following is a summary of proceedings from our December Tempo Forte meeting.

Update on Ongoing Activities

- Our ongoing formation session for Tempo Forte was held in conjunction with the annual gathering of our priest-confreres who study in Rome. The theme for our reflection was the second chapter of our Constitutions: "Apostolic Activity". Fr. Eli Chaves, Assistant General, presented and guided discussion with all present. A summary of the ideas shared with Curia and the Council will be published in *Vincetiana* as "Meditation Moment on the Constitution".
- We put the final touches on our "New Visitors Meeting" held in Rome in January, 2014. We are hoping for a great deal of sharing and interaction between Visitors and presenters.
- We began preparations for the 2016 General Assembly by reviewing names from Visitors for a Preparatory Commission. We discussed selection of a theme for the assembly, such as focusing on the 400th anniversary of our foundation (2017), and New Evangelization. We finalized the date and place from June 26 - July 17, at DePaul University, Chicago, IL, USA.
- We discussed ongoing plans for reconfiguration of provinces. Reports were given by the Assistants General charged with helping provinces undergoing discussion on reconfiguration.
- With regard to the on-line catalogue, it is now active and functioning. It has been visited by a number of confreres offering suggestions and information to keep it up to date.
- A letter and questionnaire sent to Visitors about establishing a center for confreres who need to do vocational discernment yielded a small response. There is still time to respond. At the next Tempo Forte, we will decide whether or not to establish such a center.

- We discussed the response to a letter we sent to Visitors requesting provinces take up a collection around St. Vincent's Feast to support the VSO (Vincentian Solidarity Office) in its efforts to strengthen the patrimonial fund for developing provinces. We received donations from the provinces of Indonesia, Colombia, Salamanca, Chile, Peru, and Poland. If other provinces have taken this collection, please notify the Econome General.

General Curia Personnel

- We are now selecting a confrere to be administrator for the General Curia. Fr. Giuseppe Carulli, C.M., will complete his three-year term in June, 2014. On behalf of the confreres at the General Curia, I express my gratitude for his generous service as administrator of the house these last three years. We have nominated his replacement and are awaiting a response.
- We have named a new brother to work at the General Curia, replacing Br. Ivan Sanchez who finishes his service in June, 2014. Br. Gerardo Fajardo is not new to the Curia, as he has previously served here. We are grateful to Br. Ivan for his years of generous service.

Department Reports

- Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications reported on Vincentiana, our web sites, and SIEV. We spent some time dealing with a revision of SIEV. There will be a meeting in 2014 to discuss future projects and to appoint a new board. We are grateful to the current SIEV Board members; namely Fr. Eugene Curran, Province of Ireland, Fr. Elie De Place, Province of Paris, and Fr. Alexander Jernej, Province of Austria, who have served SIEV diligently for over eight years. At the March Tempo Forte, we will appoint a new board.
- We also hope SIEV will create inter-provincial and inter-continental groups to encourage study of our Vincentian heritage and charism, especially among younger confreres
- We studied proposed statutes for the ONLUS Commission, that is, the Vincentian Solidarity Office based in Europe. Documentation was sent to the VSO-USA Director Fr. Miles Heinen for his input. We are in the process of forming an Executive Board for this ONLUS. The board's make-up will include the Superior General and Assistants General.

New Projects

- We had a discussion with Fr. Robert Maloney in his capacity as president of the Franz Foundation. Together, we discussed two new initiatives. The first is a program providing a distinctly Vincentian

emphasis to parishes where confreres serve that will strengthen our distinct Vincentian identity. Further information will be sent out once it is translated.

- The second initiative, with Franz Foundation help is to make emergency relief funds available. We will create a fund for emergency situations that will supplement our limited funds, often quickly depleted. With this new initiative, we can quickly respond when emergencies occur, particularly where confreres and Vincentian Family members live and serve.
- Another new initiative, a proposal to offer workshops to train confreres and members of the Vincentian Family on strategic planning, grant-writing, and asset management. This was proposed by Frs. Bob Maloney and Joe Agostino, and Sr. Marjorie Clifford, D.C. and discussed by the Council. Details are in the early stages of discussion and planning.

Commission for Promotion of Systemic Change

- The Franz Foundation has generously agreed to continue financing the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change. The Commission is moving to a new phase: training leaders to teach systemic change. The Commission is also in transition to new leadership, and held their recent meeting at the General Curia. The Commission welcomed a new member, Sr. Teresa Mueda, D.C., former Visitatrix in the Philippines. With Fr. Maloney, I thank the founding Commission members who will complete their service in early 2014.
- In their October meeting, the Commission discussed a number of presentations to be given in different parts of the world. The Commission also recommended appointment of a full-time person to do follow-up on systemic change workshops.

Status of Ratio Formationis

- We took up the project of the revision of the Ratio Formationis, reworking its content to fifty pages total. Interspersed with text will be articles after each section, as confreres will offer various commentaries. The text will be published in a future issue of Vincentiana.

Union of Superior Generals

- Fr. Zeracristos, Assistant General, attended the “Solidarity with Southern Sudan” session. We renewed our participation as a congregational member of this project, which consists of assigning personnel to work an inter-religious community setting in Southern Sudan. We have Fr. Manuel Ginete of the Philippines Province training the laity in pastoral care.

- The topic of the meeting at the Union of Superior Generals was the exercise of leadership in religious communities in these days. The highlight of this meeting was a three-hour session of dialogue, questions, and give-and-take with Pope Francis at the Vatican. A summary of the Superior General's reflections on that meeting will be available at later.

Housing of Immigrants in Rome

- We studied a letter we received from Cardinal Agostino Vallini, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Rome, who represents Pope Francis, the Bishop of Rome. Inspired by the words and actions of the Holy Father, Cardinal Vallini made a request that religious congregations with access to underused buildings to consider housing poor and immigrant populations. Rome, like many cities, has a large immigrant population. We wrote to Cardinal Vallini, offering the use of a house on the grounds of the Curia for such temporary housing.

Implications for the Congregation

- I would recommend to all provinces with underused buildings to consider putting our goods at the service of the poor, whenever possible. Thus action is quite consistent with both our charism and Constitutions. The plight of the poor is real, raising a key question for Vincentians: in what concrete ways might we serve them? We do so not only because of Pope Francis or Cardinal Agostino Vallini, but as a response to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (25:40): "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me*".

Vatican Synod for the Family

- We received the working paper issued by the Vatican for the Synod on the Family, to be held in October 2014. The Council will have an opportunity to reflect on its contents and to send our ideas in to the Synod via our membership in the Societies of Apostolic Life.

Archives and Historical Matters

- We received some recommendations from Fr. John Rybolt regarding the archives of the General Curia we will adopt with the assistance of the Archivist and Secretary General. We also considered a proposal from Fr. Rybolt regarding creation of a historical section for our on-line database. We approved it and authorized him to begin its implementation.

The Education Apostolate of the Congregation

- We reviewed minutes of a meeting between the five university and college presidents of institutions with Vincentian sponsorship: St. John's, DePaul, and Niagara universities; Adamson in the Philippines; and All Hallows College in Ireland. In general, we approved their statement on Vincentian sponsorship of universities with some recommendations. With the final document, the Superior General will write to Visitors in provinces where the universities are located, urging their support and encouragement in this apostolate.
- We also believe that, with the assistance of SIEV, we can establish and promote ongoing dialogue between the Congregation and the universities and colleges sponsored by the Congregation. We are considering having SIEV produce publications with practical ways to apply the Vincentian spirit in our educational apostolate where confreres serve.
- The Superior General shared with the Council the initiatives being taken for the benefit of secondary and elementary schools affiliated with the Congregation. A pilot project has been initiated at DePaul and St. John's universities (USA) to establish links with these schools to assist them find ways to promote the Vincentian charism.

Postulator General Report

- The Postulator General provided us with an update on the status of Vincentian Family members whose causes for beatification are moving forward. The results of this report will eventually be published on line in the "Fam-Vin" web site and in *Vincentiana*. The Council also intends to provide updates on these matters on a regular basis.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

- A constant challenge we face is the difficulty of gaining entry visas for confreres going to various missions. This can lead to "double frustration", as the confrere seeking entry gets discouraged, while confreres at the mission must assume extra work in his absence. I appreciate the example of patience and perseverance of confreres seeking to go to the mission, and men in the mission waiting for a new confrere. The *Solomon Islands* is one such place, where the process for visa entry and residency can take a very long time.
- We discussed the International Missions of the Congregation. In *Papua New Guinea* plans are underway for the construction of a Vincentian residence in Bomana, as a place of work and rest for the confreres coming in from remote parts of the mission.

- We received a copy of the community project from our international mission in **Chad** (sponsored by COVIAM). It is well prepared by the two confreres at the mission. They are hoping for a third confrere to arrive in January 2014. Fr. Sixtus, Province of Nigeria, will visit and encourage the confreres, and negotiate a contract with the bishop in **Chad**.
- With regard to our mission in **Benin**, Fr. Zontak, the Assistant General responsible for this mission will visit the confreres there shortly. This relatively new mission is staffed by three very enthusiastic confreres from the Province of Poland.
- We received a report of our **Punta Arenas** mission from the Visitor of Chile, where two confreres from that province serve. Unfortunately, the Visitor announced that one of the two confreres is not able to continue for health reasons. So, I am putting out an appeal for a confrere who may be discerning applying to the missions to consider **Punta Arenas**. On a related note, in the recent meeting with the Holy Father sponsored by the Union of Superior Generals, Pope Francis appealed to religious communities to go to the ends of the earth for mission. He mentioned that the Salesians had done so in **Punta Arenas**. But, what the Holy Father did not know is that the Salesians left, and we've taken their place! Hopefully, we can keep our commitment to **Punta Arenas**, our 'end of the earth' mission.

Mission Appeal 2013

- We received five responses to the October mission appeal from confreres volunteering for the international missions. We made two definite assignments: Fr. Alexander Fonseca, Province of Fortaleza, will go to Mozambique; Fr. Slawomir Szucki, Province of Poland, will go to Papua New Guinea. I thank the confreres who volunteered, and urge all to consider volunteering. Don't hesitate to discern more deeply. Recall that we are a missionary congregation who serve the most abandoned wherever the Lord calls us!

The Vincentian Family

- We received notice of the cancellation of a workshop on "Dialogue with Islam" that had been in preparation for over a year by the Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam. Hopefully, it will be held at DePaul University in Chicago in 2015.
- We received a proposal from Fr. Claudio Santangelo, who serves as moderator of the AIC (Ladies of Charity) in Rome. The ladies of Charity are willing to offer a scholarship to a confrere in the

Congregation for the study of the social doctrine of the Church. For further information, please contact the Secretary General (secgen@cmglobal.org).

Conferences of Visitors

- We received reports from the different Conferences of Visitors. The Asia-Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC) will have its meeting in Sydney, Australia in February. It is being organized by Fr. Greg Brett, the Acting Visitor of the province. At its recent provincial assembly was renamed the Province of Oceania, at the request of the confreres.
- The European Conference of Visitors (CEVIM) will have its next meeting in Jerusalem. The Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI) is holding a program for seminarians in theology in the Province of Venezuela. The Superior General will meet with the National Conference of Visitors (NCV) in the USA next spring to discuss how the three provinces can support each other and spread the Vincentian charism.

Superior General's Calendar

- The calendar for the Superior General for the next three months is as follows. In January, he attends the New Visitor's meeting in Rome from January 5-15. Then, he goes to Paris January 16-19 for the annual Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family and ongoing formation for Vincentian Family Leaders. Then he will participate in the International Council of the Vincentian Marian Youth in Madrid, from January 22-26.
- On February 2, he will have his traditional meeting on the Feast of the Presentation with Sr. Evelyn Franc, D.C. to discuss the state of the Company of the Daughters of Charity as they prepare for the annual renewal of vows. From February 3-25, he will visit the missions in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and attend the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC) meeting in Sydney, Australia. February 27 - March 2, he will attend the General Assembly of MISEVI in Costa Rica. He will then go to Rio de Janeiro. Assisted by Fr. Eli Chaves, he will participate in dialogue on the reconfiguration of several provinces of the Daughters of Charity in Brazil. He will then return to Rome to prepare for the quarterly March Tempo Forte meeting.
- As I conclude this report, 2013 is nearly over, and Advent has ushered in a new liturgical year. I look back with great thanksgiving and gratitude to God for the warm welcomes I received in my visits with

confreres in this past year. I am also thankful for the many kind and thoughtful greetings I receive from confreres by letter, e-mail, and phone. I pray God will bless you and grant you “abundant life” (Jn. 10:10) in the year ahead. Together, may we continue to live the Mission entrusted to us by Jesus and Vincent.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Meditation Moment on the Constitutions

Apostolic Activity of the Congregation of the Mission
Constitutions, Part II, Ch. 1, # 10-18

Pastoral ministry in a missionary seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities (Evangelii Gaudium, # 33).

The text of the Constitutions (# 10-18) relevant to the above topic, contains a reflection and an interpretation of the Vincentian tradition with regard to the apostolic activity of the Congregation. The entire text of the Constitutions is important, but this chapter has a special importance. It defines the activity as well as the place of the Congregation within the Church and gives meaning and specificity to the one true name of the Congregation: "The Congregation of the Mission". Fidelity to these characteristics allows the Congregation to be a significant presence in the Church. This chapter of the Constitutions provides a norm and a guide for the animation, the evaluation, the discernment and the development of the apostolic activity of each Missionary, of each community, of each province and of the whole Congregation.

Reading and reflecting on the text, one discovers anew the specificity, the richness and the relevance of the mission of the Congregation. Three pivotal or underlying themes define the understanding and the identity of the apostolic activity of the Congregation of the Mission:

a) The missionary and compassionate charity of Christ, evangelizer of the poor

The Congregation of the Mission is seen as an institution that has been called to evangelize the poor (Luke 4:43). The charity of Christ who is compassionate toward the multitudes (Matthew 8:2), Jesus words and actions and his vision of the new life of the Kingdom... all of these are the source of the Congregation's apostolic activity. Like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) the Congregation ought to make every effort to provide effective relief to the poor in all its various situations, thus fulfilling the demands of social justice and of evangelical charity.

Missionary activity is the source and the center of the Vincentian apostolic activity. An encounter with Christ and his attitudes, and his historical and missionary commitments toward the poor led Saint Vincent to discover the priority of missionary charity and also led him to establish the Congregation of the Mission. He wanted the Missionaries to be *in a state of mission* (CCD XII: 224), to be available to go where they were needed and to live together in community for the mission. He exhorted the confreres to be willing to reach out and encounter the poor, to allow themselves to be evangelized by the poor and to be witnesses of unassuming and arduous service in those places where the missionary demands are most urgent.

The missionary charity of Christ is a constitutive element and is also a priority in the life and the ministry of the Missionaries and of the whole Congregation... it is the gift that the Spirit has given to the Church through Saint Vincent. Through the holiness of missionary charity, the Vincentian vocation participates in the holiness of the Church while at the same time offering its collaboration in the task of sanctifying the Church.

b) The option for the poor

Number twelve of the Constitutions characterizes the evangelizing activity of the Congregation and points out six criteria or characteristics that give authenticity, visibility, and Vincentian fidelity to the missionary “being” and “doing” of the Congregation. These criteria are founded on Vincent’s experience of faith. Vincent, in his encounter with those who were abandoned and hungry experienced the presence of the Incarnate Word, the Son of God who came *to evangelize the poor* (CCD XII: 71-72), who identified himself with the poor and therefore *our mission is to do what Christ did on earth* (CCD XII: 71-72). The poor were the privileged beneficiaries of Saint Vincent’s love... they were also the inspiration and the objective of his activity and of his various foundations.

The ecclesial nature of the Congregation is to be a sign and an instrument of Christ preferential love for the poor. This is to be done in union with the Church while at the same time the Congregation places herself at the service of the Church. *The poor are our inheritance; the poor evangelize us*; we encounter Jesus in the poor who reveal the true face of the Father, *the good God* of mercy and the defender of the poor. Vincent referred to the poor as *our lords and masters* (CCD XII: 4). Here then we encounter the original and specific nature of the apostolic activity of the Congregation. The poor have a preferential claim on the compassion and the charity of the Missionaries. The option for the poor is an essential part of the Vincentian heritage. This option ought to be the root, the foundation of our life, of all our pastoral decisions, both as individuals and as a Congregation.

c) Renewal from the perspective of the missionary calls of the reality of the poor and the reality of the Church

The provinces ought to make a decision with regard to the forms of the apostolate that they will assume. Nevertheless, these forms ought to be assumed and renewed in fidelity to the spirit and the example of Saint Vincent and in accord with the needs of the reality and the needs of the Church. Popular mission, the formation of the clergy and the laity, missions *ad gentes*, and collaboration with the Daughters of Charity are the privileged ministries of the Vincentian tradition and ought to be developed by the Congregation. As a response to the signs of the time the Statutes (# 2-12) propose other pastoral actions and orientations.

Just as Saint Vincent knew how to interpret the call of God revealed in the reality that surrounded him, so too the Congregation ought to consider and reflect upon and renew and develop in an on-going manner its apostolic activity. This task ought to be done from the perspective of the missionary option for the poor, and therefore we hold before our eyes the poor as our purpose and the mission as our primary ministry. The service of the Congregation ought to be prophetic and as such, should help the Church to be a community of charity which is a continuation of *the spirit of the perfect charity of Christ* (CCD XII: 193). This vision requires the Congregation to engage in a process of profound discernment and a sincere search for coherency in the development and the renewal of its traditional ministries and its new pastoral initiatives. The mission requires this process so that its apostolic activity does not become so diverse that any and every ministry is justified and as a result we lose both our prophetic sense and our Vincentian identity.

A tremendous on-going challenge for the Congregation and for each and every member of the Congregation is to etch the text of the Constitutions on our hearts and to express this text through our lifestyle. The internalization of the text with regard to the apostolic activity in the Congregation must take into consideration the new challenges and possibilities of the present social and ecclesial reality that is formed by three important factors: the present social-cultural environment of “epochal change”, the present increasing awareness of the Church as a missionary church and the call to a new evangelization with its resulting proposal of creative fidelity to the mission (a theme presented during the 2010 General Assembly).

The Congregation of the Mission has as its purpose the service of charity and the mission; it wants to be with the poor and involved in the formation of the clergy and the laity. This is its theological and pastoral place in the Church. This is its identity that needs to be in an on-going state of construction and actualization through a process of

confrontation with the challenges and the opportunities of the present time. The words that Father Miguel Flores wrote in 1994 are still valid: “*The lack of identity in the various ministries is the seed of a certain opaqueness of the Congregation in the Church, a cloud that obscures the visibility of its charism. An institution that lacks identity is slowly dying*”¹. In order to keep the Vincentian identity alive and relevant in the ministries it is necessary to eliminate the gap between what is said and what is done and it is also necessary to eliminate everything that could prevent or disturb the creation, the recovery and the renewal of the ministries of the Congregation.

The text of the Constitutions, especially # 12, calls us to a process of continual revision and discernment. Looking at the ministries of the Congregation we have great concern: statistically, the great majority of its members minister in stable works and ministries, that is, in ministries focused on the preservation of the faith, while a minority of the members work in ministries that are more specifically missionary, in new and difficult situations where there is a greater urgency². A greatly diminished missionary activity on the “peripheries” of the province, an unwillingness to participate in the mission in those new and difficult situations, a lifestyle that is removed from the conditions of the poor, a certain historical inheritance of pastoral practices, pastoral works and structures that do not conform to the Vincentian spirit, individualism in pastoral ministry, an excessive pastoral presence in parishes, some self-serving interpretations of the Constitutions in order to justify certain ministries, all of these are obstacles that create a gap between the Congregation and the poor and that create a cloud that obscures our missionary identity. The internalization of the text of the Constitutions requires courage and decisiveness on the part of the local communities, superiors and the individual confreres in order to purify our apostolic activity and make it a visible, coherent and meaningful expression of our charism.

During the time of epochal change and the search for a new evangelization, the necessary charity of Christ convokes and guides the Congregation in developing an attitude of creativity and renewal. The text of the Constitutions points out the missionary activity of the Congregation, sheds light on it in order to purify this activity and lays out a path for fidelity. The proposals with regard to the new evangelization highlight new historical challenges and new opportunities to renew and reconfigure the mission with new vigor, new methods and new expressions. The text of our Constitutions and the challenges of

¹ Cf., MIGUEL FLORES, *Identidad de los Ministerios de la Congregación de la Misión*, in *Vincentiana*, year 38, # 4-5 (May-June 1994), pp. 123-143.

² Cf., CLAUDIO SANTANGELO, *Numbers and People*, in *Vincentiana*, year 54, # 3 (July-September 2010), pp. 252-253.

the new evangelization give a validity and a vitality to Vincentian missionary activity and also provide the possibility for the development of creative fidelity to the mission. This in turn leads to new commitments and attitudes so that the missionary charity of Christ, evangelizer of the poor, configures and renews the heart and the apostolic activity of Vincentian missionaries and of the whole Congregation.

The present proposal with regard to the new evangelization invites the Congregation to find its proper foundational roots. The Congregation was born from the innovative activity of Saint Vincent and the first missionaries who as a result of their missionary work with the poor contributed to the fact that the face of the Church during the XVII century was completely changed. Today, the new evangelization proposes “*a missionary transformation of the Church through a ‘Church which goes forth’ with a transformative missionary option and a pastoral approach of conversion*” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 20-33). The internalization of the text with regard to the apostolate of the Congregation gives a dynamic meaning to its foundational purpose, to its ministries and structures. It also gives meaning to the call to live in a state of on-going missionary conversion and to do this from the perspective of openness to the Spirit, of reaching out to encounter the poor and of a willingness to shift direction and not be satisfied with the status quo. This also involves a willingness to engage in critical dialogue with modern culture and the courage to renew and to change and to allow ourselves to be led by the evangelizing potential of the poor... and all of this is done in order to engage in a process of searching for creative fidelity in order to purify, to invigorate and to expand the apostolic action of the Congregation and in order to make it more Vincentian, more creative, more relevant and more prophetic.

For reflection and dialogue

In *Evangelii Gaudium* we read: “*Indeed, today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church and the missionary task must remain foremost. What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*” (# 15)... “*I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. Mere administration can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’*” (# 25)... “*Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor!*” (# 105).

In light of the text of the Constitutions and in view of the new evangelization, what can we do in order to develop a Vincentian missionary presence in our apostolic activity?

“You, the Missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, ought to be specialists in the mission, be careful then not to sin in those areas where you are called to be more virtuous” (Paulo Suess)³... “Congregation of the Mission, be what you are. Do not yield to mediocrity... work tirelessly to go beyond the boundaries of your mission” (General Assembly, 2004).

In light of the text of the Constitutions, do our ministries, missionary work and initiatives identify us in the church as true “Vincentian missionaries of the poor”, specialists in the mission?

What do we need to do to today for the apostolic activity of the Congregation to purify it, and make it a more lively and renewed expression of our charism... in order to go beyond the boundaries of our mission?

“Poor persons are our portion, the poor; pauperibus evangelizare misit me. What happiness, Messieurs, what happiness! To do what Our Lord came from heaven to earth to do, and by means of which we will go from earth to heaven” (CCD XII: 4).

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

³ Paulo Suess is a German missiologist who lives in Brazil and he addressed those words to a group of confreres who had gathered together in that country.

New Appointments



Fr. Carl Pieber, C.M. named Sub-Director General of the Association of the Miraculous Medal

Rev. Carl L. Pieber, C.M., Executive Director of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal (CAMM) in Philadelphia, PA, USA has been appointed the Sub-Director General of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the international organization promoting devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Fr. Pieber has served as Executive Director of CAMM in Philadelphia for seven years.

Fr. Pieber is a native of St. Louis, MO, USA. He entered the Congregation in 1975, and was ordained in 1980. He has had various assignments in educational and pastoral ministries in both the Province of the West and the Eastern Province, of which he is a member. In his time at CAMM, Fr. Pieber has pioneered an extensive outreach to create awareness and encourage devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal using both traditional and digital media. The weekly novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal at the Shrine in Philadelphia is viewed on-line by large numbers of people, and its “Facebook” page reaches thousands of people submitting prayer intentions and sharing their faith.

In his new ministry, Fr. Pieber will work with national organizations in various countries that promote devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal through the weekly novena, works of charity and encouraging personal piety. He reports directly to Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M. the Director General of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Fr. Gay also serves as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

Fr. Gay noted, “I am grateful to Fr. Pieber for his willingness to accept this assignment. I know his deep devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal will be a catalyst to help our many associations to make people aware of the story of the Miraculous Medal”. Fr. Pieber observed that “the Miraculous Medal has been had a profound influence in my spirituality as a Vincentian. In my years of working for the Miraculous Medal, I have heard so many stories from devotees all over the world of what Our Lady has done for them through their prayers and acts of charity. It is a truly great gift in our faith”.

Fr. Pieber begins his new assignment on January 1, 2014. He replaces Fr. Juan Bautista Iborra of the Province of Saragossa, who served as Sub-Director General since 2010, and who resigned for reasons of health.



Fr. Simon Kaipuram, C.M. appointed Bishop for the Diocese of Balasore, India

Pope Francis has appointed Rev. Father Simon Kaipuram, C.M. as Bishop for Balasore Diocese in Odisha State in Eastern India. He will replace Bishop Thomas Thiruthalil, who has resigned after reaching the canonical age of retirement of 75. This was announced by Fr. Joseph Chinnayan, deputy secretary general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).

The bishop-elect, a member of the Congregation of the Mission, is currently Rector and Professor at Aquinas College in Gopalpur, Odisha. Bishop Thiruthalil who is also a member of Congregation of Mission headed the Balasore Diocese since 1990. Bishop-elect Fr. Simon was born in Thannermukkom, India in 1954. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1975, and was ordained in 1980. He holds a doctorate from the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome. He has served as a parish priest, seminary formator, retreat master, professor and lecturer.

Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, said the news of the appointment of Fr. Kaipuram "was a bittersweet one for me, as I know he will do great work for the Church in Balsore, as he has done for the Congregation in over thirty-three years of service. But he has been a great confrere and collaborator, and I will miss his presence in the Congregation. However, we are honored at the appointment. I join with all my Vincentian confreres in offering my congratulations and prayers for Bishop-elect Kaipuram".

Fr. Mathew Kallammakal, C.M., Assistant General of the Congregation, has worked with Bishop-elect Kailuram in the province of Northern India, and noted that "Fr. Simon is a well respected and much sought after lecturer and retreat master. I used to see how quickly his schedule would fill up with retreats and talks. Besides all his talents and accomplishments, I consider him a model confrere, as he embodies the virtues of simplicity and approachability".

The diocese of Balasore covers the civil districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar which were part of Calcutta archdiocese until 1968. It has over 17,000 Catholics in a population of 8.2 million. They live in 24 parishes and missions, served by 54 diocesan and 10 religious priests, 9 Brothers and 134 Religious Sisters,

according to the latest statistics from the CBCI. Christianity first came to the area in 1514 through a Portuguese settlement in Pippli.

The ordination of Bishop-elect Kaipuran to the episcopacy is scheduled for January 30.



Fr. Patrick J. Griffin Steps Down as Director-General, Daughters of Charity

Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M. Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, announced that, due to health concerns, Fr. Patrick J. Griffin, C.M. has resigned as Director General of the Daughters of Charity. This position is based in Paris.

In a letter to the Daughters of Charity signed by both Frs. Gay and Griffin, they said, “We have come to this unwelcome conclusion only after much discussion and prayerful reflection. It is based solely on Fr. Patrick’s health situation. He has been attentive to a heart condition which has raised greater concerns over the last six months. His doctors recommended a program of care and lifestyle that make carrying out the responsibilities as Director General difficult and incomplete”.

The letter acknowledged the difficulty the decision to step down presented for Fr. Griffin, noting, “Patrick and I have spoken about our love for the Company and our desire to serve them and our beloved poor in the best way. Both of us recognize that this goal is not possible in Patrick’s role as the Director General because of his doctors’ advices. Acceptance of the sometimes mysterious will of God, as reflected in the circumstances of our life, brings us to this point”.

Fr. Gay expressed gratitude for the years of service Fr. Griffin has provided as Director-General of the Daughters of Charity since his appointment in 2010. He expressed hope that his future ministry will continue to be rewarding. “I am sure that I speak for all of us when I thank him for his service and offer him our continued prayerful support. Thankfully, Fr. Patrick will be able to carry out another ministry with different responsibilities in his Province and for the Congregation”.

Fr. Patrick Griffin, a native of Brooklyn, NY, is a member of the Eastern Province, USA and was ordained in 1979. He studied at the Catholic University of America, earning a doctorate in Sacred Scripture. His 35 years in priesthood have been spent as an educator, both as a seminary professor and formator, and in higher education as an administrator and teacher. He has also organized ongoing education programs for diocesan clergy and given numerous retreats for the Daughters of Charity. Before being named the Director General and moving to Paris, Fr. Griffin served as Executive Vice President for Mission at St. John’s University in Queens, NY.



Fr. Bernard Schoepfer, C.M. Appointed New Director General of the Daughters of Charity

Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M. Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, announced that he has appointed Fr. Bernard Schoepfer, C.M., a confrere from the Province of Paris as the Director General of the Daughters of Charity. He will serve in this position for a three-year term. In a letter to Visitors, the Superior General noted, "After informing you of the resignation of Fr. Patrick Griffin, C.M., due to health concerns which no longer allow him to carry out his ministry as the Director General of the Daughters of Charity, I asked for your prayers. Having considered the suggestions I received, and with the consent of the General Council, I have appointed Fr. Bernard Schoepfer, C.M., as the new Director General".

Fr. Bernard was born in Bale, Switzerland and grew up in the Alsace region in eastern France. A member of the Paris Province, he was admitted into the Congregation on 10 September 1984, and was ordained on 4 May, 1989. In his quarter century of ordained ministry, Fr. Bernard has fulfilled a number of varied ministries. He has engaged in pastoral work in rural areas of the Diocese of Amiens; accompanied candidates in seminary formation for the Congregation; served as chaplain to the shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, worked as spiritual advisor to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and served as member of the provincial council for the Province of Paris. Currently, Fr. Bernard serves as Superior at the Maison-Mere, and the national chaplain to the AIC in France.

Fr. Gay expressed gratitude to Fr. Bernard Schoepfer for his generosity in accepting this assignment as well as offering thanks to the outgoing director Fr. Patrick Griffin: "I thank Fr. Bernard for his willingness to serve, and I assure him of our prayers and fraternal support in his new ministry. I express my deep gratitude to Fr. Patrick Griffin for his tireless devotion to duty as Director General these past three years. We pray the Lord grant him good health, so that he may continue for many years to *'serve the Lord with gladness'*" (Ps. 100: 2).

Fr. Bernard is scheduled to assume his new duties in late March. In closing his letter to the Visitors, the Superior General exhorted all confreres, "Let us entrust Fr. Bernard's mandate to our Blessed Mother, because as St. Vincent told us, *'When the Mother of God has been invoked and taken as patroness of important matters, everything can only go well and accrue to the glory of Jesus, her Son'*" (SV XIIIb: p. 3).



Fr. Donald J. Harrington, C.M. to serve as Consultant to Vincentian Solidarity Office

Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, announced that he has secured the assistance of Fr. Donald J. Harrington, C.M., President Emeritus of St. John's University, New York to advise in fund-raising efforts for the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO), a fund-raising arm of the international Congregation. Fr. Harrington, a member of the Eastern Province, USA will serve as a consultant to the VSO. In this capacity, Fr. Harrington will assist the VSO in two crucial ways. First, he will advise on the best means to reach their \$5 million dollar goal to qualify for a matching grant from a charitable foundation. Secondly, Fr. Harrington will use his expertise to design a long-term plan that will coordinate and enhance fund-raising efforts of the VSO for the Congregation on the international level.

The Vincentian Solidarity Office provides financial support for provinces in developing countries for their works with the poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. The VSO is building up what it calls "Patrimonial Funds" that will promote the economic viability of Vincentian provinces in developing nations, and also fund the activities of Vincentian Family groups that are under the responsibility of the Superior General. The monies raised will help provinces to get on solid financial footing, so they can fund programs to offer formation for their members and initiate new works with the poor.

Fr. Gay said, "I am gratified that Fr. Harrington has generously agreed to serve as a consultant to the Vincentian Solidarity Office, and I thank him for his willingness to assist the international Congregation in this fund-raising endeavor. We are at a crucial time in our efforts to achieve a matching grant. Fr. Harrington brings a great wealth of knowledge and expertise to this task. His very successful fund-raising efforts, both as President of Niagara and St. John's, resulted in major enhancements in the quality of academic and student life at both universities".

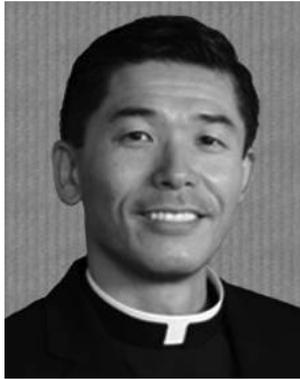
Fr. Donald Harrington is a native of Brooklyn, NY and was ordained in 1973. His entire priesthood has been spent in the higher education apostolate of the Eastern Province, USA. He served as an administrator and professor at Niagara from 1973-1989. In 1984, he was named NU President. In 1989, Fr. Harrington left Niagara to become President of St. John's University, where he served until his retirement in 2013. In both Vincentian schools, Fr. Harrington established successful capital campaigns, including the first-ever major fund-raising effort at Niagara. At St. John's, he carried out two very successful capital campaigns, resulting in a major transformation of the University.

Fr. Miles Heinen, C.M. is the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office, and has served in this capacity since 2009. The Vincentian Solidarity Office is based in Philadelphia, at the provincial house of the Eastern Province. Fr. Harrington, currently on sabbatical, will begin his consultant duties with the VSO in August, 2014.

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

An Interview with Fr. Toshio Sato, C.M.

Member of the Western Province of the United States



John T. Maher, C.M.,
with Toshio Sato, C.M.

Editor's Note

Our guest this issue is a confrere who holds a unique claim among the members of the Congregation. Fr. Toshio Sato, C.M. is the first Vincentian of Japanese heritage to take vows and be ordained for the Little Company. A member of the Western Province of the United States, he was ordained in June, 2013. Fr. Toshio was born and lived in Japan before coming to the United States for work. His journey to the Catholic faith, Vincentian vocation, and priesthood is not just an interesting one; it is inspiring.

Describe your life in Japan, including family, school, activities, and sports you enjoyed. In growing up, did you have any significant religious training or practice?

Being a youngest of four, I was always trying to get attention of my parents. In becoming a Vincentian priest in June 2013, I may have at last succeeded in my efforts to do so! I was very active in sports when I was young, particularly Kendo (Japanese fencing) and volleyball for four years until I finished high school in the capital city in the Fukushima prefecture.

My family gave me a foundation for a life of prayer and community. My grandmother made sure that her four grandchildren recited Buddhist chants at our ancestral altar every morning. She never missed this morning chanting session until her recent death at 91. For many years, I lived in an environment where my grandparents and parents were active at the local Buddhist Temple. We often opened our house for community gatherings. However, I had no interest in religion; I'd rather go play with other children, or practice Kendo or Volleyball. Perhaps this was my way of getting the attention of my religious oriented family members by not being active in their faith.

What brought you to the USA?

During my undergrad study of economics, I experienced a deep emptiness in my heart, as I searched for true meaning in my life. It took six years instead of four for me to graduate from University. However, this gave me an opportunity to come to Chicago to work at the Consulate General of Japan as an "extra chancellor" specializing in protocol and administration.

How did you get interested in the Catholic faith, what steps did you take to enter the Church?

Unlike love at first sight, it was a gradual and constant way of being guided to the Catholic Church for me before I could call it my "home." I started by reading books on the lives of the Saints, particularly Francis of Assisi, Therese of Lisieux, Vincent de Paul, Maximilian Kolbe, and others. What those saints said and did with their lives quenched my inner thirst for the meaning of life, filling my void beyond tangible pleasures. They gave me a joy and sense of being enlightened; it was an overwhelming feeling, as if I had found a precious jewel. After that, I went through the RCIA at St. Vincent de Paul Parish, and I was baptized in 2004.

How soon after that did you become interested in Vincentians?

I began to think about joining the Vincentians after I was baptized. I began serving at the sandwich window regularly at St. Vincent de Paul parish in Chicago. It was recommended to me that I serve one year as a full-time volunteer at St. John's Mercy Medical Center in St. Louis living with other young Gateway Vincentian Volunteers, which I did from 2004-2005.

My initial interest in the Vincentians began when I started studying at the School of Public Service at DePaul University. It was through the example of the director, the professors and the Vincentian priests there that I found what I had been searching for. The Vincentians

I met and later came to know at DePaul manifested an internal tranquility, dedication, and commitment to serve the marginalized joyfully and peacefully while working in collaboration with the laity. This was fascinating to me, and it occurred at the same time I was discovering the Catholic faith.

What drew you to St. Vincent?

Well, I guess seeing that St. Vincent was not born into a noble family, but that he was a regular boy with a great ambition to become better caught my attention. His faith journey was gradual, filled with examples of ongoing conversions like ours. He used his gifts from God to organize and communicate with others for the benefit of the abandoned poor. Vincent showed that in serving others in need with Christ's love, we are evangelized by them. St. Vincent lived a holy life as a normal human being, with commitment and full trust in God's providence.

St. Vincent changed his course in life from pursuing financial success and fame to doing the will of God by bringing the Good News to the marginalized. His heart was a compassionate one, open to the unheeded pains and sufferings of the materially and spiritually poor. His ability to interact with people in diverse backgrounds social status to serve the marginalized amazes me. St. Vincent had a keen insight into human nature, and his charism continues to share goodness among us all in various vocations of the Vincentian Family.

What was your experience of formation in the Congregation?

My experience of formation in the Congregation of the Mission was a continuous 'break-through.' I spent time in two different formation houses; doing my philosophy studies in Chicago, and my theological training in California. Perboyre Mission House in Chicago helped stretch my "comfort zone" as I learned to live with my brother CMs as family members, sharing many things, mostly space. After having lived in US for several years, I was used to enjoying my private space and belongings as I wished. A previous year as a Gateway Vincentian Volunteer in St. Louis before formation helped me learn to live in community. Perboyre Mission House was intentional, and psychologically and emotionally challenging, but I learned to share with others.

Four years at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California provided me with a very different formation, with its own richness and depth. Besides a solid seminary academic curriculum, I had the privilege of interacting with diocesan seminarians and priests. This helps me in my ongoing ministry as a parish priest or in whatever capacity I chose to assist my brother diocesan priests.

A challenge I faced as a Vincentian seminarian studying at a diocesan seminary was to remind myself intentionally of my identity as a 'Vincentian' seminarian. This was done in my time spent with other confreres, sharing our Vincentian feast days among us, and our own Vincentian meetings and formation program besides the diocesan priestly formation program.

What pastoral experiences helped you grow in your commitment to your Vincentian vocation?

Some of pastoral experiences during my formation period prepared me to open my heart to all people. These included service experiences at various CM and diocesan parishes, such as St. Josaphat Church in Chicago and periods of time assisting at various parishes across the province, such as St. Ann in Arkansas, St. Vincent de Paul in Perryville, Missouri, Sacred Heart in Patterson, and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Barbara, both of which are in California.

I also did ministry to the incarcerated at Santa Barbara County Jail; hospital ministry at St. Vincent Medical Center in Los Angeles, where there were many Koreans, as well as Japanese patients spoke to me in Japanese; a pastoral internship at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Dallas, Texas, and as a seminarian and my diaconate at St. Vincent Catholic Church in Los Angeles. I also visited our seminary and parish in Kenya, Africa.

These diverse ministerial experiences allowed me to be in touch with different faces of the one Church. In visiting and working at these place I grew in great awareness of how so many of our confreres and lay people are filled with the spirit of St. Vincent. Their example and witness reaffirmed my desire to contribute to the benefit of the poor and those who are marginalized.

What is your current assignment like? How is it helping you grow in your priesthood and Vincentian identity?

I currently serve as a Parochial Vicar at Holy Trinity Catholic Church founded by the confreres of my province, and staffed continuously since 1907. We have a parish school proudly known as the oldest Catholic school in Dallas, open for 100 consecutive years. We welcome a very diverse group of faithful from the greater Dallas region. It is a privilege and great honor for me to be ministering to the people of the Diocese of Dallas, along with our pastor and my confrere, Fr. Don Ours, C.M. My time is filled with various pastoral ministries, including visiting the sick at home and hospitals, counseling, confessions, visiting the school, and RCIA. I recently began presiding some of Spanish masses and baptisms with great joy.

Growing into priesthood and as a Vincentian are inseparable from one another. In whatever ministry I serve, I am conscious of my identity as “a Vincentian priest” in what I do and what I say. That is who I am. As being still a newly ordained Japanese Vincentian less than a year ago, I sometimes find the challenge of growing as “a Vincentian priest” in the US context where we respect each other’s individual space and perspective too much. Yes, our community life exists to support our apostolic ministries. However, we can become blinded and fall into a trap by placing too much emphasis on accomplishments in an individual assignment, instead of serving in a mission together. In serving together, we have a stronger impact on our mission.

With over 100 years of Vincentian service in evangelizing the people in Dallas, I am much obliged to recall with gratitude my predecessors’ dedication and commitment. Thus, I am profoundly grateful for my current ministry at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Dallas.

The Church is promoting the “New Evangelization” to reach inactive or apathetic Catholics. How do you think this could be used with young people of your generation?

Holy Trinity Catholic Church hosts *Beyond Sunday*, the largest young adult Catholic group in Dallas. My observation is that young professionals strive to establish their place in our competitive, business oriented society. I see them looking for “connection” in their multi-layered relationships. Naturally, they belong to many organizations by keeping themselves very busy, and join numerous “social media” groups, often without truly having any sense of belonging. To make a commitment to an organization becomes such a challenging task because they desire their freedom to “shop” around. This applies to their relationship with their religion, faith, and local Church, aided by technological and mobile innovations in communication. Many find the programs and prayer services that they want in various parishes, and participate in them as if to enjoy a buffet meal. It appeals to them as “all you can eat” but they have a difficult time to find one refined, “soul” food to quench their thirst through their active participation.

New Evangelization begins, I believe, within us first. Unless we are energized, no matter what resources we use, they will not be convinced. If we sit comfortably looking back over our history without actively engaging in current events or trends, then no one can relate to our living the faith in their daily life. We live in such an exciting time of revitalizing our Catholic faith, especially where it is culturally challenged like never before. How we relate our joy and gratitude of this precious faith of the Paschal Mystery hinges upon how we live together as a witness of a vital community of faith in spreading the Good News

to the marginalized as our utmost primal mission with Christian courage and hope.

The young generation looks for true, authentic human relationships. Though technology and social media are a means, not an end, we can use them to cultivate face to face relationships and empower those who are materially rich, yet are emotionally lonely and spiritually isolated. Authenticity and genuine relationship are key concepts, I believe, to revitalizing our faith. We can model them by living our spiritually rich Vincentian community life.

Do you ever think of what it might be like to serve as a Vincentian in your home country, Japan? (As you know, the confreres in the Philippines do have a mission in Kobe City!)

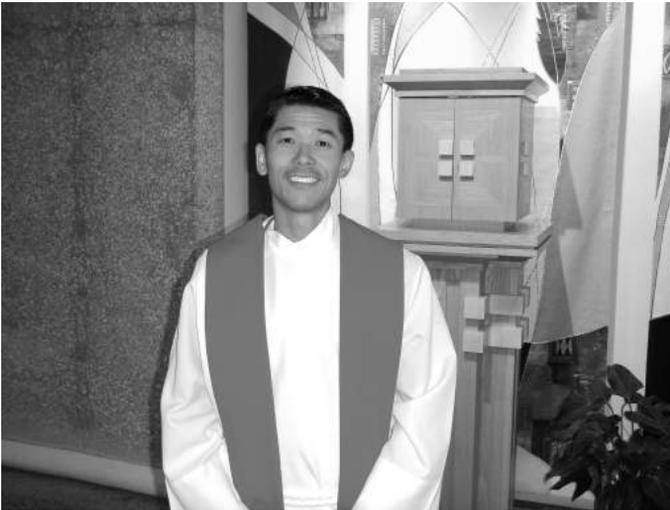
Yes, I do, especially when the earthquake and tsunami hit near my hometown three years ago, “three-eleven” (March 11) in 2011. Luckily, my family was fine, being fifty miles away from the troubled nuclear power plants. The Daughters of Charity always inspire me as ones who live the Vincentian Christ, including those I met in USA, Columbia, Brazil, Kenya and Japan. Japanese Daughters of Charity are my heroines; they serve the poor and abandoned in a supposedly wealthy country, where the elderly die alone from hunger, and youth kill themselves because they cannot find hope in their future. As an adult convert to Catholic faith in the USA, my liturgical language is primarily in English, as I went through my religious formation in the USA. For me, therefore, to celebrate mass in Japanese, and to talk about my Catholic faith in Japanese, it will require that I learn the vocabulary to do so, as I never had the experience when I was growing up. Beside this challenge, of course, Japan is the country in which I was born. All of my family and relatives live there. It is up to God’s providence and the need of our universal Church and the Congregation of the Mission to which I humbly submit.

What advice would you give a young person searching for meaning in life?

I would like to revisit the concept of the beauty of making committed relationship with God, one another, and oneself. As a newly ordained Vincentian priest, I often find myself revisiting and emphasizing this theme again and again in my ministry. A meaningful Christian life with integrity and dignity as a human person in the image of God, I believe, can be attained by our intentional commitment and discipline imitating Jesus’ sacrificial love. There is no place for cheap grace in our faith. Each of us is created in a beautiful image of a loving and merciful God. If there were no sacrificial commitment, there would be no identifica-

tion and imitation of the crucifixion. Philosophical prowess can never break through the mystery of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ unless we authentically live our lives in joyful sacrifice for others; sharing His love in our daily encounter with Christ, who calls us to find him in the marginalized.

I would also tell them that it is okay to feel lost at times. Just be honest and reach out others. Genuine relationships come from opening our heart. The true meaning of life shines through the clouds of life events as long as we are up for the task of committing our relationships with God and one another as Jesus did for us on the Cross.



THEME:

The Vincentian Missionary Parish of Today

Editor's Note

The theme of this issue is “Reflections on the Vincentian Missionary Parish”. To assist in properly presenting them, we have received essays detailing the experiences of a Visitor, pastors, and missionaries. We have called upon confreres from various continents, countries, and missions for their view on what constitutes a Vincentian missionary parish. Those ‘laboring in the vineyard’ have a uniquely authentic perspective to contribute to this discussion; well worth reflecting upon by our readers.

However, before reading the excellent submissions of our confreres, it is important to know the criteria they were asked to reflect upon. Below are listed some key criteria presented at the July 2013 Visitors meeting for establishing and maintaining a Vincentian missionary parish.

PROFILING A VINCENTIAN PARISH: Some Crucial Criteria

- *It is in a permanent state of mission, and committed to the urgent needs of the poor.*
- *It is among the poor, oriented to serving them, and attends to new situations of poverty.*
- *It fosters Vincentian and Marian Spirituality and Trinitarian faith.*
- *The commitment to serve is set by contract with the local bishop for a limited time.*
- *It is done as a work with the laity and the Vincentian Family.*
- *It promotes study and application of systemic change & the Church's Social Doctrine.*
- *It enables the implementation of popular missions.*
- *It develops and implements a parish pastoral plan.*
- *It encourages popular devotion and piety, and affirms the cultural realities of its people.*
- *It creates small parish communities by inter-personal evangelization and home visits.*
- *It is a model of fair and just treatment to all people, especially the poor.*

What follows on these next pages are essays from confreres engaged in parish pastoral in Latin America (Argentina and Bolivia), Central America (Panama), Africa (Cameroon, Chad and Tunisia), and Northern India. Requests for essays went to confreres from twelve missions, but these seven missionaries responded. As you will see their ideas and pastoral practices help advance our understanding of what truly constitutes a “Vincentian Missionary Parish” today.

Vincentian Missionary Parishes in the Province of Argentina

Juan Carlos Gatti Octavien, CM
Visitor, Argentina

Without any doubt, the Second Vatican Council clarified and strengthened the identity and the mission of the universal Church¹. The whole Church moved from a state of initial enthusiasm to one of arduous work in order to overcome the problematic situations of those years, a state that enabled it to hear the soft, reflective and solemn voice of the Council. Then came acceptance and the application of the Council Documents². In accord with this Spirit the whole Congregation, as it deepened its fidelity to the institutional charism, looked for ways to respond to the various challenges.

The Province of Argentina did not find itself on the fringes of this movement, but rather, beginning in 1968, engaged in a form of ministry that was different from previous years, a ministry that was focused on an experience that we would call missionary parishes. This marked the beginning of a new era in which we did not establish works, but rather prioritized a method of evangelization³. From that time to the present in the three countries that make up the province (Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina) we have been continually engaged in these experiences of missionary parishes. While these experiences occurred in diverse situations, nevertheless they were guided by some common criteria. These experiences took place in the following parishes:

1. Parish of San Carlos Mina (Córdoba - Argentina) 1968-1973.
2. Parish of Ntra. Señora de Sumampa (Santiago del Estero - Argentina) 1970-1977.
3. Parish of Ntra. Señora del Valle (Santiago del Estero - Argentina) 1977-1984.
4. Parish of San Francisco de Paula (Buenos Aires - Argentina) 1971-1982.
5. Mission Zone of Los Berros (San Juan - Argentina) 1995-1997.

¹ CELAM, Global Plan 2003-2007, Toward a Church that is the home and the school of communion and solidarity in a globalized world, # 11.

² *Ibidem*.

³ FERNANDO GUZMÁN, *150 años de Misión and Servicio Vicentino (1859-2009)* [250 Years of Vincentian mission and service (1859-2009)], p. 391.

6. Mission Zone of Tamberías (San Juan - Argentina) 1996-1999.
7. Parish of San Francisco del Chañar (Córdoba - Argentina) 1994-1999.
8. Parishes in Yabebry, Laureles and Cerrito (Paraguay) 1998-2002.
9. Parishes of San Francisco de Asís and San Rafael Arcángel (Arroyos and Esteros and Juan de Mena - Paraguay) 2002-2008.
10. Parish of Ntra. Señora de Itatí (Goya, Corrientes - Argentina) 2002-2005.
11. Parishes and Shrine in Santa Lucia (Corrientes - Argentina) 2006-2009
12. Parish of Ntra. Señora de los Remedios (Rocha - Uruguay) 2009-2012.
13. Parishes of Caballero, Sapucay and Ybytymi (Carapegua - Paraguay) 2010-2014.

In each one of these places we have attempted to respect the spirit of our Constitutions (especially, # 12) and our Statutes (in particular, # 5) which point out certain criteria with regard to the various works of evangelization, and more specifically, to parishes that the Congregation agrees to staff and provide pastoral care. If we were to engage in an historical investigation of the thirteen works mentioned above, we would be able to deduce certain constants with regard to the criteria that guided us and the tasks that had to be developed.

In recent years the concern for the poor has been a recurring theme in the Church. The Aparecida (Brazil) document of 2007 affirms that *the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty* (# 392). Vincent de Paul stated: *But, Monsieur, we aren't the only ones who instruct poor people; do pastors do anything else? What about preachers in towns and villages? What do they do in Advent and Lent? They preach to the poor, and they do it better than we do. True, but there isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor and never preaching in large towns. That's what Missioners profess to do; it's their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor. So, our vocation is a continuation of his, or, at least, it's similar to it in its circumstances. Oh, what happiness, brothers, but what an obligation we have to be attached to it* (CCD XI: 71).

In these years of commitment to the ministry of missionary parishes, the Province of Argentina has been very clear with regard to those principles just articulated. In each area that has its unique characteristics, we have attempted to provide for people in poor and/or neglected communities. The majority of these parishes, though not all of them, are located in rural areas where the bishops lack the necessary person-

nel to provide for the pastoral needs of the people. The evangelizing activity of the Vincentians was developed in light of the fact that priests have not ministered in those areas for an extended period of time. The spiritual abandonment of some communities, that is, the inability of the local clergy to assume the ministry in those areas... that is the reality that has motivated the Province to accept this ministry.

Attention to the realities of present-day society: in a public manner St. Vincent de Paul denounced those in positions of power who abused the rights of the poor; he attempted to involve the rich in assisting the poor and thus establish bonds of solidarity between them. It has been very gratifying to examine the documents and the letters of the confreres who ministered in many different places. Fr. Pellerín wrote: *"We incarnate the social dimension through our integration into the community and there in the midst of the community we seek the solutions to the distinct problems. We bring here missionary teams of Sisters and lay people and as they become aware of the true needs of the people they attempt to resolve these situations (providing medicine for three hospital, school supplies, clothing and shoes)"*⁴. Fr. Ventura Sarasola wrote: *"In Sumampa Viejo: the installation of a water tank, a motor, a main pipe with four faucets that distributes water to people over a distance of four meters, organizing people to take turns in tending the water pump, installation of a generator to provide light to the whole neighborhood"*⁵. I have reviewed the correspondence, the provincial bulletins, and the notes from house visitations, and I can say that the ordinary method of evangelization on the part of the confreres involved in this ministry always involved a social dimension that is in accord with our Constitutions which indicate the style of ministry that should be carried on in these missions.

Some sharing in the condition of the poor: *"The Church, indeed, is not alone responsible for justice in the world; however, she has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message, a witness to be carried out in Church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians"* (Justice in the World, # 36). The economic aspect of different parishes is a distinct theme. To meet their expenses, the Vincentians are dependent on a fixed allotment provided by the diocese (generally a poor diocese) and the Congregation. It is not uncommon for the Congregation to intervene in covering some of the expenses incurred for evangelizing these parishes. This precarious financial situation of the confreres is closely aligned to

⁴ DIDIMO PELLERÍN, "Trabajo realizado in la Parroquia de San Carlos Mina" [Work accomplished in the parish of San Carlos Mina], in *Vincentiana*, 1971, # 4-5, p. 145.

⁵ V. SARASOLA, "Sumampa", in *Vincentiana*, 1971, # 6, pp. 179-180.

the realities that the poor continually encounter in their work and as they try to provide for their family. The living situation of the missionary community is austere and frugal; most often the confreres themselves maintain and make the necessary repairs in their living quarters. We understand that *“the Church is bound to give witness to justice; she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes”* (Justice in the World, # 40).

A genuine community spirit in our apostolic ministry: We are guided by the idea that *“the Vincentian community came into existence for the mission, and therefore, the mission defines its community lifestyle”*⁶. The majority of these experiences have been legally entered into as *coetus ad instar domus*, functioning with a responsible individual but dependent on a canonical house with which they maintain contact for planned periods of prayer, formation, evaluation and recreation. Many of these works have been historically viewed as “privileged places” and so the seminarians participate in these experiences during their pastoral year. At the same time these communities are taken into consideration when the Visitor is scheduling house visitations. We also point out the support that is received by the missionary groups of the Vincentian Family in the zones or the parishes that the Congregation evangelizes.

Readiness to go to any part of the world: our Founder tells us that: *our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world* (CCD XII: 215). Therefore, the timeframe of the contracts is most important. Over the years our experience has varied in this matter, but recently, and in accord with our Provincial Norms⁷, we have entered into contracts for four years with the possibility of extending it another two years. Historically, the lack of local clergy has contributed to extending the time of the contracts. Because we want to preserve our mobility and our missionary freedom, this aspect has become a central focus of our dialogue with the Ordinary prior to signing a contract. In other words we have to cultivate the availability of the confreres (“indifference” according to Saint Vincent).

Our Common Rules warn us: *“Each one should show a great eagerness in that sort of openness to God’s will, which Christ and the saints developed so carefully. This means that we should not have a disproportionate liking for any ministry, person, or place, especially our native land, or anything of that sort. We should even be ready and willing to leave all these things gladly if our Superior asks it, or even hints at it, and to put up, without complaint, with any disappointment or disruption this*

⁶ JULIO SÚESCUN, C.M., “Comunidad” [Community], in *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana*, Editorial CEME, Salamanca 1995, p. 67.

⁷ Provincial Norms of Argentina, Apostolic Activity, 1.1.2.

causes, accepting that in all this the Superior has done well in the Lord" (Common Rules II: 10).

Striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation: This attitude or predisposition of conversion is fundamental and the efficacy of the apostolic ministry is subordinate to this reality. Thus, the apostolic work and the contact with the poor have led the confreres participating in this experience to a more authentic commitment to Gospel values. The preaching of the confreres has become a commitment to the people of that particular place. Prayer and Eucharist are an opportunity to mature in discerning God's will and preserves us from the temptation to become "saviors". Vincent said: "*You must have recourse to God through meditation in order to preserve your soul in his fear and love... many people are often lost while contributing to the salvation of others*" (CCD XI: 312).

Despite difficulties, the ministry in these parishes has led the confreres to become more humble so that they can proclaim a message that is not just their own message but one that God has placed in their heart: "*The missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation*" (JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mission*, # 45).

I have briefly described general characteristics of those experiences that have the approval and the support of the majority of the young confreres and their elders in the province. The young confreres continually express their desire to engage in this form of mission. At the same time, we have seen that the pastoral activity in this type of community is very beneficial to those who are taking their first steps as members of the Congregation. The diversity of tasks and various possibilities for the exercise of ministry point out how this privileged place can have a profound influence on the final stage of initial formation and the first years of ministry.

The confreres responsible for this work are aware that the role of formator is in their hands. Recent years have corroborated the reality that these communities have developed certain characteristics that I would label as fraternal, warm, joyful and committed. Perhaps it is this way of living together that has created so much interest in this ministry, especially among the younger confreres. In my opinion this ministry is by no means the "panacea" that will renew all the missionary initiatives of the Province. Nevertheless, it is has become one way to provide for the real and the concrete needs of the local church without losing our missionary identity.

Presently, our Province has a work of this type in the Diocese of Carapegua in Paraguay, an area covering three parishes. There are three confreres assigned to this mission, with one as “Pastor”, although they all act together as a team in solidarity with one another. At the end of 2014, they will conclude their ministry there, although we believe that the Ordinary will ask us to extend the contract for another two years. In Uruguay, we are involved in taking the first steps that will eventually lead us to a new ministry in this area. Here will be some slight differences that we have not seen in our other experiences. In Uruguay, we will attempt to extend the missionary endeavor from a work that has already been established by moving beyond the traditional structures, and renewing the missionary reality of a canonical house. We are attempting to reinforce and increase the number of confreres in a community in such a way that ultimately we can assign a confrere to work in the area of the mission, parish, chapel or community center that is at a distance from the house where he is living. Even though there are subtle differences, we believe that this missionary commitment can create a resurgence in missionary zeal in works where the structure had strangled such zeal.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Our Vincentian Mission in Tunis, Tunisia

St. Augustine and St. Fidelis Parishes

Firmin Mola Mbalo, C.M.

Tunis, Tunisia

Since 2011 the Superior General invited us as members of the Congregation to reflect on our commitment in parishes with an emphasis on our charism. An actual statement on our work in parishes is an undeniable result and reality. It is over two years that our community has been in charge of the parish of Saint Augustine and Saint Fidelis in Tunisia. In response to the request of Fr. John Maher, Editor of *Vincentiana*, I will discuss some relevant items that are noteworthy from our experience in this commitment to the parish.

1. *Our experience in Vincentian parish missionary*

Our presence as a Congregation serving the parish of Saint Augustine and Saint Fidelis in the eastern suburbs of Tunis began in August 2011. This is a parish which includes Catholics from more than thirty countries, a majority of sub-Saharan Africa, all of whom are English-speakers. Upon arrival, we found an organized community with a parish council, and a group of faithful engaged in the life of the parish by service through various committees.

In the first months, we quickly realized the need to continue work with those involved in the commissions in order to improve pastoral service. We started listening to our people, asking for concrete proposals on the model of parish they wanted us to build together, while respecting our cultural differences. We decided to place an emphasis on the "Church-Family", where all who come to the Eucharistic celebration feel welcomed like a family. On Sunday, the faithful do not just come to pray and then go home. For all, it is also an opportunity to meet, welcome new members and visiting tourists, and to deepen interpersonal relationships among the faithful, not all live in the same neighborhood, and some travel a dozen kilometers to come to church.

What makes our experience of our parish work Vincentian and missionary? In an October 2011 letter to confreres by the Superior General on parishes, we read: "A Vincentian missionary parish must be located preferably among the poor. It must be fundamentally oriented service to the poor, responding to new situations of poverty...".

First, the parish is located in an area where we easily meet the poor. We do not need to go further to experience the life style of our neighbors, who do not lack anything but; some still find difficulties in everyday life. The Tunisian revolution of 2011 has exacerbated the situation. Despite new construction of buildings, nothing hides the poverty that affects many families.

In our parishes, many of the faithful are not really poor, because through their work they have the means to enable them to live decently. With them, we strive to open ourselves to the associations which assist the poor and the elderly. We seek to mobilize the faithful to make them aware of the need to assist and serve the poor.

Now that the Bishop of Tunis has entrusted us with the coordination of the diocesan agency Caritas, our parishioners themselves participate in this mission. Some even volunteer. We coordinate our programs with a “solidarity” team, composed of lay volunteers and a Daughter of Charity, who assist families and poor people needing material and financial assistance. We prepared our parishioners to participate by collecting materials for the poor as organized by this team. The parish is always ready for any kind of charitable action.

2. Commitments needed to make this a reality

The announcement of the Good News is at the heart of the mission. This involves situations where it calls us to otherwise reorganize our missionary work.

The Church teaches that it must constantly change and adapt to new situations to remain faithful to the origin of its mission. Austrian Cardinal Christophe Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, at a conference on “The Parish and the New Evangelization” held in Rome exclaimed: “It takes a great deal to build a parish because it is the people of God with all its strengths and weaknesses... It is a community made up of young and old... several speeds!”. We need a change of attitude to become more involved in parish life and parish activities. We also need to create a climate where every Christian who takes part in the community may feel the impulse to answer the call of Jesus. The Lord invites us to continue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by announcing the Good News through our commitment to the mission of the Church.

Here we are all invited to a witness of communion and charity where every member of the parish community feels the need to contribute to building up the community. We are committed to fostering creativity and support all emerging groups to deepen the faith and commitment of the faithful. To this day, we are happy to accompany a group of ladies who pray the Rosary, and who meet weekly in the home of a family to pray, meditate on biblical texts and reflect on God’s presence

in their daily lives. Every last Thursday of the month these Ladies go to a residence of the elderly to pray and share a meal with them, so they will be lifted out of the monotony of their daily lives.

3. What we do to create a sense of community

We can and must convey to others what we have and that which moves us forward in our mission: to witness to the love of God in a world where individualism and selfishness tend to take over. We are invited to be creative, and this must be the experience of our community. We must love the community and create an atmosphere that allows each member to engage in and contribute to the building up of the fellowship. The community is and should be a place of dialogue, listening, and mutual trust. Therefore, we must try to overcome and eliminate divisions and bad relations between members. All this must be done in a spirit of sacrifice supported by a regular prayer life.

In the pastoral work entrusted to the community, it is essential to have an evaluation time that allows us to see where we are and take a confident look into the future. This evaluation with our people and parish staff is done twice a year.

Our community life depends on how we want to live together in simplicity and charity. This implies acceptance of our differences, along with a desire to live the missionary experience as a testament to our commitment to Gospel values. We remain open and attentive to our parishioners who choose to stay apart from religious celebrations and times of community in the parish. We invite them to see these times as opportunities to meet and create fraternal bonds.

4. Challenges in this parish ministry

In a parish, it is important to create an atmosphere that allows the faithful to feel welcome and to actively participate in the life of the parish. Since our time of having assumed the responsibility for this parish, we invited the faithful to be active and not to be spectators. We have done everything to encourage the cultural and ethnic diversity that characterizes our parish. We promote a team effort where the contribution of each member is encouraged and appreciated by the entire community.

We have authentic signs that show the existence of a warm, friendly atmosphere, resulting from the efforts of all to build a true parish community. Active participation in the preparation of the Sunday liturgy and retreats, along with time of preparing children and adults for the sacraments is an undeniable proof of the personal and communal commitment of our parishes.

Despite our personal and community commitment, there are still ways in which we can improve our efforts. We need to ask ourselves a reflective question: how can we help the faithful to translate this parish experience in their daily life, their environment and work? If we are a model parish in our organization and hospitality, what about our relationships outside the walls of the church? There must be a true solidarity with the poor, and it also includes one who asks me for assistance. This includes co-workers and people outside my parish and my faith. We often have issues that fall within the scope of service and we invite our faithful to review and reflect upon our teaching on the love of God and neighbor and resist the human tendency toward selfishness and indifference.

These questions are often raised in personal meetings with the faithful. With thirty nationalities belonging to the parish (even the majority are African) we still need to be attentive. As the only English-speaking Catholic parish in Tunis, our parishioners like this feature. To serve them better, we must understand and accept them.

It is also important to emphasize that we are in a parish with many members who are civil servants who work all types of hours during the week, sometimes making it difficult for them to come to Mass on Sunday. Having a stable growing community is a great support for our mission. However, missions like ours may not be as attractive to our confreres. This reality, along with the crisis of vocations, may make it difficult to open new missions, or to keep our community with a stable missionary presence.

5. The future of our parish in the next five years

The picture is not at all clear when we consider our future in Tunis. What seems to be emerging on the horizon is that there will be a significant reduction in the number of the faithful. A majority of our parishioners are employed by the African Development Bank (ADB), which transferred its headquarters to Tunisia due to the socio-political instability in the Ivory Coast.

In late 2012, it was decided that the headquarters of the bank would return to the Ivory Coast. It is expected that by the end of 2014, those who are living in Tunis will have to return to the Ivory Coast in order to keep their jobs with the ADB. Although bank officials have spoken about decentralization, with bank representative in various nations, we must prepare for a drop in attendance in our parishes.

This should not discourage us, because this mission in North Africa is not only a mission focused on pastoral activities in parishes. There are other places where we can insert our charism to exercise a ministry that fits well with our Vincentian vocation.

In addition, our commitment to the poor includes continuing with the Caritas diocesan ministry, where we welcome migrants and refugees from countries in sub-Saharan Africa and border countries that experienced revolutions such as Egypt, Libya, and Syria. We also play a role in prison ministry where the authorities of the country accept our presence and pastoral care in the prisons in Tunis.

Although the current type of pastoral activity in the parish will decrease, we will always be useful and can search out ways to provide other types of direct service to the poor. Thus, in five years, our pastoral landscape may be completely different from what it is today. However, it is key is no matter that changes occur; we insure that our lords and masters, the poor, are served.

Living the Vincentian Mission in a Mission “ad gentes”

International Mission, El Alto, Bolivia

Aidan R. Rooney, C.M.

El Alto, Bolivia

It probably strikes you as strange to be asking what makes the International Vincentian Mission on the Bolivian Altiplano a missionary parish. Actually, we are two parishes, San Miguel de Italaque and San Pedro de Mocomoco, served by three Vincentian priests, two lay women and two corps of catechists (called delegates of the Word in other settings). The territory is about 550 km², ranging from 3000-4800 meters in altitude. The lives of our people, about 8500 persons who are almost all indigenous Aymara, are given over to small agriculture and herding. They live in two small towns and 80 smaller villages. Many supplement their incomes by working in various activities in our area and in the urban center of El Alto/La Paz.

A missionary parish is more a style and a set of commitments than a place or a structure. Working from a community plan that sketches out a single framework consisting of lines of action for the two parishes, Cyrille de Nanteuil, Diego Plá and I, along with our associates Violeta Rodriguez and Flora Silva and over fifty lay leaders try to live the mission. Recently, Fr. Gregory Gay, C.M., the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, in collaboration with his curia and the provinces of the world, arrived at some helpful statements to answer this question. I'd like to concentrate on style.

Among many things, we are told that a Vincentian missionary parish should:

- be done as a community project; in accord with the five Vincentian missionary virtues and in harmony with the local Church;
- have a commitment to serve set by contract with the local bishop for a limited time;
- be done as part of our work with the laity and the Vincentian Family;
- develop Vincentian ministries and pastoral outreach that conform to our spirit: an integral evangelization: service of the Word and the practice of charity; formation & participation of laity in pastoral action; develops prophetic ministries, with a special attention to new forms of poverty, especially to those on the margins;

- promote study and application of systemic change & Social Doctrine of the Church;
- enable support of missions and implementation of popular missions;
- have a parish pastoral plan to be implemented and evaluated;
- encourage popular devotion and piety to help the growth of their faith while also affirming the cultural realities of the people;
- support and collaborate with Vincentian Family groups and movements;
- promote collaboration with diocesan clergy, especially as a parish;
- promote development of a community spirit, collaboration, and the support of the social ministries and popular movements;
- cultivate an attitude of listening, welcoming people to the sacrament of reconciliation, and also in providing counsel;
- create community and ‘small communities’ in the parish by interpersonal evangelization, through home visits;
- be a model of fair and just treatment to all people, especially the poor.

Explaining how all of this is becoming a reality in our mission would be book-length, not an essay, so I will concentrate on the last four aspects of this description, and then speak about the short and long-term future.

1. Promoting development of a community spirit, collaboration, and the support of the social ministries and popular movements

Both inside and outside of the country, this is a priority for us. The Aymara culture has a strong sense of community, often under attack by disintegrating effects of current poverty, and the lingering effects of historical colonization, racism and political and economic exploitation. We work locally to restore the strength of community, rebuild self-esteem, and undo years of destructive systemic damage. Through development work, alternative education, preaching, catechesis, accompaniment of the young, and a basic personal and cultural respect, we are making inroads. There are direct assistance programs for nutrition and health, education and human formation from infancy through adult years, and the stimulation of local, sustainable economic initiatives to promote independence and family stability. You can see much of what we are doing at my YouTube channel (<http://youtube.com/fatherratgmail>) and our websites (<http://vocesvicentinas.org/donate> and <http://saytasim.org>). On the global scene, we’ve reached out to connect with donors and supporters in the United States, Spain and France. We welcome donors and supporters as visitors and are in

regular contact with donors to connect them with the mission, and to raise awareness of the justice issues involved in addressing current needs in their historical perspective.

2. Cultivating an attitude of listening, welcoming people to the sacrament of reconciliation, and also in providing counsel

The hardest lesson to learn as a missionary is the lesson of humility. Coming from cultures that value competence, I have found it difficult to listen to the voice of the Spirit that is woven into the conversations that we have with people who are poor. Regular meetings with catechists, reflections with the priests and lay leaders who serve in parishes adjacent to ours, conversations with ordinary folks during pastoral visits, and privileged moments in spiritual conversation or the Sacrament of Reconciliation are key. Day by day, learning the local language and cultural patterns is revealed to be a more important element of the missionary pastoral. Folks here speak Spanish on a rudimentary level, but they think, pray, suffer, and dream in Aymara.

3. Creating community and ‘small communities’ in the parish by inter-personal evangelization, through home visits

The development of small, strong Catholic communities within village life is a constant challenge. With communities dispersed throughout the region, with difficult access – for example, some of the communities require that we drive for two or more hours and then walk two hours more – sustaining relationships is difficult. But if the goal of the missionary parish is invite persons into transforming personal relationships with Jesus Christ, there is no substitute for face-to-face encounters. To that end, [a] we form local leaders constantly, to be the presence of “Christ the leader and teacher” to their communities, and the means of communication between the people and their pastors; [2] we have identified key communities, in locations central to groups of smaller communities where we can gather more regularly, especially with the young; and [3] we allow enough time to form relationships with our people, rejecting to old style visit of just showing up to celebrate Mass and the sacraments.

4. Being a model of fair and just treatment to all people, especially the poor

An almost forgotten element, especially in an area with scarce local resources and a small income, is the need to be just to the people with whom we minister. Here we have made efforts to see that justice is done. Cyrille recently guided the incorporation of the social development projects of the parish of Italague so that employees can be enrolled

in the national social security program. Diego is guiding the same process in Mocomoco. Salaries are on the increase, to arrive at a reasonable wage (not just a minimum) for all our workers. Contracts are fairly arrived at completed faithfully. In our programs, we don't promise more than we can deliver (a sometime failure of unrestrained zeal that ends in injustice). To support all of this, we've mounted a fundraising effort that walks hand in hand with our pastoral plans.

The road before us and the road ahead

There are continuing challenges to be faced. Governments are not always friendly. Prior years of well-intentioned pastoral practice and non-profit development styles have accustomed the people to be passive recipients of aid rather than active agents of their own transformation. The educational system is poorly funded and staffed, and lacks an ethical center. It is not uncommon for exploitative relationships between professors and minor students to end up in abuse and pregnancy. And then there is the poverty. Always the poverty.

A continuing social phenomenon here is internal migration from our rural sector to the coca-producing regions (for a "fast buck") and the urban centers looking for work. The small scale agricultural/husbandry model simply can't sustain the coming generations. The resulting problem is a complex of economic, social, familial and spiritual stressors, as people seek a better life. Cyrille and Violeta have begun some small and cooperative business ventures coupled with human and spiritual development that are bearing fruit in some of the communities of Italaque. In Mocomoco, intentional community-building with the young and formation for higher education, beginning locally and continuing through a program of accompaniment in La Paz guided by Flora and Diego seems to be showing good effects. But we have a long way to go.

Formation of catechists, often drawn away from their commitment as pastoral leaders by real and pressing family needs, is a continuing problem. Recently in Mocomoco, Flora pointed out to Diego and me that, in our urgency to communicate content and prepare catechists, we were losing a sense of community. We had noticed that catechists were absenting themselves from reunions and not completing some of their local tasks. She pointed out that we had abandoned, to a large degree, the necessary dialogue and listening that promotes true collaboration. We had to admit she was right. It was time to recover what we had lost, and so we've made plans to extend the time spent in each community when we visit, just so we have time to really listen to the lives of our people, and to use more dialogic methods in our reunions.

Solidifying external support, cultivating support within Bolivia, and expanding the depth and breadth of local participation is the long term agenda. Commitment to our donors to provide timely information on

the impact of their support, and the invitation to personally participate in the mission will form the next steps in our external fundraising strategy. Involving Bolivian partners – families that have moved from Mocomoco, vendors, other non-profits that share similar goals and the local governments – will be high on the agenda. But most importantly, we will deepen our commitment to be partners with our people. Only in this type of relationship will people encounter themselves as powerful subjects of their own transformation, and understand themselves as worthy of a deep and personal encounter with Jesus. Living the mission is allowing the Christ that lives in me to meet the Christ present in the poor. It’s a meeting of equals, a meeting of sons and daughters of the same Father.

Journeying Together: An Indigenous Vincentian Parish in Panama

Joseph G. Fitzgerald, C.M.
Soloy, Panama

“One flea is enough for the whole family”, said Mechi, an elderly woman sitting on the roots of a mango tree outside the small wooden chapel in the tropical mountains. There was a long silence after the statement as everyone took in her assessment. We were gathered for the mission’s agricultural program – organizing for the planting season and evaluating the local resources we had to produce enough organic fertilizer for the various family plots. The proverb spoken by Mechi has its base in one of the many indigenous Ngäbe stories and myths...

“Once a great hunger came to the people. The rain stopped falling, the land no longer produced, the animals died. A man of great faith and confidence in God came upon a flea, but he did not eat it. He instead gave it to the smallest child in the household who took a small bite of the flea and passed it on to his older sister. She in turn took a small bite and pasted it up the line of the many children of the household until it came to the mother, who took a small bite and past it back to her husband who finished it. The family thanked God for sending the flea, survived the great hunger and continued to grow...”

This story invoked by Mechi in a moment of doubt invites us to trust that God will provide if we are open to sharing and working together. I think of this bit of Ngäbe wisdom as I reflect on what it means for us to be a parish that is missionary, indigenous and Vincentian...

The Beginnings of the Vincentian Mission amongst the Ngäbe

The Ngäbe are the largest of the seven indigenous peoples in Panama, numbering about 250,000. The majority of the Ngäbe live by subsistence farming in the rough mountain terrain of the Comarca, similar to a reservation, in the western part of the country near Costa Rica. The Ngäbe predominantly use their native language, *ngäbere*; Spanish is the second language here. Native dress is worn and traditional song, dance, rituals, myths and customs are still in tack, although under constant threat from the outside culture.

In the late 1970’s, Father Charles Schuster, C.M. began visiting these mountains for several consecutive dry seasons (January-March), even-

tually establishing a permanent mission house. For many years, with the support of lay missionaries, he visited the villages, catechizing and celebrating the sacraments. In response to the extreme poverty in which the Ngäbe live, he built a health center, began an agricultural project and initiated several assistance programs in response to the health and education needs here. Charlie continued to serve in the mission until his passing in 2011 at 84 years of age.

Transition into an Indigenous Vincentian Parish

In 2012 the mission was erected by the bishop as the Saint Vincent de Paul Parish, the first parish of the Dioceses of David situated within the territory of the Ngäbe Comarca. Two confreres and three Sisters of Mercy currently serve the parish in collaboration with a growing number of committed Ngäbe laity. Defining our identity as an indigenous Vincentian parish has been the focus of the past two years. The pastoral plan these first years has focuses specifically on *a*) the active participation and commitment of the laity in the various villages, *b*) inculturation of the way we worship, work and organize as an indigenous Ngäbe parish, and *c*) building a sense of parish community between the various villages where active faith communities exist.

A sense of community at the level of the villages is natural, as most villages are comprised of several large extended families. One of the ways we have addressed the challenge of gaining a sense of parish community between the various villages was to begin monthly gatherings with representative from the various villages to organize, discuss needs and opportunities – in a very open style in line with traditional Ngäbe congresses. These gatherings evolved into the current lay formation program that offers both specific formation (catechists, youth leaders, missionaries, etc), as well as several larger gatherings throughout the year when all the committed laity gathers for combined formation as well as evaluation and organization.

Another important practice has been the interchange between villages – youth gatherings, celebrations of feast days, popular missions, etc. Several large gatherings take place throughout the year at the large palm-roofed hut at the mission center, which serves as a multi-use gathering space for formation, conventions and Eucharist, as the small chapel at the mission center cannot hold the crowds that attend such gatherings. The feast of Saint Vincent is celebrated here beginning with a vigil where the sacred cacao drink is accompanied by traditional stories, song and dance. The celebration continues on the feast day with Eucharist, traditional food and more cultural celebrations.

In Search of Life in Abundance (Jn 10:10)

In the midst of extreme poverty, malnutrition and lack of basic necessities such as clean water, programs and projects to confront these realities with the people is an ongoing task. The parish has a special relationship in assisting patients at the health center that Charlie Schuster built, as the people who come from the far villages have no source of nourishment while here (some hike from villages as far as 12 hours by foot). Integral and sustainable developments projects are also a fundamental part of the Congregation's work, such as the *Semillas de Esperanza* agricultural program (which also builds latrines, rainwater capture systems, animal husbandry projects, fish ponds and eco-stoves) and a new collaborative project between the Congregation and local Ngäbe artisan cooperatives to develop fair trade mechanisms for their products. The project focuses on increasing local economic income while fostering local identity as well as promoting environmental protection.

Justice issues and the struggle for indigenous rights is also an ever present reality in our lives. The Ngäbe have shown an incredible capacity to unite and work together to confront threats to what they consider is God's desire for a life in harmony as community and with creation. This was evident in their struggle against open-pit mineral mines in their territory over the past several years. After much protest that brought the loss of several Ngäbe lives, the Panamanian government was forced to sign a new law that prohibits mining on Ngäbe lands. This is an achievement gained by very few indigenous peoples. The Catholic presence alongside the people in these struggles is prominent at all levels, including the Catholic Ngäbe themselves, missionaries (Vincentian, Jesuit, Augustinian) and bishops - and this Church presence does not escape the criticism of those who wish to exploit Ngäbe lands for profit and reduce the Ngäbe to "obstacles to progress".

Permanent State of Mission

During a recent gathering to evaluate our pastoral plan and focus on the most pertinent objectives – the committed lay leaders prioritized *a)* evangelization, *b)* inculturation, and *c)* youth. It was a joy to see the new plan placing mission and evangelization as our first priority. The well established faith communities are now starting to act as "missionary communities", visiting other villages as lay missionaries and inviting villages to celebrations. Ngäbe youth train as missionaries, visit other villages throughout the year (dry season popular missions, Holy Week, etc.), have become one of the major strength of the parish's mission thrust and have served as examples, encouraging others to assume commitments within their local communities.

Confronting Challenges with Hope

Although there is much excitement of growth as a new parish and the expanding commitment of the laity, the difficulties and challenges we face are ever-present. A major challenge of the parish is distance, as some villages are 10 or 12 hours by foot or horse from the mission center. Few communities can be reached by truck. We currently have a presence in 50 villages, half of these having chapels with organized Catholic communities – regular sacramental life, catechetical, youth ministry, etc. Other communities are in various stages of evangelization, with sacraments or popular missions taking place in government school classrooms or celebrated in the open air. Involving the people as committed laity in the most distant communities has proven difficult as our presence is more sporadic.

Temporary and permanent migration outside the Ngäbe lands for work or education is another challenge, leaving many villages largely abandoned during the dry season when it's easiest to visit. "Losing" formed laity due to migration to another part of the country can also affect our ability to develop solid faith communities in the villages.

True inculturation of the gospel also stands as a great challenge, although the commitment of the mission teams has been a serious one in recent years. Articulating the faith from the Ngäbe worldview and organizing pastoral ministry from this vision has been a slow, yet fruitful process that continues.

"Guairé ni ja etebare" (together as family)

In the final document from the most recent conference of Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, the encounter of the society and Church with indigenous peoples is spoken of as a *kairós*, a sacred moment and potential for a "new ecclesial Pentecost" (DA 91). A deep faith in God's providence, the importance of community, working together and a profound respect for creation and all life are examples of values that indigenous people attest to from their own lived experience. Here in Soloy, we have experienced and been witness to what is possible when a people, who by statistical standards are the "poorest of the poor" in Panama, work together to live life as they understand God intends. We are convinced the gospel lived from the indigenous worldview offers something of great value to the wider society and the universal Church.

As we journey forward as a new parish, deepening our indigenous and Vincentian identity, it is with much hope. There is no magic formula for moving forward as an indigenous Vincentian parish, but with a deep faith in God's presence in our journey, and openness to sharing and working together, we believe God will continue to bless us.

*Leaving the mission center property, walking a short distance along the Fonseca river, you come to a small cemetery of several Ngäbe families. Small wooden crosses are sporadically placed among the otoi plants, which in Ngäbe tradition keep the deceased safe from danger. One of those simple crosses says "Rev. Carlos Schuster, CM". Charlie's only wish in his later years was to be buried among the people he loved and served for so many years. May the seeds of faith he planted here keep growing and give us the strength to continue sharing the Good News with joy! **Ngöbö reba mäben** (God be with you).*

The Experience of the Missionary Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Armand Ntoutou, C.M.

Bafoussam, Region of Cameroon

One cannot speak of the Vincentian missionary parish without being reminded of the following words of St. Vincent: "Let us go, gentlemen, through all the earth bring his Gospel, and not let difficulties undermine us... the salvation of all people as well as our own are a good so great that it deserves to be won at any cost whatsoever". To speak of a missionary parish, we must first get caught up in the spirit of these words, as they define the context in which we are invited to reflect. It is nearly eight years since the Vincentian Fathers in Cameroon were given the Parish Our Lady of Mount Carmel Banengo in Bafoussam. Our experience in this parish these past years can be regarded as both missionary and Vincentian.

This experience is based on that of St. Vincent himself. Indeed, St. Vincent was not an apostle for the wealthy, although he knew they were able to influence society. But he reached out in love and care to the little ones, especially those in need who were unattended to by the leaders of their day. It was for them that Vincent sought to change their situation unhappiness into joy, and to transform their spiritual and material poverty to make them rich in the sight of God. They could never have known the true joy of realizing how fortunate they were to have the fixed and compassionate gaze of the grand saint of the Grand Siècle. Through Vincent, Jesus came into the lives of the poor of that era. Today, this mission continues in the world by the presence of his disciples among the poor. This is the case in Banengo Vincent said: "If there is a true religion, it is among the poor. They are the people who keep the true religion, a living faith" (XI, 200).

Our eyes will be open to Vincentian values if we can identify these concrete situations of poverty; those environments where faith needs to be awakened. The choice of the parish Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the result of this search. In 2004, a team of three confreres arrived in the diocese for a time of exploration. After one year, they had to choose between a parish which had almost all structures in place, and one where there was a small hut serving as a church. What motivated this choice? The answer to this concern is very simple: Vincentians should not settle for environments where action would be superfluous and repetitive of standard situations. It is truly Vincentian insofar as

we share the condition of the poor by being present in their midst. As such, our presence at Mount Carmel is a true missionary witness.

The parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was founded in 2005. Its debut was that of a single outpost that a few years later became part of a special sector, namely to be within the district of another parish (St. Boniface in Kyenengo). Currently there are seven BEC (Basic Ecclesial Communities) within our parish outpost. The parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is located in the city of Bafoussam, but up in the hills from the main road. It is framed by two large parishes where the access is easier. Most Catholics who live on the edge prefer to go to one or the other, not only because they are well built, but also because they can easily take a taxi to get there.

Access to our parish in the dry season and the rainy season is a challenge, due to the bad road conditions, varying on the weather conditions from mud, dust, and rain. On either side of the parish, those living furthest are about 1.5 km. The indigenous people in the parish territory are mostly animists. A small number of the population who adhere to the faith come from elsewhere. Recently, more people have found their way to the Church since with the arrival of our confreres in this parish. In this population, their main activity is subsistence farming. The already low agricultural product is sold for basic things needed for living. Added to this economic reality is that the people of this area practically live on trade. It assumed great importance, near the top of the scale of values of the people.

These activities occur both on Sundays as ordinary days regardless of the teaching of the Church on the Sabbath rest. Those in leadership in the Church rarely address this situation, if at all. This is the origin of the lack of commitment, passion, and inertia seen in parish life. Therefore the results of pastoral work are as of now insufficient to bring the parish to undertake new projects.

Added to this is the lack of an adequate infrastructure (in this case, a lack of housing for the confreres). For nearly eight years, the confreres are still seeking a more permanent residence, and it is the community that bears the burden. Also, a vehicle suitable for roads is needed, as the confreres share only one vehicle. All this slows the progression and development for the pastoral, material, and spiritual growth of the parish, making the effective deployment of pastoral activity more problematic.

However, my parish and Vincentian missionary experience here gives me the opportunity to be more creative and efficient in my field of apostolate. The Vincentian is a witness, a learner, an imitator of Christ, who is the One always inventing new methods and pointing us to new ways to better cope with difficulties occurring in the missionary parish. Recall St. Vincent's words that "love is inventive to infinity". To avoid discouragement in the mission we are invited to do more.

So it is not enough to see the misery of the poor, but we must be personally involved. Feed my lambs, says Jesus. That is why before arriving in a parish, it is essential to ask these questions: how will we benefit people who live there?

What good will we do to proclaim Christ, even when it does not create a response? Will we be able to view the situation as a glass that is half-full or half empty? A parish that wants to be a Vincentian missionary one, and yet fails to have all the suitable structures of a regular parish is still worthy of the name. The only structure which Mount Carmel can boast today is the church which is still under construction. And to mark our Vincentian presence, we are now working to make it a home for the animation of women and youth.

The presence in our territory of places of worship such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestant and Pentecostal churches requires us to do ongoing pastoral work, such as sustained and intense evangelization, to prevent the loss of Catholics from our parishes. This is all the more critical, especially since many are not mature in the faith. Hence, the importance and need for popular missions, which we have experienced once, when the Vincentians were installed in the parish. Parish activities are following the Parish Pastoral Plan which is established at the beginning of the pastoral year. At the end of the year, a parish pastoral session is held. It is a forum where all components of the parish came together to reflect on aspects of parish life and to evaluate the programs held throughout the year. The existence of this pastoral practice saves us valuable time and energy, during the year as we promote pastoral dynamism and the awakening of faith. Even with these procedures, the parish priests often end up working alone, not always integrating laity, although they are our primary stakeholders and collaborators in the mission.

A yearly budget is established, but we still question if we have the means to use it effectively. Each year, we visit the Basic Ecclesial Communities twice. We are looking for more effective ways to help dissipate the inertia and disengagement of the faithful. For example, this year we started door to door blessing of families and homes. In addition, the homilies are translated into local "lingua franca", to help the vast majority of the faithful understand the essential message of the Word of God daily. But as the indigenous population is predominantly animist, and to a lesser extent Protestant, there are rarely Bafoussam nationals present among the faithful. The formation of Christians through catechesis deepens faith on specific topics for a better understanding of the Church, in order to make experienced Christians who can give convincing reasons for their commitment to follow Christ.

It is obvious that we are challenged to put our plans firmly to work. A few times during meetings of Parish Pastoral Council, we have heard comments such as "the Vincentians have never done anything for the

parish". Therefore, to be credible in the context of the people's mental and material poverty, we must take our share of misery and become the hope of the poor. The love of Christ urges us to show by concrete gestures of our desire to raise the poor out of the peculiar situation of poverty in which they find themselves. What a noble task! But the poor often remain so, when their practical problems are not resolved. It is therefore important to preach and teach both an idealistic Christ, but one who lives in a real world that they encounter.

This is also why we must attend to economic matters, such as the terms of the contract between the congregation and the diocese, especially as it regards housing apostolic workers in the diocese. However, this contract needs to be renewed. Aware of the scope of work, we are a team of four confreres willing to address these challenges. Success in the pastoral plan depends on the atmosphere that prevails in community. In community for the mission, our role is to bring together the mission entrusted to us, and to listen to the call of Christ to be missionaries, especially when our hearts do not agree. Our strength is our first consciousness of belonging to the Little Company. We are a joyful community with a sense of harmony, and we know the importance of promoting a climate of peace. This harmony arises from dialogue and sharing frank and sincere to our different times of meetings or when necessary.

In addition, we work to promote Vincentian groups within the parish, such as the International Association of Charity (AIC), the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM) and the Vincentian Marian Youth (JMY) to mention only a few. Each group reminds us of the responsibility to support one or the other of these branches. It is clear that while it is sometimes difficult to fully gauge the level of enthusiasm on the part of the faithful, yet, we are aware that the future is bright. Just talking about future expectations requires that the faithful be aware of their responsibilities. It is up to them to assume their proper duty as active laity in building up the Church.

It means that we encourage them to participate not primarily on a financial level, but with a physical presence in the activities that engage parish life. There must be an awakening of faith to allow everyone to rediscover the central place that God should hold in each one's life. It may well involve helping the laity to make a new scale of values. This work can lead to a birth of a true consciousness in the Christian identity of the faithful.

There is an unwritten rule in our diocese that says: "Better to do small things with great number of people to do great things with little people". If our hope is that our parish will be a truly missionary one, sent forth for service, it will only be possible if all laity are involved. This is our biggest challenge in accomplishing our mission today as we work to build a true Church Family of God.

Vincentian Parish Ministry in the Chad Mission

Onyekachi Sunday Ugwu, C.M.
Chad

Location

St. Jean Baptiste Parish of Bebalem, created in August 2005, is situated in the southern part of Chad (about 678 km from the capital Nd'jamena) in the north-east of the Diocese of Moundou. Its land mass extends to about 55 km long. The parish is situated in the countryside about 78 km from the city, with 95 percent of its population being peasant farmers. The majority of the population is very poor. The population of the inhabitants in the area is estimated at about 62,777 according to 2011 census, with Catholics (baptised and non-baptised) counting about 13,929. The inhabitants are composed of Catholics, members of Evangelic Church, Moslems, and adherents of African Traditional Religion.

In Chad, the north is predominantly Moslem and the south being predominantly Christian. However, with the desert encroachment in the north towards the south, the engagement in commerce and nomadic cattle rearing, there is steady migration to the south which augments the Moslem population in the south on a daily basis.

History of the Mission in Brief

The Vincentian Mission in Chad began in principle with the contract signed between the Superior General and the Bishop of the Diocese in January, 2011; and confreres were officially welcomed on April 17, 2011 with an inaugural mass in St. Jean Baptiste Parish, presided by the bishop of the diocese. Chad Mission is a Curia Mission in collaboration with COVIAM (Conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar). It is a parish mission. There are three confreres working in the area: Fr. Alexandre Roch from the Province of Madagascar; Frs. Onyekachi Ugwu and Ambrose Umetietie from the Province of Nigeria. We work with the Daughters of Charity from Spain who are located in the heart of the parish, where they have been working for almost 12 years.

The Mission Proper

As a community, we pray the office together, eat together, and have time for recreation and sharing of pastoral experience as well as community meetings. In the parish apostolate, we work with the diocesan

project and implement the resolutions of Parish Assembly, while putting our Vincentian touch on them. Our pastoral work includes engaging in the visitation of the sick and the aged, ministering the appropriate sacraments according to the needs of the people. The last week of every month is dedicated to evangelization in the parish. We go with the faithful for house to house evangelization. Also, we frequently organise workshops for catechists, facilitators of Basic Christian Communities and other pastoral agents. For the catechists, there is a formation for them at least once monthly. We have intensified our pastoral to the young and the vocation apostolate. We have had series of workshops for the parish youth in the course of this pastoral year. A few young men and women who felt having a call have joined in our vocation group. Every month, there is a workshop for this group.

Education is a necessary instrument for the alleviation of poverty. It is evident that the illiteracy level is so alarming. It contributes to the 70 percent poverty level here. And there is no adequate educational system in place. As a result, we have found ourselves in the school apostolate. Although there is inadequacy of teaching materials (such as books, which are rare here and if found are usually very costly), we are not discouraged. We have 7 primary schools in the 37 station churches we run in the parish, but none except one has a building. They are made with branches of trees and grass while used within the academic year. There are no building structures but thatched huts for classrooms. We supervise the schools, and we work with the village and canton heads to see that there are independent lands allotted for the schools. The pupils learn while sitting on little logs of wood. These places we use for schooling are farmlands during rainy season. It is only in the dry season that the academic year can run. In October, 2013 we just began a secondary school running in the same manner of the other 6 primary schools without a school building. We also teach religious instruction in these schools.

We make every effort to carry the Good News to the people, so that through us, they may be drawn closer to Jesus Christ. The parish has no church building. We have just started to install the foundation of our parish church. We do masses under mango trees with a podium as our altar. We move from one station church to another to meet with people, celebrate the sacraments with them, and listen to them. We have 37 station churches within the 77 villages that make up our parish. The station churches are far removed from each other and in some situations, the weather can make the routes become almost impassable. During the rainy season, 15 station churches are cut off from the parish by flooding. A station is attended to by boat, even in dry season, because it is cut off from the rest of the parish by a river. Roads to other areas are heavily sandy, making passage diffi-

cult, even in dry season. Thanks to our *Vincentian Solidarity Office* and “*Kirche In Not*” foundation, we have a vehicle to use, donated in September 2013. There is also a problem with access to water in some areas during dry season, which forces our people in search of water to move like nomads. For this reason, some stations are closed during this period.

Our apostolate to the sick and the aged remains a priority. We visit the sick and aged in their homes, giving them the needed sacraments when necessary. We do also hospital visitations. With our Daughters of Charity in the parish, we engage in accompaniment of the handicapped and mal-nourished children. In the parish, we also have a group for accompaniment of the sick, which is often sent to give formation and instruction in addition to their usual tasks.

During the last pastoral year, 130 infants were baptised, 55 persons received their First Holy Communion, 222 adults were baptised, and 242 Christians were confirmed. We also have more than 2,000 catechumens in their three different stages of the catechumenate

For the PASTORAL YEAR 2013, we were able to have our Parish Assembly in October 2013. At the end of a three day session, we came up with the following resolutions for 2014:

“In the light of the formation received on health in this assembly, the reports from stations, the resolutions of the diocesan assembly of 2013, and the problems observed which are obstacles to human life and our Christian faith, we, participants at the October 2013 parish assembly resolve in this Year:

1. To develop the spirit of initiative and work through the rearing of livestock, making vegetable gardens around our houses, while irrigating them during dry season, and learning small skill or small trade, such as soap making, brick-making, plumbing, etc.;
2. To avoid the mismanagement of the goods of the Church and of the family;
3. To fight against sickness- malaria, diarrhoea, typhoid, cholera, etc – through preventive and curative actions like the use of mosquito treated nets, making of pit toilets, boiling of drinking water, washing hands before and after eating, washing fruits and vegetables before eating them, eating good food, etc.;
4. To form the catechists, facilitators of small Christian communities, members of Christian movements and associations, and families of the sick to accompany the sick, with the option of those who are ill may receive the Sacrament of Anointing;
5. To celebrate solemnly World Day for the Sick on February 11;
6. To understand that being a Christian involves changing bad behaviours and mentalities;

7. To form catechists who teach, and evaluate the methodology used in teaching catechism, the hours and days accorded to it, so as to bring the catechumens to true conversion;
8. To assist organisations in the parish who fight against alcoholism;
9. To reserve a time of prayer in every Sunday Celebration to combat the phenomenon of sorcery, alcoholism, poverty among our people;
10. To appeal to the local authorities to sensitize citizens to respect the common good;
11. And to sensitize our faithful on the need to respect each person and his goods”.

We pray that God gives us his grace in this pastoral year to have the zeal of St. Vincent in order to enable us to make Christ felt by the poor. The parish and the entire country need your prayers so that the cry of the poor may be heard. Please pray for us also.

A Vincentian Missionary Parish

Babu Oonnukallinkal, C.M.
Province of Northern India

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.

OF CURRENT INTEREST

Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World

Félic Álvarez Sagredo, C.M.

1. Introduction

For some time I have had this desire to write about the laity in the Church and in the world. Whenever I have thought about evangelization or the present situation of the Church or, more specifically, the present situation of the Church in Europe as reflected in statistics regarding Sunday worship and other criteria that allow one to evaluate the impact of faith on the life of believers... whenever I have considered these realities, the theme of the laity has always been a part of my reflection.

There are many reasons that motivate me to write these reflections. On the one hand, there is the Word of God where the presence of the laity and their responsibility in the ministry of faith are continually highlighted. On the other hand, we have the Church's teaching which, at least on a theoretical or doctrinal level, has developed the theology of the laity as it has dealt with such themes as the identity of the laity, their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world, their full participation in the evangelizing ministry of the Church, the value of their presence and their proper and indisputable witness in the family, the workplace, and other social situations and, finally, their inescapable commitment to life, to progress, to human development and to the whole of creation.

Now, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, there is an invitation to read anew its primary documents and the great messages that are contained in its constitutions, decrees and declarations... all of which have been enriched and confirmed by many personal and ecclesial experiences that have taken place during the past fifty years. In this sense the fourth chapter of the dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, and the decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, have great significance. Even though my space here is limited, it is absolutely necessary to make some reference to the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, and to the apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*.

Nevertheless, we are not only dealing with reasons and arguments, but there are also positive attitudes and states of mind that create dif-

ferent expectations as we contemplate the global panorama from the perspective of faith and as we also contemplate this reality from the perspective of reason. The faith perspective opens the mind and the heart to horizons and goals that are in harmony with the identity and the dignity of men and women, with their transcendence and their ultimate purpose. In fact, the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, states: “*The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals men and women to themselves and makes their supreme calling clear... For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man and woman... Such is the mystery of the human person, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #22).

First, some clarifications before I begin to develop this theme. With regard to the sources that I will use in order to give form to this presentation: the theme seems to imply that the primary sources must be Sacred Scripture, tradition and the Church’s teaching, especially the more important teachings that have occurred during the past fifty years, namely, the Second Vatican Council and the synod of Bishops that dealt with the vocation and the mission of the laity. More specifically, I will refer almost exclusively to the following documents: the fourth chapter of the dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, the decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and finally, the apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*.

I want to develop this presentation from a theological perspective rather than from an historical perspective because the objective that I peruse is that of highlighting the laity as qualified agents of evangelization so that they might be recognized and supported in their mission as true protagonists in the different areas that are rightly theirs. If one of the most important challenges of today’s Church is to assure that all its members are fully aware of and take responsibility for the demands of their vocation, then this challenge becomes a priority when dealing with the laity. Imagine the Church with lay people who are fully aware of their dignity and vocation and who are generously committed to the process of evangelization in their personal, family, social, and professional life!

2. Biblical and theological foundation

The first thing that we become aware of is the thematic structure of *Lumen Gentium* as a whole. From the beginning we are presented with the image of a living, complex body that is well-organized and in which all its members have an important function that has to be developed

on behalf of the whole body: “*The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #1). This statement underlines the essential human, social, spiritual and divine elements of this community, of this mystery, of this people of God.

As I reflect on the purpose of this presentation, I find an incredible beauty and value in the references that the dogmatic constitution makes to the universal plan of salvation that was inaugurated by God-Father. The document places the decisive stages of this plan in an historical perspective and we can see how this plan took shape in a definitive and total manner with the event of the Incarnation of the Word and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the community of the disciples and to all people. Without a doubt this Trinitarian perspective provides us with a sound foundation for our reflection on this revealed plan and provides a basis for all future development of this theme.

Before moving on, I want to make an explicit reference to the first appearance of human beings on earth in the book of Genesis. As the name indicates, we are dealing with “the origins” yet at the same time the author describes for us the dignity and the spirit and the gifts that the human person possesses and then specifies the tasks that the human person must accomplish. Men and women were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26) and were entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the earth. Thus, men and women became God’s collaborators, people who were able to develop and to bring to fulfillment the work that God had begun... people who would be animated by the strength of the Spirit. The first blessing that God bestowed upon men and women was pure gift and made them fruitful so that they could transmit life and recreate the world¹.

In this same line of thought the distinct images that the Council presents to us when referring to the Church enrich our knowledge and provide our personal and community experiences with an extraordinary value. I refer here to the images taken from rural and farming life and the image of the spiritual building, and those images that refer to family and spousal relationships. Perhaps there is no more expressive and enlightening image than that of the Mystical body of Christ.

It is incredible to see the various types of references that are found in chapter four of *Lumen Gentium*, a chapter that is entitled, “The Laity”. We find references to the image of the mystical body of Christ, references taken from the writings of Saint Paul to three

¹ *Father, by your plan man and woman are united, and married life has been established as the one blessing that was not forfeited by original sin or washed away by the flood, Rite of Marriage, Catholic Book Publishing Co, New York, Nuptial Blessing [A], p. 16.*

different communities (1 Corinthians 12:1-12; Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 4:15-16). There are very few images and/or expressions that are as enlightening and able to clarify the reality and the profound identity of the people of God.

The apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, comments on some of these biblical images and highlights the allegory of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-10) and the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). We read: “*Vatican Council II has invited us to contemplate the mystery of the Church through biblical images which bring to light the reality of the Church as a communion with its inseparable dimensions: the communion of each Christian with Christ and the communion of all Christians with one another. There is the sheepfold, the flock, the vine, the spiritual building, the Holy City. Above all, there is the image of the Body as set forth by the Apostle Paul. Its doctrine finds a pleasing expression once again in various passages of the Council’s document*” (*Christifideles Laici*, #19).

We have referred, in passing, to the image of the spiritual building. I believe that in the theology of the laity this image has an exceptional attractiveness and power. When we speak about witness and the worship that the laity are invited to offer to God through their union and communion with Christ, we can begin to understand the profound significance of this image.

In this section I would like to make reference to another gospel passage that focuses our attention on the conditions that Jesus established for those who wish to follow him. These could be described as characteristics of the true disciple... others prefer to speak about the effort that is demanded in the school of discipleship. This passage is found in the three Synoptic gospels, even though the more interesting passages are those that are found in Luke and Mark (cf., Matthew 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-27). The introductory phrase speaks for itself: “*He [Jesus] summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them: Those who wish to come after me must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. For those who wish to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it*” (Mark 8:34-35).

Jesus’ words were spoken in response to the disciples’ profound misunderstanding of something as important as his true messianic mission. Jesus, for the first time, had just spoken about the dramatic, violent and paradoxical end to his life. Mark states that Jesus began to teach the disciples that “*the Son of man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days*” (Mark 8:32). Peter’s immediate response and his firm decision to prevent such an outcome not only led to the teaching that we have already cited but also provoked some of Jesus’ harshest words. In this passage we find a clear expression of the paradox of the

cross, the true paradox of believers who, obedient to the words of their faith, accept with profound joy the true wisdom and true transformative power of the gospel.

3. The identity of the laity in the Church

The constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, describes the laity with the following words: “*The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #31).

The foundation that gives origin to the new condition of the laity in the mystery of the Church, that which constitutes their most genuine “features” and serves as the basis for their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world is their “*incorporation into Christ through faith and baptism*” (*Christifideles Laici*, #9). Even though the description is clear, perhaps it would be good to explain one by one each individual word of this phrase so that we can grasp its rich content. The first element that is mentioned is that of the incorporation of the laity into Christ through baptism. Here John Paul II speaks about a new aspect of the grace and the dignity that comes from baptism: “*The lay faithful participate for their part in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King*” (*Christifideles Laici*, #14). The Council used similar words: “*The faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #31).

The following passages that I will refer to are well-known but they contain a life-giving message and are only understandable from the perspective and the dynamic of the new cult that was inaugurated by Christ who made filial obedience to the Father the center of and the most perfect expression of such worship. We see in the letter to the Hebrews: “*By this ‘will’, we have been consecrated though the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Hebrews 10:10). All the documents, including the conciliar constitution, emphasize the depth and the efficacy of this participation of the laity in the priesthood of Christ as it pertains to their own sanctification and the sanctification of the world. Once again we recall the message of Jesus’ farewell discourse where he speaks about joyfully handing himself over to the Father for the salvation of the world: “*I have made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me, may be in them and I in them*” (John 17:26). This, however, must be concretized

in order to see exactly in what ways the laity participate in the priesthood of Christ.

Therefore, *“the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne – all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’. Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God”* (*Lumen Gentium*, #34).

We could cite numerous references not only from the documents that we have already mentioned, but also from the pages of the New Testament, especially from the writings of Saint Paul. The doctrinal outline that Paul followed in his letters to the various communities begins with a presentation of the mystery of Christ which is then followed by words that refer to the incorporation of the believer into that mystery. Thus, for example, in the letter to the Romans, after explaining the transformative and liberating efficacy of baptism as a result of the death and resurrection of Christ and after explaining the life of the Christian in the Spirit, Paul states: *“I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship”* (Romans 12:1)².

The conciliar document highlights the full participation of the laity in the prophetic mystery of Christ: *“Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of his Father both by the testimony of his life and the power of his words, continually fulfills his prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and with his authority, but also through the laity whom he made his witnesses and to whom he gave understanding of the faith (sensu fidei) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life”* (*Lumen Gentium*, #35). The document then goes on to say: *“This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in*

² The note in the *Jerusalem Bible* states: the Christian community has taken the place of the Temple in Jerusalem and the indwelling of the Spirit gives a new intensity to the presence of God among his holy people (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). This is also the inspiration of a new spiritual cult for believers are members of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15-20) who has become in his crucified and risen body the dwelling place of a new presence of God and a new cult (John 2:19-22; 4:20-21).

that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world” (Lumen Gentium, #35).

All the documents underline the importance and the value of this participation of the laity in the prophetic ministry of Christ. They do so with the same realism and significance that is demanded by the realities of life today, by life “in the marketplace” and in the various “secular situations” where the message of the gospel must be made present in the way that Paul VI said: “*Evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new*” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #18).

In order to understand the profound significance of the participation of the laity in the mystery of Christ it would be good to recall some of the principles outlined in the pastoral constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. I would mention first of all the autonomy and the value of created things. The Council affirmed: “*If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #36). Thus we have an admirable description of the legitimate autonomy of created reality and their orientation toward the integral goal of men and women and toward their ultimate end (Genesis 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23). Besides this principle, however, there are other important principles: the principle of the common good (so often alluded to in the conciliar document) and the principle concerning the secular nature and the character of the laity.

Finally, I want to refer to the present awareness of the Church and her attitude before the world and society: the Church is wholly convinced that if she wants to be a valid instrument of evangelization then she needs to live in a state of constant reform and renewal, she must engage in dialogue and place herself at the service of humankind. There are two parables in the gospel that reveal the authentic significance of solidarity, two parables that Jesus places before us with great mastery: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29ff) and the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31ff)... “*Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me*” (Matthew 25:40).

Both the dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, as well as the apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, clearly reveal the meaning of this participation. The conciliar document states: “*The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #31). John Paul II underlined the fact that “*in particular the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value... The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and*

King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, in as much as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord” (Christifideles Laici, #14).

4. The apostolate of the laity

The conciliar constitution introduces this theme with some very eloquent statements³ especially when we consider the call to participate in the New Evangelization and the various scenes described in the *Lineamenta* from the last Synod of Bishops and in *Gaudium et Spes*, which also points out some very urgent problems. The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where the Church can only become the salt of the earth through their efforts. Therefore paths must be opened to them so that, in accord with their abilities and the needs of the present era, they might zealously participate in the salvific mission of Church.

In addition to some other nuances that could be highlighted, I want to emphasize here two clear and demanding affirmations that can be applied to the laity as well as to the other members of the Christian community, especially those persons who have accepted the responsibility of encouraging and planning in those areas related to evangelization and pastoral ministry. Without any hesitation the constitution points out the fact that “*the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #34)... thus the exhortation to open paths for them. Once again I am reminded of the words that Pope Pius XII, on more than one occasion, addressed to the laity: “*The faithful ought to have an ever clear consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church*” (PIUS XII, Discourse to the new cardinals, February 20, 1946). These affirmations are authentic statements that ought to accompany every initiative and every form of collaboration that the other members of the Christian community might engage in.

This theme is developed at length in the conciliar decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Three chapters are dedicated to this development and they are entitled: objectives, various fields of the apostolate and the different forms of the apostolate. The apostolate of evangelizing

³ See *Lumen Gentium*, #33 the end of paragraph b and d; see also the compendium at the beginning of the second part of the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, #46 which mentions the following urgent problems: marriage and family, culture, economic and social life, politics, the solidarity of peoples and peace.

and sanctifying men and women, the Christian renewal of the temporal order and charitable action (distinctive characteristics of the Christian apostolate) form and shape the purposes that have to be achieved⁴. Benedict XVI wrote about this with admirable precision when he stated: “*The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being*” (BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #25a).

Before examining in greater detail the various areas and forms of the lay apostolate, it is interesting to listen to what the Council says with regard to the witness of life and its impact on human structures. Such evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ, through the witness of life and through word, acquires a specific characteristic and a unique efficacy as a result of the fact that all of this is done in the ordinary circumstances of the world. Commenting on the impact of the evangelization process on human structures, the constitution states: “*By their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word*” (*Lumen Gentium*, #36).

5. The various field and the different forms of the apostolate

These sections of the conciliar decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, are most significant and cannot be passed over lightly. I will attempt to present a summary which incorporates the primary elements and which therefore, will facilitate the future study of some other fundamental aspects related to this theme.

Among the various fields of the apostolate, we find reference to church communities, the family, young people, the social environment and the apostolate on the national and international level. We also find here a reference to the importance and the greater participation of women in the various areas of the apostolate. The parish and the diocese are called to be the center of unity and a point of convergence for the various charisms and personal gifts. Thus, the exhortation to cultivate a sense of belonging without losing sight of the urgent needs of people who live outside the boundaries of the local and/or diocesan community. Today it is possible to engage in international collabora-

⁴ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, see the titles given to the various sections of chapter two of this document.

tion through the human and technical means that are now available to so many people.

The Council Fathers began chapter four with a general statement: *“The laity can engage in their apostolic activity either as individuals or together as members of various groups or associations”* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #15)⁵. The document then goes on to explain: *“There are many forms of the apostolate whereby the laity build up the Church, sanctify the world, and give it life in Christ. A particular form of the individual apostolate as well as a sign specially suited to our times is the testimony of the whole lay life arising from faith, hope, and charity. It manifests Christ living in those who believe in Him. Then by the apostolate the spoken and written word, which is utterly necessary under certain circumstances, lay people announce Christ, explain and spread His teaching in accordance with one’s status and ability, and faithfully profess it”* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #16).

The exhortation to work in the parish is always accompanied by an invitation to promote a sense of communion and unity among all its members. In this work the laity should follow the dynamics of their faith and should also be attentive to the movement of the Spirit so that their own problems and the problems of the world can be examined together and solved by general discussion and consensus. The decree mentions the need for a broader outreach that extends to the inter-parochial and inter-diocesan level, as well as the national and international level.

I want to highlight some ideas with regard to the apostolate on the national and international level... and I do so because of its importance at the present time, and also because of the many paths that have been opened to us through modern technology and rapid communication. The decree states that a *“vast field for the apostolate has opened up on the national and international levels where the laity especially assist with their Christian wisdom”* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #14). Therefore, there follows an invitation to accept responsibility in various organizations and institutions and to work on behalf of peace and justice, the common good, dialogue and solidarity among people.

A theme that merits explicit consideration is the various organized forms of the lay apostolate. I would like to highlight the following ideas: in the present situation the apostolate calls for the concerted effort of the laity. It is suggested that more emphasis be given to unity and integration and insertion into the different areas of social life. There should be some good reason when considering the creation of a new

⁵ *“Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:14); *“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

association and at the same time we must avoid prolonging in some artificial way the life of those associations that are outdated and/or dying. This means that we use some common sense criteria and apply them when evaluating these groups and when discerning the path to be followed when working with these same groups.

6. The spirituality of the laity

A good starting point is found in the following affirmation of the Council: *"It is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society"* (*Lumen Gentium*, #40). We see here a clear expression of the fundamental demand of every Christian vocation, namely, the universal call to holiness. John Paul II underlines this idea when he states: *"We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity"* (*Christifideles Laici*, #16). This reference is all the more significant because it is formulated from a Trinitarian perspective which is, of course, a logical consequence of belonging to this Church, a mystery of communion in which the identity and the unity dignity of the laity is revealed.

A spirituality of communion: the ecclesiology of communion is a central and fundamental idea in the documents of Second Vatican Council. Paul VI explained this in an admirable way when he stated: *"The meaning of the Church is a communion of saints. 'Communion' speaks of a double life-giving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ, and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the faithful, in this world and in the next, union with Christ and in Christ, and union among Christians, in the Church"* (PAUL VI, General Audience, June 8, 1966). Both the Council documents, as well as later Church documents, refer to Paul's image of the body of Christ and the dynamism of the charisms. *Lumen Gentium* states: *"The messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race"* (*Lumen Gentium*, #9).

We find this same idea expressed by John Paul II when he quotes the Council: *"The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them he prays and bears witness that they are adopted children. Guiding the Church in the way of all truth and unifying her in communion and in the works of service, he bestows upon her varied hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns her with the fruits*

of his grace. By the power of the Gospel he makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse” (Christifideles Laici, #20).

A spirituality rooted in the newness of baptism: This sacramental reality, with its various dimension and dynamisms, has appeared in many different sections of this reflection. In light of the reality of a new birth, believers experience themselves enlightened by the Word and strengthened and animated by the Spirit who shares with them various gifts/charisms. They understand that this newness has made them effective participants in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and regal mission. They have acquired a sense of belonging to the ecclesial community and a commitment of service that involves them in the human, social, political and religious realities and structures.

Baptism, far from alienating people from their brothers and sisters, makes people fully human. Through baptism we died so that, like Christ who by the glory of the Father was raised from the dead, we too might live anew. The pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, affirms: “*Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #22).

The spirituality of the laity is profoundly Christological: Paul’s profession about the centrality of the person and the ministry of Christ in his life and his full incorporation into this mystery, could also be a valid expression for the laity: “*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself for me*” (Galatians 2:19-20). It is the person of Jesus who attracts the attention of the laity.

For the laity, Jesus’ family, social, and ministerial life, is a prototype and a point of reference in order for the laity to live faithfully in the various situations in which they find themselves. Jesus Christ was a member of a working class family in Nazareth and not a member of the priestly class. From the beginning of his public ministry Jesus was acclaimed as the great prophet who was to come to save the people and as such, he offers the laity a paradigm... indeed, Jesus gave glory to the Father through filial obedience and through the offering of his life on behalf of his brothers and sisters provide people with a sign of the greatest possible love (cf. John 10:14).

The spirituality of the laity finds in the Gospel the living Word of God and finds in the Eucharist its source of authentic inspiration and of solid support for living life in its fullness: In the post-synodal exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, and the encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, we find numerous references to the importance of the Word of God and the

Eucharist in the life of every Christian and therefore, in the life of the laity. We should recall the fact that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the process of evangelization since its objective is the communion of all people with Christ and in Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *Lumen Gentium* affirms this reality when it states: “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with it... strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament” (*Lumen Gentium*, #11).

Lay spirituality is genuinely secular, something characteristic of their nature: the laity are sanctified in their home and in the world and in their professional work. In the fullest sense of these words the laity are called to be salt of the earth and light to the world. They experience as their own the affirmations that are made at the beginning and throughout the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #1).

7. Formation

One of the many experiences, for which I am extremely grateful, is the ten years that I spent in Málaga as a professor at the theological center for the laity. There were night sessions that took place in the bishop’s residence and men and women from distinct social and professional classes (professors, workers, permanent deacons, officials from the public and private sector) participated in those classes. The majority of those people were parents. These were not small groups... quite the contrary. Yet I can still vividly recall their attention and interest and active participation through their dialogue and their sharing the various ways in which they gave witness to their faith.

At the beginning of this section on lay formation, I mention this personal experience because it was there that I discovered an encouraging ecclesial reality... I witnessed a clear expression of the Christian commitment to this formation and I also became aware of a dynamic of fidelity and integrity as people gave witness to their faith.

The conciliar decree dedicates the last chapter to this theme of formation for the apostolate. It insists on the need to take into consideration every dimension of formation: human, spiritual and theological. Formation should also promote the development of authentic human values, collaboration and dialogue. Such formation should be directed

toward every sector of society and toward all people (children, young men and women, adults) and this formation should be continually updated.

The decree refers to the means that are available today – meetings, congresses, retreats, recollections, assemblies, conferences, books, periodicals, etc. It also refers to the establishment of higher institutes that have produced excellent results. This section concludes with the following exhortation: “Centers of documentation and study not only in theology but also in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and methodology should be established for all fields of the apostolate for the better development of the natural capacities of the laity – men and women, young persons and adults” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #32).

A good formation that is internalized will necessarily create in the laity a foundation for their own proper spirituality, will strengthen their hope and lead them to a deeper commitment to the various human and social realities. In the case of the laity, there is also a need to develop processes of on-going formation because such formation will naturally foster fidelity to their identity and spirituality as well as fidelity to their vocation and mission in the Church.

In this presentation, I believe it is important to refer to the social doctrine of the Church as a significant aspect of evangelizing the contemporary world. I do not intend to develop arguments that validate the affirmations of the Church’s teaching but rather, in a schematic way, I want to highlight two or three reasons. From the time of the Second Vatican Council until the present, the Church has been consistent in her teachings related to social concerns. I would list the following documents as important milestones in this uninterrupted history: the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes* and the encyclicals, *Populorum Progressio*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Desus Caritas Est*.

All these documents have two essential parts that have been developed and that form the core of their message: an analysis of the social question, a description of the challenges or the priorities that demand our attention and a broad and coordinated response to these challenges.

At no time is the central message of the Gospel put aside. Rather it is this message that shapes the content of each of these documents and is expressed in such themes as the dignity of all people, their inalienable rights, their supreme vocation as well as the development of every aspect of their life, including their spiritual and religious dimension.

After these reflections on the means of formation, I conclude with an experience that occurred when I was studying in the beautiful German city that is located on the banks of the Rhine, Boppard am Rhein. The Goethe Institute housed foreign students with families who lived in the city, and I was housed with a peasant family. After the evening

news there was always a brief biblical-theological reflection on one of the public television stations, a reflection that was presented by some distinguished Christian scholar. When this presentation was concluded the family would comment on the message that they had heard... even though all of this occurred many years ago, that powerful image has remained with me.

8. Conclusion

In light of the invitation to participate in the New Evangelization and also in light of the theology of the laity, I believe that some serious personal and community reflection and discernment are demanded, especially as we consider the strategies and practices that might respond to the urgent needs of our time. Are not the laity agents and indisputable instruments in the Church's evangelizing activity? Do they not have their own proper place in the Church and in society? How can we make our pastoral activity creative so that it opens new paths that can confront that which is routine and/or stagnant? Do we feel the need and the urgency for a new evangelization? What responses are we willing to assume in this regard? Are we willing to put aside outdated methods, expressions and content that say nothing to people today? Are we willing to look for alternatives? When are we going to attempt to initiate dialogue in the matter of faith with other persons and groups in society who are not usually present at our liturgical celebrations? Why, in so many situations, is our outreach so limited?

In our parishes do we give priority to the promotion of lay groups that are well-formed and able to minister in the various spheres of social and pastoral life? Here I am not specifically referring to Vincentian groups but to groups that adhere to no specific form of congregational spirituality but live in a profound manner the apostolic dimension of their Christian lay vocation.

The question is all the more urgent and serious in those provinces where the majority of its members minister in parishes, that is, in provinces whose primary ministry (and in some cases, exclusive ministry) is parish ministry. We must accept and affirm the various lay charisms, ministries and services so that the laity, in full communion with the Church and all its members, engage in this prophetic ministry that renews social and family structures and realities.

No one doubts that we live in a time of change and this reality has to influence and motivate us to clothe ourselves in new attitudes, to view reality in a new light, to make a greater effort to familiarize ourselves with new languages and new situations where these problems are experienced, where these concerns and legitimate desires of humankind are revealed and where the presence of the Church ought to be made manifest through the convincing witness of the laity. They are

the ones who can communicate human, spiritual and gospel values and who can enrich the world by transforming it with the power of the Spirit who inspires them.

The challenge that our communities and ministries confront is certainly great: we must engage in a profound self-analysis and do this in light of the signs of the time, the Gospel and our charism. Rigid conformity and unanalyzed accommodation and superficial reform and renewal have no place here. We must have the ability “to look” and “to see”... and at the same time we must be able “to understand” and “to discover” in order to undertake a permanent commitment that involves on-going renewal.

On the other hand, it is clear that when our parishes are truly Vincentian parishes, this will have positive repercussions on the laity who, in an imperceptible manner for them, but a form nevertheless real and apparent to others, will embrace a lifestyle and values and a spirit that are in harmony with our charism and our mission.

Throughout this presentation I have not mentioned any of the various associations of the Vincentian Family. This was not the objective or the purpose of this synthesis. This could well be the theme for some future study. Indeed, the persons whom we attempt to evangelize and the poor with whom we want to collaborate in this urgent task deserve our recognition, our support and our co-responsible activity.

Translated by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

The French School of Spirituality



A Conference sponsored by the Oratorians, Sulpicians, Eudists, Foreign Missions of Paris, and Congregation of the Mission. As heirs of this tradition, this conference will promote dialogue, so together we can meet today's challenges in our world.

Monday, June 30 at lunch to Friday, July 4 evening

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Conference will be tri-lingual: English, Spanish, and French**

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- To explore foundations and historical unfolding of each charism;
- To exchange ideas on pastoral practices of various institutes.

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Limited spaces available, so please register soon!

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Monday, 30 June / Opening Luncheon

Topic:

“Contexts and transmissions of the French School of Spirituality”

- Opening Panel discussion
- What is the French School of Spirituality?
- What this school done over the centuries?
- Which stakes of this heritage for today?

Tuesday 1 July / Wednesday, 2 July

Topic:

“From the figure of a founder, to a tradition and a spiritual family”

- Cardinal de Berulle
- St. Vincent de Paul
- St. John Eudes
- Jean-Jacques Olier
- MEP: Pierre Lambert de la Motte, François Pallu, and François de Laval
- Final Synthesis

Thursday, July 3 – Morning

Topic:

“The French School of Spirituality and issues for the Mission Today”

- What worlds to evangelize?
- Round table with six presenters chosen among the participants
- Afternoon: Time to explore Paris!

Friday, July 4

Topic:

“The French School of Spirituality; issues for training today”

- Afternoon: Final document
- Visit to St. Sulpice with celebration
- Closing Dinner

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**In our next
issue...**

**Reflections
on
*Evangelii
Gaudium***