

# VINCENTIANA

59<sup>th</sup> Year - N. 1

January-March 2015



## Preparing for the 2016 General Assembly

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

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# INTRODUCTION

## Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

This edition of *Vincentiana* has a different theme from what was planned previously, and for good reason. After publishing the *Ratio Formationis* in the last issue, our plan was to devote this one to a series of articles written by confreres on the various aspects of the Ratio. However, with the General Assembly on the horizon, we decided that a more pressing need was to have an issue devoted to materials entrusted to us by the Preparatory Commission for the General Assembly. This year, provinces will hold domestic and provincial assemblies to discuss *postulata* and to elect delegates for the 2016 General Assembly. We at *Vincentiana* want to assist you in this important endeavor by providing you with resources and information on the General Assembly.

So this issue is devoted to assisting confreres in getting ready for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. To accomplish this goal, our main presentation is divided into two parts. Part One is comprised of memos and short articles on the “mechanics” of preparing for a General Assembly. Of special interest will be a “practical guide” for planning a provincial assembly, a “reflection guide” for both domestic and provincial assemblies, instructions for submitting “*postulata*” for the General Assembly, forms that need to be submitted to insure provinces are represented at the Assembly.

The second section (Part Two) on preparing for the 2016 General Assembly holds a series of articles by confreres for reflection and discussion. Fr. Patrick Griffin, with his keen background in Scripture, reflects on the Assembly’s Jeremiah-based biblical theme: “*To whom-ever I send you, you shall go*” (Jer. 1:7). Fathers John Rybolt and Bernard Koch exercise their prerogative as excellent historical researchers in writing on a brief history of General Assemblies (Fr. Rybolt), and lessons we can learn in studying the genesis of our Vincentian charism (Fr. Koch).

Two articles touch upon current and pressing interests in the Church today. Fr. Celestin Fernandez explores the contributions Vincentians can make to the “New Evangelization” today, and Fr. Jaroslaw Lawrenz discusses two favorite themes of Pope Francis: “mercy” for those on the “peripheries” of life. We conclude with a reflection by our Fr. G. Gregory Gay, our Superior General and Fr. Joseph Agostino, the chair of the Preparatory Commission. They share their ideas on

“Multiculturalism, Solidarity, and Collaboration”, three themes bound to be topics of considerable discussion at the next General Assembly.

Rounding out the issue is a thought-provoking article from Fr. Robert Maloney, entitled, “The Company will cease to exist, unless...” (I will let you end that sentence on your own, but please read the article first!). We also include our continued reflection from the General Curia on the vow of stability, as well as regular notices and circulars from the General Curia and the Superior General.

The next issue will have as its theme a discussion of the eight parts of the *Ratio Formationis*, written by confreres who have generously shared their experience of formation, along with their ideas and insights on these topics. Confreres authoring articles for issue come from varied countries and continents, but all are united in their desire to live and pass on the Vincentian charism to the next generation of confreres, seminarists, and aspirants to the Congregation of the Mission. It is important to recall that the *Ratio* deals with initial as well as ongoing formation, so it is meant to be utilized by all members of the Congregation of the Mission. As we can see from the life of our Holy Founder, St. Vincent, we are all constantly being formed in Christ’s way!

May the grace and blessings of the Lord Jesus be with you in 2015, and may St. Vincent’s spirit and example continue to guide us as we prepare for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in 2016.

# FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

## Tempo Forte Meeting

October 6-10, 2014

Dear Confreres:

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

This is a summary of the major points covered at the recent Tempo Forte. We began with a day of reflection and prayer on the theme of the vow of poverty, including the Statute on Poverty in our Constitutions, and a discussion of our style of life at the General Curia. Moving from a general discussion to specifics, we reflected on how to live more simply as Vincentians. Visiting us at Tempo Forte were new members of the SIEV group. Fr. Miles Heinen made a presentation as Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office. Details on both are in this report.

### UPDATES

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLANS:** We focused on plans in progress for the 2016 General Assembly at DePaul University in Chicago, USA. Fr. Joe Geders, Econome General and I made a site visit to DePaul to review the places we will utilize for the assembly. Fr. Dennis Holtschneider, DePaul's President and his staff graciously received us. Plans are moving forward as the Preparatory Commission for the Assembly will meet in Rome during the next Tempo Forte. We also finalized our list of confreres who will serve as translators at the assembly.

**NEW VISITORS MEETING, 2016:** The date of this bi-annual workshop for new Visitors will be in January 2016. As in past years, it will be held at the Casa Maria Immacolata in Rome.

**RECONFIGURATION:** We had an ongoing discussion of reconfiguration, studying reports of the provinces in Brazil and status updates for the provinces of Italy, France, and Spain. We also reviewed the reconfiguration plans of CLAPVI-North for Central America and the Caribbean.

**RATIO FORMATIONIS:** We had a discussion of the final draft of the 'Ratio Formationis' which the Council accepted for promulgation. It has been translated into all three languages of the Congregation and will be published in Vincentiana. I offer my sincere appreciation to the confreres who served on the Commission of the Ratio Formationis:

Fr. Gerard Luttenberger, chair, and Fathers Orlando Escobar, Jan Martinec, Robert Petkovsek, and Joy Thuruthel. I also express my gratitude to Fathers Jaime Corera and Antoine Douaihy, who translated the 'Ratio' into Spanish and French and labored many long hours over this text.

**MISSIONARY PARISH THRUST PROJECT:** We studied seven proposed projects received from the newly created "Missionary Parish Thrust" for parishes sponsored by the Congregation. Upon review, we approved all seven and sent them to the Franz Foundation, who will select and fund the proposals they consider best in line with the goals of this project.

## **GENERAL COUNCIL PROJECTS**

We discussed several projects under consideration by the General Council.

*PROVINCIAL SECRETARY POSITION:* The Superior General issued an ordinance requiring all provincial offices to employ the services of a secretary, (either a confrere or layperson), to assist in their internal organization and to facilitate better communication between provinces and the Curia. The Secretary General asked provinces if they wanted the Curia to sponsor a meeting for provincial secretaries. Due to the slight response, we sent out a questionnaire to assess their needs. Our goal is to have provinces employ a provincial secretary to improve their internal operations and communication with the Curia. We stand ready to assist provinces in any way.

*CENTER FOR CONFRERES IN DIFFICULTY:* The second project we discussed was possibly opening a center in Mexico for confreres experiencing personal difficulties. Here the response was also slight, with few provinces responding. Thus, we will not pursue this particular project.

*SELF- SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT:* We discussed a "Self Sustainability Project," sponsored by the Eastern Province, USA, and Fr. Elmer Bauer, Provincial Econome. At an international meeting, Fr. Elmer was sought out by a number of provinces for help on this matter. Two provinces followed up, and one eventually made a suitable proposal. As of now, they are moving forward with the help of a company well versed in self-sustainability. We also recommended other provinces to Fr. Elmer that we believe could use his help to become self-sustaining. We are grateful to Fr. Elmer for this work, which benefits the entire Congregation.

*CANON LAW CLARIFICATION OF 'MISSIONARY PRIVILEGES':* We studied a project to consider the canonical privileges given to mis-

sionaries according to Canon Law. This came from a request by a confrere engaged in missionary work. After the appropriate consultation, we will compile a letter to spell out the missionary privileges considered acceptable by the Holy See.

**VINCENTIAN BISHOPS:** We received a letter from our bishop-confrere in Ethiopia, Bishop Varghese Thottamkara, who offered some recommendations that the Council found favorable. These included calling Vincentian bishops together for a meeting; inviting a confrere-bishop to attend the General Assembly to celebrate the Eucharist and reflect on its theme; and inviting a confrere-bishop to speak at the 2016 New Visitors Meeting on the relationship between the visitor and local bishop, as seen in a section of the *Practical Guide for Visitors Handbook*. We also discussed possible reconsideration of the request to provide financial support for apostolic vicariates where confrere-bishops and confreres serve. There are a number of such apostolic vicariates where the Congregation provides personnel and at times, financial assistance.

**CHARISM/SPIRITUAL FAMILY WORKSHOP:** We received an invitation to attend a meeting of religious congregations with wider spiritual families (similar to our Vincentian Family.) The Superior General and Fr. Jorge Rodriguez will attend this meeting to discuss how 'spiritual families' can assist the religious congregations they are affiliated with in living their charisms.

## REPORTS TO THE GENERAL CURIA

**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS:** Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications offered his report. He proposed new ways to advance the visibility and use of the "FAM-VIN" website and to increase participation of members of the Vincentian Family from various language groups. We were happy to learn that a new website created to highlight the International Missions is now fully functional. Titled "*The Joy of the Gospel*," its web address is [www.gospel-joy.org](http://www.gospel-joy.org). I invite all confreres to visit this site, and to learn about our missions and men in the Congregation who serve. The website also provides a secure way of communicating with confreres in these missions, so you can leave a message or offer words of encouragement through this website.

Regarding Vincentiana, the final edition of 2014 will be devoted to publication of the *Ratio Formationis*. The first edition of 2015 will be a commentary by confreres on the various sections of the Ratio, which we hope will help us provinces to better understand and apply the Ratio in programs of initial and ongoing formation.

**SIEV MEETING:** The re-formed SIEV commission met at the Curia during Tempo Forte. They began by meeting briefly with the Council to go over guidelines. We discussed with them the purpose of SIEV,

summarized in three goals. First, SIEV is a group that reflects on historical and spiritual Vincentian themes. Secondly, SIEV is responsible for preparing and promoting new specialists in Vincentian studies. Finally, SIEV undertakes responsibility for Vincentian publications. The SIEV Commission revised their statutes to reflect their new purpose. The coordinator is Fr. Corpus Delgado, Province of Zaragoza. The confreres serving on the SIEV Commission include: Fathers Franciscus Eko Armada, Province of Indonesia; Dan Borlik, Western Province, USA from the CIF program; Neil Hoffman, Province of Slovakia; Andres Motto, Province of Argentina; Nelio Pereira Pita, Province of Portugal; Jean Rufin Mokelo, Province of Congo; and Vinicius Teixeira, Province of Rio de Janeiro. Fathers Javier Alvarez serves as liaison to the Council, and Agus Heru is Curia archivist and librarian.

*CIF PROGRAM:* Fr. Stanislav Zontak, Council Liaison, led a discussion on the CIF program in Paris. We discussed our experiences in giving presentations to confreres in the CIF program. This was done by Fathers John Maher, Giuseppe Turati, Javier Alvarez, and the Superior General. Overall, we found the CIF program well run. Confreres were enthusiastic. Programs included systemic change, five Vincentian virtues, and collaboration with the Vincentian Family.

*VSO REPORT:* We had a report from Fr. Miles Heinen, Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office, who told us that associate director Teresa Niedda has left the VSO to work closer to home. The Superior General and Council express our thanks to Teresa for her dedication to the VSO and devotion to the Vincentian charism. In other news, because of a lack of available funds, the program for awarding micro-projects has been suspended until further notice. This is a setback to provinces and missions seeking funding. Once again, I appeal for confreres to donate to fund these micro-projects. In the past, due to the generosity of the confreres, we built up a fund. I appeal not only to confreres who have contributed, but I ask those who have not donated to consider doing so. These funds help developing provinces to become self-sustaining.

On a more positive note, we are near completion of the first phase of our Patrimonial Fund Project. Following that milestone, we will evaluate whether to move to a second phase. This will occur when we have reached our goal of five million dollars with a promise of matching funds.

*SYSTEMIC CHANGE COMMISSION:* Fr. Giuseppe Turati, coordinator for the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change, gave a report to the General Council on recent activities. In July, they held a follow-up workshop in the Philippines after one previously presented. This fall, they will meet in Rome to evaluate and plan. They will then go to the Ukraine to do a workshop.

*UNION OF SUPERIOR GENERALS:* A General Assembly of the Union of Superior Generals will be held November 26-28. Its theme is “New Relationships for a Culture of Encounter.” We will discuss the “Relatio” of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, and elect new USG officers.

*VINCENTIAN HISTORY PROJECT:* Fr. John Rybolt presented to the Council a fifth volume of his work on the history of the Congregation. The Council then discussed the progress of his “Commemorative” volume to be made available in English, Spanish, and French in time for the General Assembly. However, Fr. Rybolt is having difficulty obtaining pictures from some of the provinces for this last volume. We want this commemorative volume to be truly representative of the entire Congregation, so please respond to Fr. Rybolt’s next request when you receive it.

*CONFRERES IN DIFFICULTY:* We reviewed a document prepared by the Secretary General on those confreres absent from the Congregation in this calendar year, 2014. The document also contains information about confreres who have left the Congregation since 2011.

*REPORT OF GENERAL ECONOMO:* Fr. Joe Geders updated us on various matters, including a possible sale of a house on our property at the Curia, formerly used as a convent. Due to the alternations made by previous tenants without our knowledge, we must submit to re-inspections by the Commune of Rome, and gain approval to sell the building, for which we do have a buyer.

## **INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**

We evaluated our International Missions with the goal to strengthen them in the long term.

We decided that as a follow-up to the 2013 promulgation of the revised International Missions Statutes, the Superior General and Council would begin a program for new missionaries, designed to meet their individual needs. Fathers Mathew Kallammakal, Assistant General for the Missions, and Stanislav Zontak, Assistant General for Ongoing Formation, will coordinate formulating this program. At next Tempo Forte, they will present a draft of their proposal.

This program will include in-house materials on our charism, a study of the International Mission Statutes and document on missions, and academic resources on missiology. It was also recommended we organize a gathering of the mission superiors. We are tentatively considering holding such a meeting in September 2015 in Rome. The focus will be on the above-mentioned matters, and the “Practical Guide for the Local Superior.” We envision this type of meeting to be held every six years to coincide with the administration of a Superior General and Council.

Finally, we will study more in-depth the reports sent by mission superiors that are submitted to us twice yearly. The reason for this closer examination is to bring about greater stability and maturity in these missions for the good of the Congregation.

*STATUS REPORTS ON MISSIONS:* We then studied specific reports on the status of our International Missions. *From El Alto, Bolivia*, all seems well at this time with the mission and confreres. *From Cochabamba:* We reviewed the community plan presented by confreres of this mission. *From Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands*, we carefully studied reports from both these missions. Both places are seeking greater stability in each mission. Thus, we need confreres willing to do seminary formation (particularly teaching philosophy and theology), and parish and pastoral work. *From Puntas Arenas:* We reviewed an evaluation of the first months of this new mission, which is being done in collaboration with the Province of Chile. The confreres have a solid contract and a good working relationship with the local Bishop.

*From Angola:* This mission has been undergoing some transitions. Fr. José Ramirez Martinez returned after the death of his dear mother. Fr. Jason Christian Soto Herrera assists him. Both are awaiting the arrival of two other missionaries in the process of getting their paperwork and visas. *From Tunisia:* Fr. Narcisse Djerambete Yotobumbeti is the latest arrival in Tunis. From the region of Cameroon, he is originally from Chad. He joins Fr. Firmin Mola Mbalo of the Province of Toulouse. *From Chad:* They are making progress in this mission, building a school and a parish building. It is a great help, as they had been celebrating Mass outdoors and under a tree. *From Benin:* The three Polish confreres at this new mission are working well. Things are calm, and confreres live a simple lifestyle, working steadily to increase their outreach to the poor.

As you know, the recently released Mission Appeal Letter lists details on these and other needs of the International Missions. Please reflect on them and be generous in your response.

*VINCENTIAN FAMILY:* Fr. Eli Chaves, the Assistant General for the Vincentian Family, gave the Council an update. The Vincentian Family in Brazil had a follow-up workshop on systemic change, and in Columbia, moderators of the Vincentian Family met, including confreres, Daughters of Charity, and laity. In Italy, members of lay missionary groups gathered to form MISEVI Italy, with the hope they will join MISEVI International. Finally, an ongoing formation session for the Vincentian Family in Latin America will be held in Guatemala in March 2015.

*PROPOSED SECRETARIAT FOR THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY:* The Superior General gave an update on the status of the recent proposal

for a Secretariat of the Vincentian Family. This new secretariat would entail a shift from the responsibility of the General Curia in Rome to that of the Vincentian Family, although the Superior General would oversee its functioning. The Vincentian Family Executive Committee will meet in January 2015 to discuss and decide on this proposal.

*AIC GENERAL ASSEMBLY:* The General Assembly of AIC will be held in Guatemala later this year. The Congregation has contributed a donation to the supplement some of their expenses.

*DEPAUL INTERNATIONAL:* We received a letter of resignation from Fr. Dan Borlik from the Board of Directors of Depaul International. Fr. Dan served as the board representative of the Superior General. He recommended Fr. J. Patrick Murphy of the Western Province (USA) to succeed him. The Council supported submitting this recommendation for approval by the board.

*CONFERENCES OF VISITORS:* The APVC (Asia Pacific Visitors Conference) will meet in February 2015. The Superior General and Fr. Mathew Kallammakal will attend to participate in a Vincentian Family meeting in India. In the report received from CEVIM (Conference of European Visitors), Fathers Stanislav Zontak and Giuseppe Turati described a meeting organized for young confreres last summer in Krakow. Over thirty attended, and the next gathering is in Barcelona in April 2015. The next meeting of CLAPVI (Conference of Latin American Visitors) is in Medellin, Colombia this fall and Fr. Eli Chaves will attend.

We received a report from COVIAM (Conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar). They met in July in Alexandria, Egypt, and announced that their program for formators would be moving from Kenya to either Nigeria or Tanzania. COVIAM expressed gratitude to the confreres of the Province of the West, USA for their years of service to formators of their provinces. The Superior General gave a brief update on the status of the NCV (National Conference of Visitors, USA.) The new conference president is Fr. Ray Van Dorpe, Visitor of the Western Province. The Eastern and New England Provinces are in discussion of possible reconfiguration.

## **CURIA CALENDAR THROUGH 2014**

The Council reviewed our calendars from October to December, along with our upcoming canonical visitations, ordinary scheduled Council meetings, and to set the dates for Tempo Forte meetings in 2015. What follows is a summary of the schedule of the Superior General in the coming months. In October, the Superior General visited the Province of the Orient (Lebanon) to attend meetings in Jerusalem. After that, he traveled to Sardinia, Italy to attend a celebration of the

feast of Blessed Giuseppina Nicola, a Daughter of Charity who served the poor in that region. Then the Superior General and Fr. Stanislav Zontak made an informal visit to countries in Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

In November, the Superior General will participate in the first General Assembly of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Rome at the Casa Immacolata. He will then go to Haiti to attend the wedding of Yasmine Cajuste, who is the International President of the Vincentian Marian Youth. Then he will make a visit to South Sudan to meet with Fr. Manuel Ginete of the Province of the Philippines, to see the work he is doing to reestablish the Church there through a program sponsored by the Union of Superior Generals. After he returns to Rome, he will attend meetings of the Societies of Apostolic Life and the Union of Superior Generals.

In December, The Superior General will be in Rome for Tempo Forte meetings, along with the annual gathering of Mass and a meal with our priest-confreres studying at the Leonine. He will then visit the Daughters of Charity in Northern Africa, soon to join the newly reconfigured Province in Southern Spain. He will also visit with our confreres in Tunisia. A visit with the Daughters in Algeria will occur in Mauritania, as the Algerian government does not easily grant visas. He will spend Christmas at the Curia with the confreres. On January 1, 2015, the Superior General will go to Paris for the annual New Year's Day address to the Daughters of Charity.

Please know of my good wishes and prayers for each of you. May the Lord Jesus bless and sustain you and may St. Vincent continue to intercede for the good of our Little Company.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

# Tempo Forte Meeting Summary

December 1-5, 2014

Dear Confreres,

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

December signifies the start of *Tempo Forte*, but this time we decided to have the retreat day that introduces it at the end of the week, not the beginning. We made this adjustment to include our student-priest confreres studying in Rome who were coming to join us for Mass and a meal. Our topic for reflection was the *vow of stability*. Fr. Giuseppe Turati gave a conference and led a group discussion. Then we enjoyed the Eucharist, some fellowship, and a nice *pranzo* together.

We began *Tempo Forte* with updates on various aspects of governance of the Congregation. First, we reviewed preparations for the **2016 General Assembly**. With us during Tempo Forte was the *Preparatory Commission for the General Assembly* who were holding their second planning meeting. They presented us with a draft of the schedule for the assembly and redaction of the directory, both of which will go to the Visitors for review and comment. We also approved the “logo” for the General Assembly, which is accompanied with a video explaining its meaning.

The *Ratio Formationis* has been completed and approved by the General Council. Its promulgation with the text *will be published in the December issue of Vincentiana* in French, Spanish, and English. A meeting of **Vincentians who serve as Bishops** will take place in Rome June 23 to 25, 2015 at the Casa Immacolata. The coordinators for this gathering are Bishop Varghese Thottamkara, from the Apostolic Vicariate in Nekemte, Ethiopia; Fr. Javier Alvarez, Vicar General; and Fr. Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel, Postulator and Procurator General.

A first-ever meeting of all *Superiors serving in the International Missions* will take place in Rome in September 2015. Superiors from provincial and regional missions will also be invited. Coordinating this meeting is Fr. Mathew Kallammakal, the Assistant General, who oversees the International Missions, and Fr. Justin Eke, a missionary assigned to Papua New Guinea currently studying in Rome. The topics covered will include proper preparation for mission work; mission in a multicultural setting; the importance of enculturation; economic matters affecting the mission; and studying relevant documents of the Congregation, such as the *Ratio Missionum*, *Statutes for the International Missions* and a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*.

Finally, the General Council has decided to undertake a group retreat in Jerusalem in May 2016 before we end our six-year term of service to the Congregation. This retreat will include a time of evaluation in order to prepare for the General Assembly, which starts soon after.

We received a report from Fr. John Maher, ***Director of Communications, who alerted us to ongoing problems in finding translators*** for our publications, web sites, and the Secretariat. Of particular concern is the dire lack of French translators. We need help with translating from French to English, French to Spanish, and English to Spanish. We were long on discussion but short on immediate solutions. Hopefully, confreres reading this circular will be sympathetic and assist us in doing this difficult, but essential work for the service of the Congregation. Volunteers are always welcome, and their contributions will insure the publications of the Congregation are available to more people. On behalf of the Council, I thank the confreres and members of the Vincentian Family who faithfully serve as translators. We depend on your help!

The Council asked Fr. Maher to continue moving forward the Fam-Vin website strategic plan. He is working with Fr. John Freund, web master, and Fr. Joe Agostino to revamp the Vincentian Family website. They are trying to form a team of persons who will represent various cultures and countries to make the website more international and strengthen our ongoing formation efforts for the Vincentian Family. The Council believes that a thorough revision of the Fam-Vin web site is a good way to promote our Vincentian charism and invite dialogue. Our yearly theme for 2015 is “Collaboration in the Vincentian Family.” As you know, this is the way we are integrating the “Lines of Action” from the General Assembly into the life of the Congregation.

We had discussion and evaluated the ***CIF (Center for International Formation) program***. I want to thank Fathers Dan Borlik and Adam Bandura for their report and the great work they have done in planning and evaluating various CIF programs. This year, CIF not only held its programs and workshops in Paris, but also went ‘on the road’ with a program in Eastern Europe. We will continue to evaluate CIF in 2015, as Fathers Dan and Adam will continue to collaborate.

We had our yearly meeting with ***Fr. Robert Maloney*** who serves as ***President of Franz Foundation***. We discussed the progress made in building up Patrimonial Funds for developing provinces. We spoke about ways the Congregation and Franz Foundation are working together to finalize our goal of fully funding the Patrimonial Funds. We thank God for a ***generous donation by the Province of Slovakia***, which brings us closer to attaining our Patrimonial Fund goal.

We discussed a project undertaken by the General Curia ***on helping provinces to become more self-sufficient***. This report will be sent to the Franz Foundation for their review. It is our hope that, with Franz

Foundation support, workshops on “Wise Asset Management Workshops” and assistance from DBI, a consulting firm, we can help provinces to become self-sufficient. At their January meeting, the Franz Foundation will discuss the viability of several project proposals we submitted concerning Vincentian parishes. We look forward to the results their review.

The Superior General reported on his recent meeting of the **Union of Superior Generals** that he attended. Topics discussed included impressions by the Superior Generals on the October Synod of Bishops on the Family, and a document the group is formulating on the relationship between the local bishop and those in consecrated life or societies of apostolic life. The Superior General also reported on “**Solidarity with South Sudan**”, a program spearheaded by the USG for religious congregations to work together and re-establish the Church in a new, unstable country.

I noted that our confrere, **Fr. Manuel Ginete** has been working in South Sudan under the auspices of this project of the USG for four years. I shared my impression of this project and my visit with him in South Sudan last November. Fr. Manny has concentrated his efforts in the area of pastoral education to assist bishops, clergy, and lay leaders in assuming leadership positions to fulfill the mission of the Church in South Sudan. He lives in a simple, inter-congregational community in Juba City, the capital of South Sudan. You can read about his work in the September 2104 issue of *Vincentiana* where he was interviewed.

We received a verbal report from Fr. Maloney on the “**Wise Asset Management**” workshops that he and a team have conducted. They have made presentations in the **Provinces of North and South India**. Their next workshop is in the new **Region of Kenya**, which is affiliated with the Western Province, USA. It will be open to Vincentian Family members in Nairobi. These workshops are designed for superiors, local or provincial economies, and people who want to learn how to write grants or learn how to seek funding to advance the Vincentian charism. These workshops are held twice a year, so we recommended various provinces over the next two years.

In terms of economic issues, **we reviewed the budget proposals for 2015**. We approved the budgets for the International Missions. Fr. Joe Geders, Econome General, distributed a **document to the Council from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life**. It provides valuable and practical information on how to administer the economic goods of a Congregation, and gives guidelines for proper financial procedures and controls according to current best practices. We also approved **new members for the Finance Committee** for the Congregation in place of those who finished their terms of service.

We shifted our discussion to the *International Missions of the Congregation*. By January 25, our mission in Angola will increase to four members, which we believe will help stabilize both the community and its mission work. We studied *reports from the Missions in Tunisia, Chad, and Benin, and the future mission in Alaska, USA*. To help stabilize our international missions, and to help our confreres there mature in their ministry, *we have proposed a workshop for the superiors of the International Missions in 2015 in Rome*.

In addition, *we are initiating a course in formation in our International Missions*. Both proposals were the work of Fr. Stanislaw Zontak, Assistant General. With Council approval, they will be enacted by Fr. Mathew Kallammakal, Assistant General who oversees the International Missions. The course for new missionaries will involve instruction at Pontifical Universities in Rome, such as the Gregorian or the Urbaniana. There will also be preparation and discussion of Vincentian missions and administrative aspects of life in the missions from the perspective of the Congregation. We will begin this new venture in fall, 2015 with at least two confreres who are preparing for the International Missions.

We reviewed *three applications of confreres wishing to go to the International Missions*. We also reviewed *two requests from Bishops for missionaries* to serve in their dioceses: one from *Central Africa*, and another from our confrere Bishop in *Madagascar*. We were unable to respond affirmatively to either request. If confreres from provinces located in these mission areas wish to come forward and volunteer to serve there, we would be supportive. But *we have decided as a Council not to accept any new missions now*, so we can concentrate on stabilizing and better developing our current International Missions.

As for *Vincentian Family* matters, Fr. Joseph Agostino, the Coordinator of the *Vincentian Family Haitian Initiative*, has asked that the Superior General reappoint Fr. Joseph Foley to this board for another three-year term, which he did. Fr. Faustino Burgos, Visitor of the Province of Puerto Rico, has agreed to serve on this board, replacing Fr. Raphael Verlux. I thank Fr. Raphael for his three years of service on this commission.

We had a report from various Conferences of Visitors. Most noteworthy was a report of the *National Conferences of Visitors, USA*, which brought news of an active discussion occurring about reconfiguration between the Eastern Province and the New England Province. We then had an interchange of information regarding our calendars for the next three months, and we took time to map out and schedule various canonical visitations that will occur through the end of this administration in 2016. We also finalized the dates of General Council meetings in 2015, and those of the Tempo Forte meetings as well.

The following is the schedule of the Superior General for the next three months.

As in past years, he will go to Paris On December 31 to visit the Daughters of Charity and offer a New Year's Day conference. Then he will visit with a local community of confreres in the Province of Paris. From January 3-8, he will visit the Province of the Congo. From January 10-12 he will be back in Paris to meet with the Vincentian Family Executive Committee, consists of the heads of the four branches of the Family: the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, International Association of Charity (AIC), and Society of St. Vincent de Paul. From January 14-18, he will go to Madrid, Spain to meet with the International Council of the Vincentian Marian Youth. January 21-27 he will be in Bogotá, Colombia for the International Council meeting of MISEVI (Vincentian lay missionaries.) At this time, he will join confreres in the Province of Colombia on January 25 for the annual celebration of Foundation Day.

For most of the month of February, the Superior General will visit the Northern and Southern Provinces of India. While there, he will participate in the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Visitors Conference, and will take part in the annual Vincentian Family gathering in India. He returns to Rome for meetings and Tempo Forte from March 2-6. Following these meetings, from March 12-22, he and Fr. Stanislav Zontak will travel to Africa to visit the International Missions in Benin and Chad. On March 25, the Superior General will be in Paris to celebrate Mass and give a conference to the Daughters of Charity as they renew their vows. From March 26 to April 12, he will visit Bolivia to celebrate Holy Week with the Daughters of Charity taking part in their unique "evangelization river boat." This will be followed by a visit and retreat with confreres of El Alto and Cochabamba, two sites of the international mission in Bolivia. His time there will conclude with a gathering of the Vincentian Family.

As we enter into and enjoy the blessed seasons of Advent and Christmas, I pray that the Lord's deep and abiding love may be with you and bring you peace. Recall the Scripture we proclaim on Christmas vigil Mass; "*The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all*" (Ti. 2:11). May God's grace and peace be yours this holy season and throughout the year ahead.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

## Lines of Action

First General Assembly of the Association of the Miraculous Medal  
(November 3-10, 2014)

Rome, 8 December 2014

*To All members of the Vincentian Family:*

My dear brothers and sisters:

As we embrace Advent to pray and prepare for the coming of the “Word made flesh” (Jn. 1:14), it is an ideal time to reflect on Mary, the Mother of the Lord. Her “*Fiat*” – a full submission to the will of God as she entered into the Incarnation – has resounded over the ages as it does today. Our Lady remains the first and most faithful disciple of the Lord.

The gift of the Miraculous Medal to Saint Catherine Laboure was an expression of Mary’s desire to lead all people to her son, Jesus. For over a century, the Association of the Miraculous Medal has promoted devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal to receive the abundant graces of God through Mary, who fortifies us in a world hungry for justice and mercy.

I was honored to preside and participate in the first-ever General Assembly of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Rome from November 2-9, 2014. This joyous gathering of a hundred participants from across the globe strengthened our common bond to promote devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and to engage in works of charity and justice of the Association.

The participants in this General Assembly formulated the enclosed “Lines of Action” which I ask you to reflect on during this Advent season. In the coming year, I request that the various branches of our Vincentian Family, particularly those with a special devotion to the Miraculous Medal to pray, reflect, and discuss how to promote awareness and further devotion to Our Lady and the pious and charitable works of this wonderful Association.

May Our Lord bless you and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal intercede for you!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

**ASSOCIATION OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL**  
**General Assembly**  
**(NOVEMBER 3-10, 2014)**  
**LINES OF ACTION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Miraculous Medal is a great evangelizing and transforming force for all who wear it with faith. To come to the foot of the altar, to receive the abundance of the graces of God through Mary, fortifies us in a world hungry for justice and mercy.

Since 1909, we, the members of the Miraculous Medal Association, consciously aware of Mary as our Mother, promote Mary's request to St Catherine Laboure in 1830 – to wear this medal of her image. With this gift of God through Mary, we give the medal as ministry to all, especially the poor, the sick, the thirsty, the hungry, the naked, the oppressed, the imprisoned and all who seek the Kingdom of God (Mt. 25:31-46). The fruits of this ministry that is, the deeper love of God experienced in the poor, evangelizes us to receive God more fully, thus impelling creativity in our ministry unto infinity.

**INTERNATIONAL LEVEL CHALLENGES**

• **COMMUNICATION:**

*Line of Action:* Create a network of (local, national and international) communications to exchange experiences, activities, information, formation, data, techniques and specialties.

• **FORMATION:**

*1<sup>st</sup> Line of Action:* Within the framework of the New Evangelization, which hopes to reach out to all of humanity (Mt. 28:19-20), the International Council will offer clear criteria for continuous formation in the Association. This formation will include the Church's social doctrine, ecclesiology, scriptures, Vincentian identity, ecumenism and other material of entities that strive to empower the poor.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Line of Action:* The International Council will suggest optional ways to do the initial formation of New Members.

• **FAMILY REALITY:**

*Line of Action:* The International Council will send to the national councils a circular letter to help them see families as a place of evangelization thus encouraging them to do home visits with the Virgin Mary in ever-creative ways. These letters will coincide with the different events leading up to and including the World Meeting of Families (September 2015).

## NATIONAL LEVEL CHALLENGES

- **FORMATION:**

*Line of Action:* The National Council will extend its formation program to include the member's family.

- **SENSE OF BELONGING:**

*Line of Action:* The National Council will encourage activities of collaboration with other members of the Vincentian Family. These include, but are not limited to, working on common projects, gatherings, sharing common formation activities, networking, spiritual retreats, etc., especially with the Vincentian Marian Youth.

- Define the mission and commitment of the National Delegates during and after the General Assembly.

*Line of Action:* the delegates have the responsibility to communicate to all its members' information obtained in the assembly before the end of the year.

- **SYSTEMIC CHANGE:**

*Line of Action:* The AMM is involved in formation and service with the poor in order to enable them to be protagonists of their own destiny, through projects of Systemic Change, always conscious that they are our "Lords and our Masters."

## LOCAL LEVEL CHALLENGES

- **GROWTH OF THE AMM IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY:**

*1<sup>st</sup> Line of Action:* Give witness to the joy of our faith and of belonging to the AMM in our families, in our work place, in the local parish, etc. and in our ministries (families experiencing difficulties, street children, nearness to the sick, etc.)

*2<sup>nd</sup> Line of Action:* Work together with all the branches of the Vincentian Family (volunteers, sympathizers, etc.)

*"Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side" (Revelation 3, 20).*

**O MARY CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN,  
PRAY FOR US WHO HAVE RECOURSE TO YOU.**

# Meditation Moment: Reflection by the General Curia on the Vow of Stability

## **The historical context**

Our way of being faithful to our charism in the Church has a special feature in the vow of stability, which all members of the Congregation of the Mission profess in addition to the three “classic” vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Why do we have this vow? What is its origin? What are the reasons why it was introduced? What is its spiritual and apostolic meaning? What is its relevance? We know that the vow of stability is not unique to our Congregation, nor was it invented by St. Vincent. It was already in practice in other communities, and in his writings, St. Vincent made reference to how this vow was understood and lived in those communities.

In particular, he referred to the vow of stability as lived by the Benedictines. The profession of Benedictine stability required making a commitment to live and die in the same monastery, because a monk was “born” in a monastery he entered and was thus committed to that monastery for life. With the emergence of the mendicant orders and the lifestyle that characterized them, the idea was born to “conventualize”, accentuating a focus to emphasize living together. In this context, stability in the community came from common life, not only the geographic locale of the monastery. In time, it was seen by some as too narrow, like the walls of the monastery, and lacking a deeper connection and more internal commitment to stability. It was not only a vow to live in a particular place, but within a given institution.

Then came the Society of Jesus, who in addition to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, took a fourth vow: to persevere in the Company after completion of studies. In this way, the Jesuits bound their members to live and die in the Company for the “greater glory of God,” thus promoting stability and consecration to the vowed life.

It is possible that St. Vincent was aware of these variations on the vow of stability, as he once studied canon law. He likely took the idea and adapted it to the specific situation of the Congregation of the Mission. In particular, St. Vincent may have drafted this vow from that of the choice made by the Society of Jesus, placing it as a fourth vow in addition to the three required ones. In fact, many religious congregations founded in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries created a vow of stability or an oath of perseverance. The founders of these congrega-

tions were concerned about the legal weakness of their vows, which at that time were nothing more than “simple vows” and were easily dispensable, according to canon law.

For Saint Vincent, the vow of stability was not only a ‘legal response’ for the good of the community. In fact, the legal relationship was not justified by itself, but the fourth vow of stability was geared to promote fidelity to the charism of the Congregation. Fidelity to one’s vocation is more than just a legal term to bind and to keep one tethered to a community. The history of religious communities shows that not all those who enter will persevere, nor those who are legally members will be fully faithful to the commitments they have undertaken.

Like all founders, St. Vincent wanted those who entered the Congregation to remain, but it was inevitable that some would leave. How did St. Vincent react when this occurred? We know that in some cases he was glad to see some leave, and readily granted them a release, due to the difficult manner of those who left. Yet at other times, he seemed to feel one’s departure could do considerable harm to the Congregation, and clearly expressed this idea in his correspondence

We do not know the number of those who persevered while St. Vincent was still alive. From his correspondence, we see he was concerned about those who left the Congregation. He was quite convinced that perseverance was the best guarantee to achieve salvation and to preserve the Congregation. This concern materialized when in the introduction of a fourth vow of stability which reads as follows:

***“I vow to dedicate myself to the salvation of the poor of the country all the time of my life in this Congregation”*** (cf. C. 58, formula c).

The idea of stability appeared early in the mind of St. Vincent before formal approval of the Congregation of the Mission from Rome. St. Vincent believed that if there is no explicit statement to persevere until death, then there is no true bond. From this, a question that easily arises is as follows: if the vows are perpetual, what sense does the vow of stability make? St. Vincent probably thought that our vows (private and simple) created a constraint that was legally a weak one, and he wanted to give greater force precisely through an explicit vow of stability.

On the other hand, none of the three “classic” vows (poverty, chastity, and obedience) have as their direct objective one’s perseverance for life in the Congregation. St. Vincent knew that the Congregation, founded not as a religious community, but as a ‘secular entity’ (now called a ‘Society of Apostolic Life’), sought a specific commitment, other than that derived from the three ‘classic’ vows required for religious life. The ‘fourth vow’ helped the Congregation to establish and express its uniqueness within the Church structure. In its history and import,

we can say that our fourth vow of stability is a special feature of a Society of Apostolic Life.

The words St. Vincent used in presenting the vow of stability are very clear: *“To live and die in the Congregation of the Mission to evangelize the poor.”* But as our history shows, the issue was not resolved once and for all. We know that some General Assemblies have had to discuss and debate the merits of certain works undertaken by provinces, such as parishes and colleges.

The present Constitutions have tackled this problem in two ways: calling for a revision of the works, and offering criteria to judge if works are in accord with the goals of the Congregation. Yet the issue has not been definitively resolved. Indeed, some believe that the lack of a clear awareness of our specificity as a Congregation is still a major concern. A sad example of how this affects the Congregation can be seen in the number of confreres who leave and ask to be incardinated in a diocese.

### **Some fundamental texts: The Instruction on Vows**

Perhaps to assist in clarifying our identity, the 1992 General Assembly asked the Superior General and Council to provide an “Instruction on the Vows”, with particular attention given to the vow of stability. This “Instruction on the Vows” was written and then published in *Vincentiana* in the January-February, 1996 edition.

A novelty of this “Instruction on the Vows” is that the vow of stability is mentioned first, thus placed ahead of the other three. This relocation indicates a change in sensitivity: it is not just a matter of importance, but the specificity of this vow to the other three. This specificity is clearly expressed in the introduction to the chapter devoted to this vow. Introduction The same goes for two other interesting statements: first, there was a time when St. Vincent thought that the only vow essential for the preservation of the Congregation was the vow of stability. Secondly, it is the same title that St. Vincent gives as its name. Obviously, the vow of stability is a fundamental question in our history in the founding of our Congregation, and not just a recent innovation. In fact, the location of this vow before the other three suggests that in some ways, the vow of stability strengthens us in living out the other vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

### **The Vows (Instruction, Ch. 2, § 3)**

In the third paragraph of the chapter two, it expressly states that the three constituent elements of the vow of stability are clearly expressed in articles 28 and 39 of the Constitutions. The three elements are the “what, where, and why” of our commitment: loyalty and perseverance for life (‘what’); in the Congregation of the Mission (‘where’), to follow

Christ evangelizing the poor ('why'). It goes on to say that, in practice, this vow obliges us to realize the end of the Congregation, which is, "carrying out the activities prescribed by the superiors according to the Constitutions and Statutes" (C 39).

Then there is an important annotation: "*The latter clarification requires that all the members are responsible for ensuring the Vincentian character of our work*", although obviously there is a particular obligation for local superiors and major superiors, because they have the mandate to make decisions on the works and ministries confreres undertake.

### **The Virtues (Instruction, Ch. 2, § 4)**

Then, in paragraph four of chapter two, the Instruction discusses the "virtues" associated with stability. It begins with an interesting statement: what our tradition has indicated with the word "stability" could be better expressed today in the word "fidelity": fidelity for life to Vincentian charism in the Congregation of the Mission. The text clearly says that this 'fidelity,'

- commits us to go beyond minimum requirements to embrace ministries entrusted to us;
- cannot be reduced to simple obedience;
- calls us to a life consistent with all dimensions of the Vincentian charism.

In other words, today the vow of stability, and more so the virtue of loyalty, requires we do the work of discerning ministries. It is in fact, a double discernment: personal and communal. This presumes a personal response, which means accepting the call to follow Jesus, Evangelizer of the poor. But this discernment must also involve the community, because our Founder sent the first missionaries out in a "common mission".

### **How to cultivate the virtue of fidelity (Instruction, Ch. 2, § 5)**

Paragraph five of chapter two in the Instruction is titled "Living Stability" and proposes six concrete suggestions to observe the vow of stability and, more importantly, to cultivate the virtue of loyalty. Of these, three appear particularly topical today.

First is the deep conviction that the Lord loves us as members of the Congregation of the Mission. This provides us with a profound certainty that will sustain us in times of crisis which sooner or later, we all encounter in living our vocation. Then, in preserving and enhancing the Vincentian character of our ministries, we find that "*apostolic works, after careful examination, that are no longer responsive to the*

*vocation of the Congregation, are gradually abandoned*" (S. 1). This is true especially today, when a lack of specificity in many of our ministries can be a reason why confreres request dispensation from vows and seek incardination in a diocese.

This leads us to consider another possible cause of leaving the Congregation: when there is no direct contact with the poor, we lack experience in what is the main purpose of our vocation. This weakens the sense of identity and belonging to the Congregation. The Instruction rightly notes that "*all members of the Congregation should have the opportunity to experience the joy of direct contact with the poor*" because they "*teach us many gospel values and encourage us to persevere in our vocation*" (C 12.3).

### **Current status of the vow of stability today**

The vow of stability is not only important today as it was in the time of St. Vincent, but it takes on a special urgency in today's world. The culture we live in makes it seem particularly difficult to make definitive commitments, both in religious life and among the laity.

The last paragraph of chapter four refers to a "double prophetic function" of this vow today, explaining that, as Vincentians, we are called to offer to the society in which we live a double sign of contradiction: one sign in overcoming the instability of the current society; and another as a sign of solidarity with the weak and marginalized. It is a function of particular importance in today's secularized world, which may be typified by a double weakness: an obvious dislike for permanent commitment, and a disregard for the most vulnerable and marginalized of society.

This leads us to consider the relevance of our mission in today's world, beyond the obvious crisis of vocations and instability present among some confreres. Precisely for this reason, in their training (initial and ongoing) it is very important to insist on understanding and acceptance of the Mission, along with a sense of belonging to the Congregation, two essential elements in our Vincentian vocation. The failure to do so has resulted in a number of our members who, in recent years, left the Congregation to join the diocesan clergy, while desiring to remain deeply Vincentian in spirit and devote oneself to the service of the poor.

Given this reality, the Visitor has a serious responsibility to accompany the confreres in his province who manifest forms of instability and discomfort, and to work with them before they come to the decision to ask for a dispensation from vows. It is "*important that the Visitors deepen what may be the most common causes of difficulty or defection of the confreres.*" A valuable contribution on this matter may be found in *Vincentiana*, 2013, issue N. 3.

In any case, any exit of a confrere from the community should not only be seen as a loss or misfortune, but an opportunity for those who remain to reflect on their vocation and reassess their way of living in fidelity to this vow. A search for stability and the virtue of loyalty has a personal aspect, but together they can present conditions and constraints on community life.

Another timely aspect of stability, both as a vow and virtue, is that it can greatly assist in moving forward two issues of particular importance today: the international nature of the Congregation, and the movement toward reconfiguration of provinces. To the extent that this virtue strengthens an internal sense of belonging to the Congregation, it reduces provincialism, often prevalent among confreres, and promotes availability for international projects. One final thought worthy of consideration: we should not underestimate or minimize a link between instability of individual confreres and the choices their province makes. If there are no clearly Vincentian works in which to engage, a confrere can develop a “crisis” (i.e., starting to question) a sense of belonging to a Congregation that does not seem dedicated to specific activities or other forms of an apostolate. From that time on, other ways of life may appear more desirable.

In conclusion, the vow of stability, and as with the “other three vows” must be cultivated continuously, otherwise, it weakens and gradually loses consistency. It is ‘like a flower that must be cultivated daily so it does not decay. Many means are possible, but all are designed to promote a growing and full love for our charism and vocation. You cannot be faithful to what you do not love, and you cannot fully and finally love that to which you have not given your heart.

Just because he was aware of this, St. Vincent asked the Lord for the gift of fidelity, which is beyond the powers of humanity. This appears in prayer that he himself formed at the end of the conference to the Daughters of Charity of the September 22, 1647:

*“We are weak, my God, and able to succumb to the first assault. You have called us out of your pure mercy. May your infinite goodness be pleased to keep us in this vocation. For our part, with the help of your holy grace, we will strive with all our strength to give to you the services and the truth that you expect from us. Give us, then, my God, the grace to persevere unto death: I ask it through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, confident that He will grant this to me.”*

# FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

## Annual Mission Appeal

Rome, October 19 2014

*World Mission Sunday*

*“It is our vocation not to go just into a parish or a diocese, but the whole world. And to do what? To set people’s hearts ablaze and to do what the Son of Man did... to light a fire on the earth in order to set it aflame with his love” (St. Vincent, CCD: XII, 207).*

Dear Confreres,

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

In October, as the Church calls us to reflect on our missionary vocation, it is also time for our annual Mission Appeal, which supports our international and provincial missions. This appeal encourages confreres to support the missions by volunteering, praying for our missionaries, and offering financial support by strengthening these missions.

Let me begin by telling you a mission story. Fr. Manny Ginete, a confrere serving in South Sudan, shared his enthusiasm for his mission with me in a recent letter. He has served on the Solidarity with South Sudan (SSS) pastoral team since 2011. This is a mission project of the Union of Superiors General in Rome, who they send religious with expertise to help rebuild and renew the Church in war-torn South Sudan. Fr. Manny invited me to ‘come and see’ his life and work there. After describing his ministry with other religious, Fr. Manny observed that:

*“The bigger picture here is the task of building up the local Church—something our Spanish ‘Padres Paules’ had painstakingly done in the Philippines, by their formation of local and diocesan clergy and lay leaders. I see my role in South Sudan as no different from that of our beloved Spanish missionaries who established the Church and the Congregation there. It has convinced me the ministry I am providing*

*here in South Sudan is as Vincentian as any we do. If we truly want to serve the poorest of the poor, we have come to South Sudan."*

I am looking forward to my visit with Fr. Manny and the other dedicated religious next month!

For this years' Mission Appeal, I am excited to introduce a new website for our International Missions. Entitled, "***The Joy of the Gospel.***" their web address is [www.gospel-joy.org](http://www.gospel-joy.org). It provides an overview of our International Missions and the confreres who serve there. The web site also provides a way for you to contact individual confreres via the web site. Please take time to review this web site and see the many great mission efforts made by our confreres.

In this letter, I wish to share information with you on the international and provincial missions of the Congregation. All are in need of personnel and financial support, so please read and reflect on this 2014 Mission Appeal. Ask the Lord Jesus and St. Vincent for the grace to respond as best you are able. Following the listing of these missions, you will find the following:

- Criteria for the selection of volunteers for these missions;
- Information (next steps) for those volunteering; and
- How to contribute to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund.

### **CURRENT LIST OF INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS AND CONFRERES WHO SERVE**

#### **AFRICA**

**Angola:** Established in 2012, this Portuguese-speaking mission offers pastoral work and accompaniment of the Vincentian Family. Confreres currently serving there are *José Ramirez Martinez, and Jason Christian Soto Herrera. Two additional confreres will be arriving soon.*

**Benin:** Established in 2013, the confreres in this French-speaking mission engage in pastoral ministry, assist the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal, and accompany the Vincentian Family. The confreres now serving there are *Stanislav Deszcz, Jaloslaw Lawrenz, and Rafael Brukarczyk.*

**Chad:** Established in 2011 and staffed by COVIAM (Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar), the confreres in this French-speaking mission do parish work. They are *Roch Alexander Ramili-jaona, Onyeachi Sunday Ugwu, and Esigbemi Ambrose Umetietie.*

**Tunisia:** Established in 2011, this French and English-speaking mission involves parish work and charitable assistance with CARITAS. The confreres serving there are *Firmin Mola Mbalo and Narcisse Djerambete Yotobumbeti.*

## AMERICA

### *Latin America*

**Bolivia, El Alto:** Established in 1994, this Spanish-speaking mission to indigenous people involves rural pastoral ministry and lay formation. The confreres serving there are *Aidan Rooney, Cyrille De Nan-teuil, Diego Pla, and Janez Cerar.*

**Bolivia, Cochabamba:** Established in 2009, this Spanish-speaking mission involves pastoral and parochial ministry. The confreres serving there are *David Paniagua, Jorge Manrigue Castro, and Luis Miguel Montano Flores.*

**Puntas Arenas:** Established in 2013, this Spanish-speaking mission involves pastoral ministry to Punta Arenas in southernmost Chile, next to Tierra del Fuego. These confreres serve here: *Angel Ignacio Garrido Santiago, Pablo Alexis Vargas Ruiz, and Margarito Martinez Gonzalez.*

### *North America*

**Alaska, USA:** Soon to be established, these confreres serve the growing Hispanic community living in the Archdiocese of Anchorage. The languages are Spanish and English. Confreres soon to serve are *Arnoldo Hernandez Rodriguez, and two confreres from Colombia awaiting VISAS.*

## ASIA

**Solomon Islands:** Established in 1993 as one of the first international missions, the apostolates here involve seminary formation and pastoral and parish ministry. The languages spoken are Pidgin and English. The confreres who serve there are: *Jose Manjaly, Jeff Harvey, Raúl Castro, Tewolde Negussie Teclmicael, Greg Cooney, Thomas Christiawan, Varghese Ayyampilly, and Antony Punnoth, who will arrive soon.*

**Papua New Guinea:** Begun in 2003, this mission encompasses several dioceses. Besides seminary formation work in Port Moresby, the confreres are engaged in rural parishes and missions. The language spoken is Pidgin and English. The confreres who serve there include *Vladimir Malota, Georges Maylaa, Homero Marin, Marceliano Oabel, Justin Eke, Emmanuel Lapaz, Jacek Tendej, and Neil Lams.*

## CURRENT NEEDS OF PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

In addition to the needs of the International Missions, provinces and vice-provinces also have needs as well for confreres to assist in their work of missions. Below are several listings.

### **Province of China**

The Province of China continues to serve the pastoral needs of the people of Taiwan and mainland China. Confreres serve in a variety of ministries, and the language is Mandarin.

### **Province of Cuba**

Although considering reconfiguration with other provinces, the Province of Cuba has a serious shortage of personnel. The language is Spanish.

### **Province of Hungary**

This province, while small in number, has one of the youngest groups of confreres in the Congregation. They engage in various types of pastoral work. The language is Hungarian.

### **Vice Province of Mozambique**

This Vice-Province has works for the poor, seminary formation, and a mission in South Africa. However, they still depend on confreres from other provinces to continue their works. They welcome new members and the language is Portuguese.

### **Vice Province of Sts. Cyril & Methodius**

This Vice-Province has evolved and grown with native confreres from the Ukraine, and has found creative ways to meet the pastoral and material needs of the poor. With ministry in the Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, this vice-province welcomes confreres for short-term ministry as well as new members. The language is Russian.

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My brothers, as Pope Francis notes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, all members of the Body of Christ are called to be missionaries and evangelizers. This calling is deeply imbued in each of us by virtue of our Vincentian vocation. As our Holy Father wrote in his apostolic exhortation:

*“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, No. 27).*

This “missionary impulse” is inherent to our Vincentian charism. I ask you to reflect on the words of Pope Francis and review details in this letter and on the International Missions website: [www.gospel-joy.org](http://www.gospel-joy.org). Pray the Lord to awaken in you a desire to live the ‘missionary impulse’ in whatever way you are able. Consider if the Lord is calling

you to serve in one of these missions. Support our confreres who serve so generously in the missions by your prayer, financial support, and even by corresponding with them through the web site, which provides a page to do so.

In this “month of the missions” that the Church provides, let us resolve to do what St. Vincent called us to: *“To set people’s hearts ablaze and to do what the Son of Man did, who came to light a fire on the earth in order to set it aflame with his love.”*

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

### **CRITERION FOR SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSION ‘AD GENTES’**

As the realities of life in the international missions are challenging and totally different from that of a confrere’s home province, some criteria is required for selecting missionaries to serve in these places. Using the criteria below, the volunteer will be interviewed by someone from the General Council or by their representative.

- 1. *Missionaries must have emotional stability.*** Missionary work is hard! Those ministering cross-culturally, if they are to be effective, must learn to speak other languages, learn new cultures, and speak God’s eternal message in changing earthly contexts. Interpersonal relationships with co-workers, confreres who are also going through cultural stress and work anxiety, can often amplify this tension. Only the emotionally stable should make the commitment for long-term, cross-cultural missions.
- 2. *Missionaries must have spiritual maturity.*** They cannot effectively preach the Gospel by their own initiative and power. They are mere “jars of clay”, who demonstrate that the “all-surpassing power” employed in Christian ministry is “from God and not from us” (2 Cor. 4:7). Missions are thus a “supernatural work” ultimately accomplished by the power of God. Therefore, missionaries must be people who “fall on their knees before the Father” (Eph. 4:2) in prayer. They must also be committed to studying the Bible not only to prepare homilies and lessons, but also to reflect upon God’s will in their own lives.
- 3. *Missionaries must have an intimate relationship with God,*** one that will influence who they are and how they relate to others. They allow themselves to be increasingly transformed into God’s

likeness as they look upon Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Their spiritual maturity should lead them to **be effective teachers of the Word of God**. Teaching a Christian worldview as revealed by God in Sacred Scripture is integral to the missionary task. Therefore, missionaries sent to foreign mission fields should be those who have taught the Gospel in their own country and culture and have empathetically nurtured the faithful to Christian maturity.

4. ***Missionaries must have the aptitude and training*** to effectively build-up churches, nurture new Christians to maturity, and equip national church leaders for Christian service. These are essential tasks of missions. This must be done taking into account the local realities. They should not transport their own cultural church to the mission, but rather allow Gospel values to be implanted in the culture of the place where they serve. Missionaries must be trained to enter new cultures and lay the foundations of the Gospel.
5. ***Missionaries must have effective interpersonal communication skills***. These interpersonal abilities are largely formed through parental, familial and other relational influences in one's early life, and are difficult to learn as adults. Personalities are also influenced by culture, and vary by country and continent. Despite one's personality type, all missionaries must have the ability to empathetically enter into the culture where they will minister. This will also include the capacity to work and collaborate as a team.
6. ***Missionaries should have a pure motive***. A missionary should develop a clear and direct motivation for evangelization, a vision for the mission, and service to the poor; always keeping in mind that all this is ultimately for the glory of God alone. The dubious motives of personal gain and vain glory will always defeat the purpose and do harm to the mission and the missionary.

### **NEXT STEPS: INFORMATION FOR THOSE VOLUNTEERING**

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome by **November 23, 2014** or again by **February 23, 2015**, so we can review requests in our *Tempo Forte* meetings of December 2014 and March 2015.
2. It is helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for all missionaries.
3. While we have no automatic age cutoff established, it is necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.

4. Confreres who volunteer should inform the Visitor in their province that they have done so. The Superior General will then dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
5. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
6. Even if you have already written in the past, please make contact again. Experience has shown that confreres not available at one moment might be available at another time.
7. If you are unable or unavailable for the missions, we welcome your monetary contribution to represent your zeal for our missionary endeavors. Every year, many eligible provinces needing help seek a micro-project grant of \$5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. These grants are awarded by the VSO quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful results of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (see: [www.famvian.org/vso](http://www.famvian.org/vso)). Donations to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund are the only source of funding for the micro-project grants.

## **MAKING A CONTRIBUTION TO THE VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND**

### ***Provincial, House and Individual Contributions:***

1. Checks must be made only payable to: "Congregazione della Missione". The bank will not accept any other name. They should be sent to: **Econome General / Congregazione della Missione / Via dei Capasso, 30 / 00164 Roma (Italy)**.
2. Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.
3. Clearly indicate that the funds are for the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF).

### ***In every case:***

All gifts received will be acknowledged. If your contribution is not acknowledged within a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification. Also, please inform us if you are making any transfer of money.

# Homily, Closing Mass of the General Assembly Association of the Miraculous Medal

Sunday, 9 November 2014

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

My brothers and sisters in Jesus, St. Vincent, and Mary, our Mother:

I began with a quote from scripture best captures our time together: “*Lord, is it good for us to be here!*” (Mt. 17:4). Although these are the words of Peter to Jesus at the Transfiguration, they express what I believe we all feel as we conclude our time together in this first General Assembly of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Yes, it is good for us to be here!

But as devotees of our Blessed Mother, we cannot bask in the beauty of this graced time forever. Like the disciples on Mount Tabor, we must move forward in faith. Our theme for this General Assembly-and what an Assembly it has been- is the *New Evangelization*. It is the right theme for the right time! Today, our world is in great need of the light of Christ and the intercession of Mary, his Mother.

By his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus showed us the way to salvation. Yet, where did Jesus first learn to love, serve, and sacrifice? Like all of us, his pathway to holiness of life began as a young child. His first and best teachers were Mary and Joseph. Together, they took Jesus into their lives and taught him in the way of faith. In Joseph’s dedication to his family and Mary’s gentle, maternal love, they readied Jesus to bring God’s salvation to a waiting world. Those early years of Jesus, shrouded in mystery, are what Blessed Pope Paul VI called the *School of Nazareth*. He spoke of it as “*a school of prayer where we learn to listen... and to penetrate the deepest meaning of the manifestation of the Son of God, drawing our example from Mary, Joseph, and Jesus*” (Pope Paul VI, “Nazareth,” January 5, 1964).<sup>1</sup>

Because of the *School of Nazareth*, we are today a Christian community and a Vincentian Family. In every age, God raises up new disciples as evangelizers to lead people to Christ. Mary has done so by

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<sup>1</sup> From the Office of Readings, Feast of the Holy Family, Liturgy of the Hours, Volume I: Advent and Christmas.

her many apparitions, offering messages of prayer, repentance, and faith in her Son. While the *New Evangelization* may seem a novelty, its call is issued anew in each age. It is best understood in these words of Our Lady to St. Catherine: "*Come to the foot of the altar, and you will receive many graces.*"

That simple message is not only to find a place at the altar of the Lord, but also to embrace a way of life that witnesses to love of God and care of neighbor. However, Mary's call to Catherine to *come to the foot of the altar* is an invitation for us to be nourished by the Eucharist, God's Word, seeking his Divine will, and devotion to his Mother.

Our Lady gave St. Catherine a valuable tool to evangelize. It was not a profound doctrine, but a simple medal. Her instruction: have the medal struck and urge people to wear it as a sign of faith in Jesus. Simply put, the Medal depicts the story of our salvation and the victory over death and sin won by Jesus and modeled by the sinless life of Mary. The medal is striking because Our Lady herself presented the design to Catherine. The front depicts Mary standing on a globe with the head of a serpent beneath her feet. Framed around it is our prayer, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." On the reverse, twelve stars surround a large "M," from which a cross arises. Below the "M," there are medals that depict the two flaming sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary.

The title "Miraculous Medal" did not originate from Our Lady or St. Catherine, but by public acclamation. After praying for Mary's intercession and wearing the medal, people began to experience in their lives the gifts and graces of this devotion. Its effects were more than they thought possible. The Miraculous Medal witnesses to God's love and the endless reservoir of Mary's intercession. It is evangelization in action.

If any group in the Church today should welcome and strive to be in the forefront of the "New Evangelization", it is we, the members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. We know of graces received through Mary's loving intercession lead us to her Son's redemptive power. This Medal and the works of our Association lead us into deeper discipleship with Jesus and Mary, the first agents of evangelization.

Our Holy Father, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, has called Our Blessed Mother the "Star of the New Evangelization." Pope Francis tells us why: "*With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church, which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization*" (EG, 284).

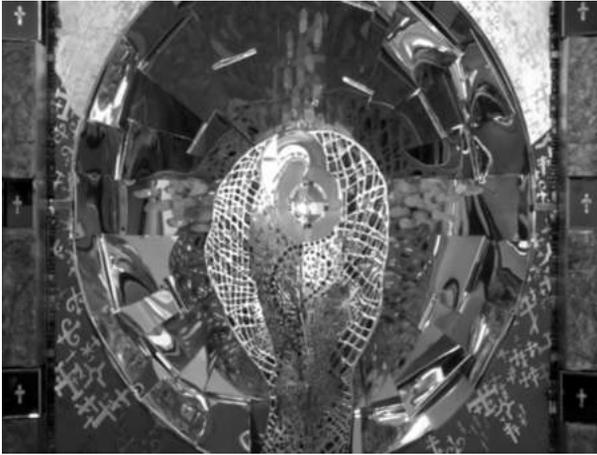
Pope Francis verifies the value of Mary's Medal and our Association when he notes, "*There is a Marian 'style' to the Church's work of evan-*

*gelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong... Mary is able to recognize the traces of God's Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives" (EG, 288).*

That is why we gather at this Eucharist as we conclude our time together: to be reminded of who we are, and to be sent forth as a Christian people to be bearers of the Good News of Jesus. As we hear God's Word, receive him in the Eucharist, offer our prayers, and prepare to return home, let us be grateful for our time together. May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal intercede for us and continue watch over the Association, as she has done for centuries. I will close with part of a prayer Pope Francis offered at the conclusion of *Evangelii Gaudium*:

***Mary, Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith, justice, and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones, pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!***

## Advent 2014: Prayer, Peace, and a Place for the Poor



*Main altar, Our Lady Queen of Peace Shrine, Kazakhstan*

Rome, 30 November 2014

*First Sunday of Advent*

My brothers and sisters in Jesus and St. Vincent,

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

The season of Advent is upon us, a time ripe for reflection on the mysteries of our faith. The Scriptures, stories, and hymns of Advent call us to embrace **prayer**, to seek the **peace** of Christ, and to open our hearts and hands to serve God's chosen and our "lords and masters", **the poor**.

In this Advent letter, I will share with you three simple, but profound experiences I had in one day. They touched my heart and led me to reflect on a need for **prayer**, a search for **peace**, and a deeper commitment to **serve the poor**. This occurred while visiting a Marian shrine, meeting with contemplative Sisters, and sharing Mass and a meal with a group of recovering addicts.

On September 27, the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul, I arrived in Kazakhstan at the national shrine of Our Lady Queen of Peace, located

in a small village. After traveling all night with a Polish confrere serving in the mission in Kazakhstan and Fr. Stan Zontak, we were warmly welcomed by the Archbishop, whose diocese is twice the size of Italy! This shrine is home to the “Star of Kazakhstan,” an altar dedicated to peace, one of twelve worldwide. Why an altar for peace in this far away place? Behind the shrine is a mountain with a cross marking the center of Euro-Asia. The “Star of Kazakhstan” contains precious regional stones and metals. It centers on Mary, in whose heart is the Eucharist to show that Jesus was born from her heart of love.

Following this moving experience, the Archbishop led us to a monastery in the village, where I met four contemplative Carmelite Sisters. We had a wonderful conversation! They spoke of their life with simplicity, grateful for the support of the Archbishop and the people in the village. They were joyous women, and told how prayer is the heart of their life. It moved me deeply.

The last part of the day’s journey was a visit to a shelter for people recovering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. Managed by a woman deeply committed to our Vincentian charism, she said it is her Christian duty to provide an outreach to the poor, especially addicts. The program is a basic one in a clean, warm environment, much needed in Kazakhstan. When the Archbishop arrived, he celebrated the Eucharist, after which we shared a meal and talked, – all twelve of us!

After the meal, the Archbishop asked me to say a few words to the group. My remarks formed the basis of my message for this Advent letter. Later, I reflected on what a wonderful experience it was for the feast of St. Vincent. With the significance of the day and people I met, I believe the Lord was pointing me to reflect on three key goals in my life and for the Vincentian Family. *Advent 2014 is a call to engage in prayer, to seek peace, and to joyfully serve God’s poor.*

### **A Time for PRAYER**

After visiting in the monastery with the Carmelites, I reflected on the need for prayer in my own life. Our charism invites us to pray as contemplatives in action, to step out of the busy world of work and other distractions, and focus on the presence of Jesus in Word and Eucharist. In my dialogue with these Sisters, I was so impressed with their simple, joyful witness in sharing their faith. As active contemplatives, we must also come aside to rest and reflect with the Lord.

As St. Vincent told his first companions: “The apostolic life does not exclude contemplation, but encompasses it and profits by it to know better the eternal truths it must proclaim” (*CCD*, Vol. III, Letter 1054). This Advent let us find some time in our busy lives to pray before the Lord. Whether priests, brother, sisters, or laity, all Vincentian Family

members know the need for prayer, as it is the motivating force for what we do. It is a distinct mark of our service, grounding us in the love of God. It helps us see the Divine presence in God's poor.

### **A Time of *PEACE***

At the altar of the Star of Kazakhstan, I reflected on the current state of the world, with its lack of peace on earth. Whether it is Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and many other places, we see constant acts of violence, terrorism, border and tribal disputes, threatening the peace we seek. Today, there is an urgent need for people to learn how live in peace. After visiting this shrine, I realized the quest for peace begins with me.

I thought of St. Vincent as an example of one who sought peace and shared it with others. He told St. Louise, "The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He will reign in you if your heart is at peace. So, be at peace, Mademoiselle, and you will honor in a sovereign way the God of peace and love" (*CCD*, Vol. I, Letter 71). Vincent lived in an era where violence, wars, and skirmishes plagued France. As it happens, the poor often suffered the most from these conflicts.

Yet, St. Vincent was a peacemaker who did so by defending the poor. He made Church and Crown aware of what these conflicts did to "our lords and masters, the poor." We, as the Vincentian Family must be champions and instruments of God's peace. This Advent, let us seek peace within to be one with the Prince of Peace of whom the prophet Micah said, "He shall take his place as shepherd by the strength of the LORD... he shall be peace (*Mi.* 5:4-5).

### **Joyful Service to the *POOR***

After an intense experience of prayer in the shrine, and profound peace with the Sisters in the monastery, I had the good fortune to share in Mass and a meal at the shelter. I felt Our Lord present in two significant ways: at the altar and at the dinner table. As I moved from being with the Eucharistic body of Christ in the shelter chapel to the small dining room, I saw the embattled, but unbroken Body of Christ in these recovering addicts. In praying with them and sharing a meal, I was given the grace to see that we are all part of the mystical Body of Christ.

Jesus was born into poverty and lived in humble surroundings. This reality – the poverty of Our Lord in his earthly life – is not a sentimental Christmas story, but salvation history. God is revealed in the *anawim*, a Hebrew word literally means "the poor who depend on the Lord for deliverance." In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' first major teaching is the Beatitudes to remind us that both Jesus and the Father identify with the least among us. At the end of each liturgical year, we hear

Matthew's Parable of the Last Judgment as our challenge: "I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me" (*Mt.* 25:40).

St. Vincent reminded us of the intrinsic link between our salvation and that of caring for the poor: "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ" (*CCD*, Vol. III, Letter 1078). Let this Advent be one in which, having prayed and sought the Lord's peace, we go forth in renewed service to God's poor.

### **Advent as a time for *CONVERSION OF HEART***

Since my return from Kazakhstan, I have been fortunate to visit provinces, missions, and branches of the Vincentian Family in Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. But that celebration of St. Vincent's feast day has remained with me. I felt the Lord calling me as Superior General to reflect on how to better integrate prayer, peace, and service to the poor in my own life. I gained insight into times when I had failed to be a man of peace, prayerfulness, or service to the poor. I asked the Lord for the grace of forgiveness. I gave voice to this at the shelter, and I willingly share it with you as we embark on this Advent together.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the prophet Isaiah tells the truth of our human condition: "O Lord, we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands" (*Isa.* 64:7). Advent is the time to again entrust ourselves to the merciful love of God by entering into the scriptural stories of our salvation. Through the lives of people such as Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, we experience the saving power of God, the shepherd of our souls. Their stories of salvation are bound up with our life stories.

A good Advent will help us see that God wants to open our minds and hearts to "prepare the way of the Lord" (*Mk.* 1:3). The Second Advent preface before the Eucharistic prayer beautifully expresses the true meaning of this holy season: "It is by his gift that already we rejoice at the mystery of his Nativity, so that he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise."

A month after the trip to Kazakhstan, I read the address of Pope Francis at the conclusion of the October Synod of Bishops. I share with you what I consider a truly 'Vincentian excerpt' that will guide us in Advent to become more prayerful, peaceful, and joyful in the service of the poor.

"And ***this is the Church***, the Lord's vineyard... not afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil on people's wounds; who doesn't see humanity as a glass house to judge or categorize people. ***This is the Church***... composed of sinners, needful of God's mercy. This is the

Church, true bride of Christ... not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church with the doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent, not only the just or those who believe they are perfect! ***This is the Church***... not ashamed of the fallen but on the contrary feels involved and obliged to lift him up and to encourage him to take up the journey and to accompany him..." *Pope Francis, 18 October 2014 (Excerpt from his Address, Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops).*

May Jesus, evangelizer of the poor, strengthen you, and may St. Vincent inspire and guide you in Advent and for the coming year.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

# Ordinance Mandating a Provincial Secretary

Rome, 1 April 2014

*To the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Confrere,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ dwell with us always!

The task of proper and prompt communication between the Provinces of the Congregation of the Mission and the General Curia is a commitment that each day becomes more burdensome and complex for the Visitors immersed in multiple matters that demand their time and drain their energy. Therefore, with the consent of the General Council I am promulgating an ordinance which demands that each Province appoint a Provincial Secretary who will dedicate his/her time to this matter of correspondence. This individual can be a confrere or a lay person.

In recent gatherings with the Visitors, some of the Missionaries have suggested that we sponsor a meeting of all the Provincial Secretaries in order to instruct them in the correct procedures to be followed when writing reports and in other correspondence addressed to the Superior General and the General Curia. Since the organization of such a meeting is complex and costly, I would like to know your opinion on this subject before moving forward. More specifically, I ask you to express your opinion with regard to the following questions:

- Such a meeting is necessary? Yes No
- It would be good to sponsor such a meeting on the Congregational level? Yes or No
- It would be good to sponsor a meeting by the various Conferences of Visitors? Yes or No

I invite you to speak with the other Visitors of your Conference and send me your response before October 1, 2014. I thank you for your collaboration.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

Rome, 10 December 2014

To: All Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission  
From: G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General  
RE: Follow-up to Ordinance on Provincial Secretaries

My brothers,

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

After having reviewed the responses regarding a possible international meeting of provincial secretaries, the General Council has concluded the purpose for such a meeting is better served if done on the level either by the Conferences of Visitors or between provinces. Concerns by the provinces over the costs of providing an international meeting of provincial secretaries led to this decision. If Visitors Conferences or groups of provinces wish to organize their own meetings, Fr. Giuseppe Turati, C.M., Secretary-General, is willing to provide the necessary information.

I also take this opportunity to inform you that practical assistance is available to improve communication between the General Curia and the provinces. It can be sent electronically for your review. You may request this material from Fr. Turati, at his email: [secgen@cmglobal.org](mailto:secgen@cmglobal.org). This material has been shared with Visitors in at the 2013 International Meeting of Visitors at St. John's University, New York. As noted, it was made available for confreres in a digital format.

Finally, I remind all Visitors that the appointment of a provincial secretary, whether a confrere or lay person, is an ordinance of the Congregation, sent out to all provinces on April 1, 2014. It requires that each province appoint a provincial secretary who will dedicate some time to attend to correspondence with the General Curia. As of this date, I have received 16 responses from Visitors, so I need to hear from the remaining provinces to insure all are in accord with this ordinance. I am grateful to those who responded, and I ask pardon for my impatience, but in my next communication, I will indicate which provinces have not yet responded to this Ordinance.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General



# OF CURRENT INTEREST

## The Company Will Cease to Exist Unless...

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Founders, as they get older, often anguish over the communities they have begotten. Like parents, they fret about their children's growth and education, their friends, and their future stability. Often, after a less-structured, charismatic beginning, they or others begin to formulate rules to guide the lives of the members and to establish a framework for the choice of apostolates in the future.<sup>1</sup> They frequently also suggest who their successor might be, knowing that the period immediately after their own death will be a crucial time of transition. In the case of the Daughters of Charity, one might almost chuckle in that regard.

Though St. Vincent had established that the successors of Louise de Marillac would be elected, he decided to name the first one himself! While he was less than two weeks from his own death when Marguerite Chétif was installed as Mother General on September 15, 1660, he must still have been very alert. He told Jean Dehorgny that, when the announcement was made, he should keep an eye on the faces of the obvious candidates to see their reactions. Vincent felt that some of them wanted the job too much!<sup>2</sup>

Vincent was also very concerned about providing for the future financial stability of the congregations, which he and Louise de Marillac had begun, and was very astute in doing so. He and Louise consistently set up foundations to support the houses and works of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. In fact, both

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent did not complete the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission until 1658. "Here at long last are the Rules or Common Constitutions of our Congregation...", he wrote in the introductory letter to the Rules. "It has been about thirty-three years since our Congregation was founded..." He never completed the Rules of the Daughters of Charity. They were not finally approved until 1672, when René Alméras was Superior General and Mathurine Guérin was Mother General. Mathurine Guérin had an enormous influence on the spirit, life and works of the Company. Her seven terms as Mother General, which were spread out over more than three decades, totaled 21 years.

<sup>2</sup> SV XIII, 181. Cf. MATTHIEU BREJON DE LAVERGNÉE, *Histoire des Filles de la Charité* (Fayard: Paris, 2011) 261.

congregations were remarkably stable institutions by the time of the deaths of the two founders.

However, future leadership and financial stability were not Vincent's principal preoccupations. He worried most of all about the spiritual depth of the members. Throughout his life, he worked hard at the ongoing formation of the members of his communities, giving conferences week after week to both the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity.<sup>3</sup> In the conferences of his later years, some of Vincent's concerns are very evident. Would the members of the Congregation be deeply spiritual? Would they be faithful to the service of the poor that Vincent and Louise had so emphasized?

One of the most striking expressions of Vincent's anxiety occurred during a Repetition of Prayer on August 30, 1657. He described his fear about what might happen to the mission in Madagascar after his death. Almost all those whom Vincent had sent there had died. He loved the mission deeply, but he knew that the Congregation would be tempted to abandon it as soon as he was no longer in charge. He spoke with great forcefulness:

*Someone in the Company may say perhaps that Madagascar should be abandoned; flesh and blood will use that language and say that no more people should be sent there, but I'm certain that the Spirit says otherwise. What, my brothers? Shall we leave our good M. Bourdaise all alone there? The death of those priests will, I'm sure, astonish some. But God led 600,000 men out of Egypt, not counting women and children, with the intention of bringing them into the Promised Land; yet, of all that great host, only two entered it – not even Moses, the leader of them all. God has called our confreres into that country, and yet some died on the way, and others shortly after arriving there. At this, we must bow our heads, Messieurs, and adore the wonderful, incomprehensible ways of Our Lord.*

*O, my dear confreres! After knowing that, could we possibly be so base and unmanly as to abandon this vineyard of the Lord to which His Divine Majesty has called us, merely because four, five, or six men have died? Tell me what a fine army it would be if, because it lost two or three, four, or five thousand men – as they say happened at the latest siege of Normandy – it would abandon everything! What a nice sight an army of runaways and poltroons like that would be! Let's say the same of the Mission; it would be a fine Company of the Mission if, because five or six had died, it were to abandon the Lord's work! What a cowardly Company, attached to flesh and blood!<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> He also gave frequent conferences to the Visitation nuns, whom Francis de Sales had entrusted to his care. Unfortunately, none of these survive.

<sup>4</sup> SV XI, 420-422.

St. Vincent had read the thoughts of his confreres accurately! In spite of this urgent plea, his successor closed the mission! The Congregation did not return to Madagascar until 1896!

St. Vincent's concern about the *spirituality* of the members of the Families that he had begun is equally touching. Thinking of the future, he often tells them that one aspect of their mission or one virtue is indispensable, and that his foundations will cease to exist if the members abandon these things.

We might be tempted to say that St. Vincent's language on these occasions was exaggerated and that he was using such forceful phrases merely for rhetorical emphasis. But rhetoric is revealing. It gives us insight into what the speaker regards as extremely important.

Of course, in a dispassionate moment, St. Vincent would probably have told his hearers – to use today's terminology – that there was a “hierarchy of truths” among the many matters that he described as indispensable. He would also have recognized that some of the concrete examples which he used (like the length of hair!) were much more historically and culturally conditioned than others. I will now name and reflect from this perspective, on six things that St. Vincent called indispensable. To cite his somber words: If we fail to do these things, *au revoir* to the Congregation of the Mission and *au revoir* to the Daughters of Charity! Basically, he felt that his foundations would cease if we are not...

## 1. Faithful to the Mission

Mission was central for St. Vincent. He saw it not just as an activity of the Church, but also as essential to its very being. He described Jesus as the Missionary of the Father, coming from God on a mission and returning to God to fulfill it. He called the members of the two Congregations he founded to share in that mission. Jesus was to be their rule. Mission was not an add-on in their lives; it was at the heart of what they were as members of the Congregation of the Mission or the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

So, from that perspective, it was natural that the ongoing fidelity of his followers to the mission he had entrusted to them stood at the top of Vincent's concerns in his old age. Not only did he want his followers to risk their lives to bring the gospel to distant countries like Madagascar; he was also eager that they continue to serve the marginalized at home. He addresses the matter with passion, sometimes using dramatic words and gestures. What he says to the Congregation of the Mission is so touching that I will quote him at length:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> SV XII, 89-93.

“I can’t go on much longer. I’ll be passing on soon. My age, my poor health, and the abominations of my life don’t permit that God will let me remain long on earth. So then, it could happen that, after my death, troublemakers and cowardly men may come along and say, ‘Why should we be weighed down with the care of these hospitals? How can we help so many people ruined by wars, and go to see them in their homes? What’s the use of taking on so many things and so many poor persons? Why guide these Sisters who nurse the sick, and why waste our time on persons who are mentally ill?’ There will be some who oppose those ministries – have no doubt about that – and others will say that it’s too much to attempt to send men to distant countries, to the Indies, or to Barbary. But, my God, but, my Lord, didn’t You send Saint Thomas to the Indies and the other Apostles throughout the world? Didn’t You make them responsible for the care and guidance of all peoples in general and many persons and families in particular? Yes, not matter what others may say, our vocation is: *Evangelizare pauperibus*.

(Some will say): ‘We’re willing to give a mission here in this country; there’s enough to do here without going any farther; I’m willing to do that, but don’t talk to me about the foundlings, the old folks at the Nom-de-Jesus, and those people who are locked up here!’ Someday we’ll see men like that, so perverse that they’ll disparage the good works God has led us to take on and maintain with His blessing; have no doubt about that...

But what sort of men will turn us away from those good works already begun? They’ll be undisciplined, undisciplined, undisciplined men who seek only to enjoy themselves and, provided they have enough to eat, don’t bother about anything else. And who else? They’ll be... I’d rather not say. They’ll be men who coddle themselves (*as he said this, he folded his arms, mimicking lazy men*), people who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one spot; they don’t want to leave it, and if they’re shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Speaking about giving retreats, he returns forcefully to the same theme, the centrality of mission. Cf. SV XI, 17: “If you say to a poor lax Missioner, ‘Monsieur, would you please guide this man during his retreat?’ that request will be a torture for him; and, if he doesn’t beg off, he’ll simply drag his feet, as they say; he’ll be so anxious to satisfy himself, and will find it so hard to give up a half hour or so of his recreation after dinner and as long after supper, that this time will be intolerable for him, even though it’s given for the salvation of a soul and will be the best spent hour of his entire day. Others will grumble about this ministry, under the pretext that it’s very burdensome and demands

## 2. Faithful to daily prayer and to rising early to engage in it

Most members of the Vincentian Family are very familiar with a statement St. Vincent made about prayer: “Give me someone who prays! That person will be capable of everything!”<sup>7</sup>

But there is more to the quotation. Vincent adds: “The Congregation will last as long as it faithfully carries out the practice of prayer, which is like an impregnable rampart, shielding the missionaries from all manner of attack.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Congregation will cease to exist if it ceases to pray. The emphasis here was on meditative prayer (*l'oraison*). Vincent asked the members of his communities to set aside an hour a day for it.<sup>9</sup>

He attached great importance to the practice of rising early in the morning in order to pray. He says to the Daughters of Charity: “Strive to be very exact in that, Sisters. Nothing is more important than rising at the proper time, because the rest of the day depends on it.”<sup>10</sup>

In a letter written to the superiors of the houses of the Congregation of the Mission on January 15, 1650, he offers a whole series of human and religious considerations to reinforce the importance of rising in the morning. In that context, he writes: “A merchant rises early to become rich; every minute is precious to him. Thieves do the same and spend the night waiting to take passers-by by surprise... Mon Dieu! how shameful if laziness causes us to lose the time assigned for conversing with the Lord of Lords, our support and our all!”<sup>11</sup>

Then, he clinches the argument by adding: “Carelessness has caused many to leave: not being able to coddle themselves at whim, they could

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a lot of energy. So, the Priests of the Mission, who formerly would have given life to the dead, will no longer have anything but the name and appearance of what they once were. They'll be only corpses and not true Missioners; they'll be the carcasses of Saint Lazarus, not the resurrected Lazarus, and, even less, men who bring others back to life. This Mission, which is now like a beneficial pool, where so many come to bathe, will be nothing but a cistern contaminated by the laxity and idleness of the men who live in it.”

<sup>7</sup> SV XI, 83.

<sup>8</sup> SV XI, 83.

<sup>9</sup> The members of the Tuesday Conferences were to engage in mental prayer for at least a half hour a day; cf. SV XIII, 130. Likewise, the Ladies of Charity at the Court (a group consisting of the Queen and a small number of women chosen by her) were to engage in at least a half hour of mental prayer daily; cf. SV XIII, 821-822. The same thing was stipulated for the Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu; cf. SV XIII, 827. In general, the Rules for the various Confraternities of Charity speak about saying various “prayers” and assisting at Mass, rather than about engaging in mental prayer.

<sup>10</sup> SV X, 95.

<sup>11</sup> SV III, 538.

not grow in love for their state. How can we go gladly to prayer if we rise only grudgingly? How can we meditate profitably if we are only half in church, and then merely out of propriety? On the contrary, those who are zealous in rising usually persevere, hardly ever grow lax, and make good progress. The grace of vocation depends on prayer, and the grace of prayer depends on rising.”

He warns against naming anyone a superior or a seminary director if he does not rise early: “Those who are not exact in this, particularly in rising in the morning and making their meditation in the place and at the time the others do it, even though they might otherwise be very talented and gifted for leadership, are not, however, suitable to be local Superiors or Seminary Directors.”<sup>12</sup>

He was also concerned about the quality of the members’ vocal prayer, particularly the Divine Office, which was to be prayed *digne, attente, et devote*. In a memorable conference given on September 26, 1659, he tells his confreres in the Congregation of the Mission, quoting St. John Chrysostom, that God prefers the barking of dogs to the prayer of someone who is merely reciting words. “Yes, the man who is negligent in his efforts to pray the Office should consider himself a dog, since, being endowed with reason, he performs such a holy action in a way that’s worse than animal-like.”<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Humble, simple and charitable

These three virtues were to characterize every Daughter of Charity. They were also to play an essential role in the life of the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

Is there any virtue about which St. Vincent speaks more eloquently than humility? It would be hard to assign it a higher place than he does in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission. “It is the foundation of all evangelical perfection, the core of the whole spiritual life.”<sup>14</sup> He emphasizes its importance repeatedly in letters and in conferences. Vincent states forcefully that we cannot persevere individually or corporately without humility.<sup>15</sup> His words to both the Daughters and the Vincentians are memorable:

- “This little company, which is the last of all, ought to be founded only upon humility as its characteristic virtue; otherwise we will never do anything that will last...”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> SV XI, 83.

<sup>13</sup> SV XII, 328-329.

<sup>14</sup> CR II, 7.

<sup>15</sup> SV I, 528; X, 528; XII, 304.

<sup>16</sup> SV XI, 57.

- “Grant that humility may be the characteristic virtue of the Mission! O holy virtue, how beautiful you are! O little Company, how loveable you will be if God grants you this grace!”<sup>17</sup>
- “Humility! Let it be our password.”<sup>18</sup>
- “Yes... we can say that His great pleasure is to reveal himself to the humble. What beautiful words of Jesus Christ, which show clearly that it’s not in palaces, like the Louvre, nor in the residences of Princes that God takes His delight! He says so in Scripture, ‘O Father, I praise and thank you that you have hidden your mysteries from the great ones of the world and revealed them to the humble.’”<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that Vincent sees humility, simplicity and charity as indispensable for the ongoing existence of the communities he founded. He tells the Daughters of Charity: “The spirit of your company consists in three things: loving Our Lord and serving him in a spirit of humility and simplicity. As long as charity, humility and simplicity are among you, people will be able to say: ‘The Company of Charity is still alive.’ But when these virtues are no longer there, then people will say, ‘The poor Company of Charity is dead.’ A Daughter of Charity who no longer has humility and charity is dead, for she no longer has its spirit. She’s like the person to whom the angel says in the Scriptures: ‘You’re dead, for you do not have charity, which is the life of the soul.’ Just as the soul is the life of the body, the day when charity, humility and simplicity will no longer exist in the Company, the poor Company of Charity will be dead. Yes, she will be dead.”<sup>20</sup>

Vincent warns particularly against envy. Contrasting it with humility, he states that it is a deadly enemy of community life. The humble person, seeing everything as gift, avoids envious comparisons. He or she receives life with gratitude, leaving judgment to the Lord, as the gospels frequently exhort us to do.<sup>21</sup> The proud person loves comparisons and remains restless as long as anyone else seems to get more attention. Vincent speaks of this theme eloquently:

“Be careful, then, to make yourselves worthy of the name you bear so that it may not be said of you what was said to the person in the Apocalypse, ‘You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead; you have the name of charity and you are someone who has no charity.’ In the same way, as Daughters of Charity; you bear

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<sup>17</sup> SV XI, 400.

<sup>18</sup> SV XII, 206.

<sup>19</sup> SV IX, 400.

<sup>20</sup> SV IX, 594-595.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Matt. 7:1-5.

this beautiful name and yet you have some hatred for your Sisters! You bear it in vain, for charity tolerates no hatred. Now, you'll note that the lack of charity sometimes stems from envy, as the Rule states, and envy proceeds from pride...<sup>22</sup>

"I don't think I've ever seen disorder arise in any religious Order except through envy or jealousy. Now, if envy is to be feared anywhere, it's among you, all the more so since it's like the corruption of the Company. When fruit is spoiled and rotten, it's no longer good for anything; in the same way, if envy takes hold among you, your Company will soon go to rack and ruin. Ah, Sisters! could a greater misfortune befall the Daughters of Charity than jealousy, since it's the cause of disunion? What good is there where there's division? Rest assured, then, that as soon as there is envy in your Company, it's finished...<sup>23</sup>

"And how is that? Because you're Daughters of Charity, daughters of the love of God and of your neighbor; and the opposite of charity is envy. A Sister who has this spirit, instead of being the daughter of God that she was, becomes a daughter of the demon, a daughter of perdition. What a misfortune to become the daughter of the devil! You see, the executioner of the Daughters of Charity is envy, which causes us to be angry when we see our Sister better cared for during her illness, or sought after in a parish because she does so much good, or better dressed than we are. For that's what envy does. As soon as a Sister reaches that point, say, 'She's no longer a Daughter of Charity; she's divested of the interior habit, which is the love of God and of the neighbor.' Ah! but we have our attire! Poor Sister, it's not the habit you wear that makes you a Daughter of Charity; it's the interior habit of the soul."

#### **4. Practicing the vow and virtue of poverty**

Today, when in a number of places we are well off economically, it is sobering to hear Vincent's words about the importance of the virtue and vow of poverty. In the Common Rules for the Congregation of the Mission, he writes: "We must all realize that it (poverty) is the unreachably rampart by which the Congregation, with the help of God's grace, will be defended."<sup>24</sup> He explains:

Poverty is what ought to maintain us. What will the Company become if attachment to the goods of the world seeps into it? What will it become? The saints say that poverty is the core of reli-

<sup>22</sup> SV X, 465.

<sup>23</sup> SV IX, 702.

<sup>24</sup> CR III, 1.

gious life. We are not religious..., but we can say that poverty is the core of communities, and above all, of our own, which has more need for it than others.<sup>25</sup>

He tells confreres: “You ought to know, sirs, that this virtue of poverty is the foundation of this Congregation of the Mission.”<sup>26</sup> Then, in another conference, he adds in forceful language: “Woe, woe, my brothers, yes, woe to the missionary who would want to become attached to the perishable goods of this life!... Then we can say goodbye to all the works of the Mission and to the mission itself, for it will no longer exist. It is only necessary to read history and you’ll find an infinite number of examples which will demonstrate that riches and an abundance of temporal goods have caused the loss not only of many ecclesiastical persons, but also of communities and entire Orders for not having been faithful to their first spirit of poverty.”<sup>27</sup>

Vincent’s ‘bottom line’ was that material goods are not “ours”, but entrusted to us “from the patrimony of Jesus Christ, from the sweat of the poor”.<sup>28</sup> It is remarkable how tough his words are: *Au revoir* to the Congregation of the Mission if we become attached to material goods!

## 5. Mortified as we carry out our mission.

Today, in an era when so many seek immediate gratification, people rarely speak about mortification. But St. Vincent took seriously the repeated New Testament imperative to deny oneself. He presents detailed instructions about mortification in his conferences, particularly to the Daughters of Charity. In the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, he states quite directly:<sup>29</sup>

Christ said: Anyone who wants to come after me must deny himself and take up his cross each day; and St. Paul added, in the same vein: If you live according to your unspiritual nature you shall die, but if, by the Spirit, you mortify it, you shall live. Each one, therefore, should be most conscientious in accepting the overruling of his personal wishes and opinion, and in disciplining the gratification of each of his senses.

Vincent saw self-denial as utterly necessary for those who serve the poor in difficult circumstances; he connected it with perseverance. He also stated that mortification and prayer were two sisters who walk

<sup>25</sup> SV XI, 223.

<sup>26</sup> SV XI, 78.

<sup>27</sup> SV XI, 79.

<sup>28</sup> SV XI, 201.

<sup>29</sup> CR II, 8.

hand in hand and are never found without each other. "Mortification goes first and prayer follows after, so that, my dear daughters, if you wish to become daughters of prayer, as you should, learn to mortify yourselves."<sup>30</sup>

In four different contexts, he makes dramatic statements about what will happen if we fail to deny ourselves. Our lack of self-denial will be fatal! He warns about:

a) *Attachment*

From his experience, Vincent was convinced that attachment, in its various forms, robs priests, brothers and sisters of the freedom they need to be faithful servants of the poor. Those attached to their families or friends become immobile. Those attached to comfort or material things find service of the poor too difficult. Those attached to their own will are unable to live peacefully in community.

He tells the Daughters of Charity that attachment is lethal. "I think that Sisters who are attached in this way pretend to be content with the others and stay for a time, but can't remain in the Company, which won't tolerate spoiled, corrupted members."<sup>31</sup>

Taking the opposite tack in speaking with the members of the Congregation of the Mission, he states: "Let us make the intention today, and begin tomorrow, to combat our satisfactions and attachments, one after the other. Have no doubt, my very dear confreres, have no doubt that, if you're faithful, Our Lord will help you to succeed; thus, from being slaves to ourselves and to things that we like apart from God, we'll attain the freedom of His children, subject only to the Will of this Heavenly Father..."

"Persons open to God's Will are above every law; they're in a different category from others, and, like glorified bodies, they pass through everything and go everywhere. Nothing stops or delays them. *O my Savior!* how happy we'd be if we were as detached as beasts of burden, like You, Lord, who compared yourself to a beast of burden, in order to adapt yourself to the greatest flexibility imaginable! We entreat You, our Liberator, to grant us at least the grace of sharing in this disposition, confident that we'll never again lose our freedom or abandon the practice of holy openness to God's Will! We'll always have this openness in our understanding and will, where nothing will enter that may distract us from carrying out all that You ordain. In doing this, You'll be leading us by the hand, helping us to do Your Will, and, in the end, bringing us into glory. Amen."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> SV IX, 427.

<sup>31</sup> SV X, 174.

<sup>32</sup> SV XII, 242-243.

b) *Excessive drinking*

In a conference focused on abuse of alcohol, Vincent tells the story of a confrere who had left the Congregation of the Mission: “A certain priest of the Company left and went off to see a [Bishop] and said to him, ‘I’m a Missioner.’ ‘Yes, replied this [Prelate], you’re a Missioner. Fine! I’m pleased about that. But we’ll begin by giving you a certain parish to administer; then, after that, depending on how you succeed, we’ll see about giving you something more important.’ “That man wasn’t more than three weeks in that place when he began to let himself slip into that vice of drunkenness, and then got involved with women; for it usually leads to that. And yet, here we have a Missioner – or at least he calls himself a Missioner; and on that title alone he’s given a ministry – and see how he ends up in that pitiful state I just mentioned to you.

“Another man comes to mind, who fell into that misfortune of becoming inebriated, but so much so that they had to hold him up by his arms because he kept falling from one side to the other. And since he was in the country, people said, ‘Who is that?’ ‘It’s one of the Missioners.’ The local Pastor was asked to be so kind as to take him into his residence. He did this with great sorrow at seeing what he was seeing. The next day, he came back here. In the end, he had to leave, for how can we allow such men to stay who are fit only to do harm and to give scandal; for, I ask you, what use is a man who lets himself become intoxicated? And how will he be able to help the poor country people rid themselves of this.”<sup>33</sup>

c) *Wanting special treatment*

Vincent wanted the members of the two Companies he had founded to shun privileges and avoid seeking to be the exception from the norm. He felt that the norms of both Companies had been formulated after a long period of experimentation and consultation, that they served the common good of the members, and that they fostered their dedication to the Mission. For that reason, he wanted the Rules observed, unless common sense dictated otherwise.

He used strong language in speaking to the Daughters of Charity on this theme. He warns them against wanting to be treated “like Ladies” when they are ill.

“If a Daughter of Charity is a true Daughter of Charity when she’s in good health, she’ll be the same in sickness. Therefore, she’ll

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<sup>33</sup> SV XII, 42-48. Coste, as he sometimes did with matters that he thought embarrassing, omitted the examples above that Vincent used. They can be found in the English translation of volume XII, on pp. 39-41.

be content to be treated like the sick poor. But you cease to be a Daughter of Charity if you want special treatment when you're ill. What do you give the poor persons whom you serve? Eggs and broth. When you're treated like that, you're the same as your masters, and that's all that can be given. When they get better, you give them meat and bread, and a Daughter of Charity would like to be treated to partridge, woodcock, and other fine food! That's not for you; it's fine for the Ladies, but Daughters of Charity must be treated like poor persons, your Company being as poor as it is. Really, Sisters, if we were in our own homes, would we be treated like that? Would we have those comforts? I call you to witness and am sure that you know this. However, because you're a Daughter of Charity, it sometimes happens that the Ladies want to treat you as if you were a Lady; they're as anxious to provide comforts for a sick Daughter of Charity in their parish as if she were one of the Ladies. But Sisters who allow them to do that are certainly far from their duty; they should say, 'Madame, that's not suitable for poor women like us; allow us to follow our own little customs.'" <sup>34</sup>

d) *Vanities, like having long hair!*

Abelly, Vincent's first biographer, notes the founder's emphasis on early rising as a means for praying faithfully and preserving one's vocation. But, immediately after that, he adds something that might raise eyebrows today.

On another occasion he (Vincent) said, "I have noticed that most of those who have lost their vocation have failed in two things. The first is the morning rising, which they have not faithfully observed, and the second is the appearance of their hair, which they allowed to grow too long, and seems to lead to other similar vanities." In this connection, he wanted all the priests of his Congregation to wear their hair short. When he encountered someone whose hair came down over his collar, he would reach for a strand, and pull it a bit, smiling all the while, but letting it be understood that he preferred it to be cut. <sup>35</sup>

As is evident to readers, matters like hair length and style are quite culturally conditioned. One need only view the numerous paintings of Jesus with long hair to recognize that within some cultures it was the norm. Time and place make a big difference. Interestingly, today a nephew of mine in a Catholic high school in New York must

<sup>34</sup> SV X, 340-341.

<sup>35</sup> ABELLY, 3.24.1.

observe a rule similar to Vincent's; his hair cannot go over his shirt collar. In contrast, when I was in a Catholic high school, also in New York, more than 55 years ago, we were forbidden to wear our hair too short!

In any event, Vincent's point is clearly *vanity*. Hair length is an instance of how vanity showed itself among some members of the Congregation of the Mission in France in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. How does vanity show itself among us now in various countries in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## 6. Obedient, keeping the Rule

In contemporary spirituality, rules hold a much more modest place than they did in the time of Vincent and Louise, but it is important to note that both Louise and Vincent were utterly convinced that the Rules they wrote were essential for both the foundation and the future of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

Louise and Vincent knew quite well that the Spirit was more important than the rule (the point which our contemporary ethos emphasizes), but they foresaw that the Rules (or what they sometimes called Constitutions) would transmit to future generations the essential truths upon which their lives should be based. Analogous to the way in which the scriptures communicate the revelation of the Lord, or a creed expresses the faith of the Christian community, the Rules that Vincent and Louise composed transmit what is at the heart of the charism, the spirit, the mission, the community life, and the spirituality of their Companies.

So, they stressed fidelity to the Rules or Constitutions. During a repetition of prayer, Vincent tells a Daughter of Charity: "Right you are, Sister. The Company is like the sea, which can't retain a dead body; it has to cast it up because it can't tolerate corruption. If, in a Company, someone wants to live her own life, that is, to follow her own will, she's dead and the Company can't tolerate her; God and the angel of the Company cast her out; that's the touchstone."<sup>36</sup>

Vincent held a touching dialogue with the sisters on the matter in a conference on the "Preservation of the Company", given on May 25, 1654:<sup>37</sup>

"And you, Sister, what could ruin the Company?"

"The Company, Father, would be ruined if the Sisters weren't faithful to keeping their Rules."

<sup>36</sup> SV IX, 648.

<sup>37</sup> SV IX, 691.

“That’s well said, Sister; especially since a lack of fidelity in keeping your Rules shows a contempt for holy things, for your Rules are holy and tend to what is holy; they help you either to serve poor persons well or to improve yourselves. So, when you neglect or despise them, people can say good-bye to the Company, and although it may not be completely destroyed, all that will be visible will be the bark of the tree, and nothing more; it will be like dead trees that have nothing underneath the green bark...”

On another occasion, he states: “One reason obliging you to obedience is that you can’t persevere in your vocation without it; for, Sisters, as soon as there’s no obedience among you, say good-bye to the poor Company of Charity; it’s dead.”<sup>38</sup>

*Au revoir* to the Congregation of the Mission! *Au revoir* to the Daughters of Charity! It is clear how deeply the aging Vincent feared the demise of his two Companies. How intensely he wanted them to be faithful to their Mission. How forcefully he urged them to be faithful to daily prayer and to rise early to engage in it. How stirringly he exhorted them to be humble, simple and charitable and to live the vow and virtue of poverty. How eloquently he appealed to them to deny themselves for the sake of the Mission and to live in obedience, willing to go anywhere in the service of the poor while living joyfully the way of life outlined in their Constitutions.

On the one hand, we can rejoice today that, contrary to his fears, both Companies are still quite alive. On the other hand, Vincent’s forceful words remind us that renewed fidelity to the mission and the spirituality he handed on to us is crucial to both Companies’ future vitality.

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<sup>38</sup> SV X, 78-79. To illustrate this point, Vincent returns to favorite themes like murmuring and attachment:

“But as long as this holy practice exists in the Company, it will get on well. And a sign to know that a Sister has the virtue of obedience is if she has no repugnance in doing what her Superiors order, if she’s ready to go anywhere and to return here when told to do so, and if she’s not attached to what she’s doing when she’s told to leave it. That’s a true sign. But to criticize what Superiors say, to murmur against their way of acting, or to say that something has been badly ordered – that’s a sign of disobedience.”

“Sister, what are some signs of the vice contrary to this virtue?”

“It seems to me, Father, that it’s attachment to our own will that hinders us from following the Will of God and of Superiors.”

“Well said, Sister. It’s attachment to our own will. I’m told to go here or there, and I’m so attached to my own will that I don’t want to do it; I’m forbidden to do a certain thing, and I want to do it because I think the prohibition is unfair. When people are in that state of mind, it’s the ruination of Communities.”

As Thomas Stearns Eliot puts it:<sup>39</sup>

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

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<sup>39</sup> "Little Gidding" V.



# THEME:

## *Preparing for the 2016 General Assembly*

### Preparatory Commission Update

January 2015

The Preparatory Commission for General Assembly 2016 met in Rome during the General Council's recent tempo forte, from December 2-5, 2014.

Our time together began with prayer and dialogue, using the materials suggested to local communities to help enter into their domestic assemblies. We shared our reflections, especially on where we have heard the voice of those living in poverty in our own lives and ministries.

Our work together began with a review of the preparations for the Assembly that have begun in Chicago. Much of the groundwork has already been laid there for June-July 2016. We also spoke about the reflection articles that have been written to assist confreres in their preparations for the upcoming assemblies. All these articles, and the preparatory documents for the General Assembly, will appear in *Vincentiana* in early 2015, and will be posted on [www.cmglobal.org](http://www.cmglobal.org)

We then studied the evaluations of GA 2010, the Visitors Meeting of 2013 in New York, and additional recommendations made by the Superior General and his Council for the smooth running of an international meeting of the Congregation. Using the results of these evaluations and comments, the Commission made recommendations to the General Council regarding the Directory, a schedule for the three weeks of the Assembly, the names of confreres to be invited to work on various committees to help with preparations, and other activities which needed to be addressed before the beginning of the provincial assemblies. Two letters went to the Visitors, and these will also be posted, along with the other Assembly documents, on [www.cmglobal.org](http://www.cmglobal.org)

The next meeting of the Preparatory Commission will be in Rome in early December 2015, after the work of the provinces has been sent to Rome. Please continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the Congregation in all our efforts during this time of assemblies in preparation for the 2016 General Assembly.



PART ONE:

# Resources to Assist Confreres and Provinces in Preparation for the General Assembly

1.

Letter from the Preparatory Commission  
for the 2016 General Assembly to the Visitors of the  
Congregation of the Mission

*“To all whom I send you, you shall go”*  
(Jer 1:7)

March 25, 2014

Dear Confrere,

May the peace of Christ be with us!

The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission will be held at DePaul University in Chicago, IL (USA) from June 27 - July 15, 2016. The motto of the GA2016 is **“Let us allow ourselves to be renewed by the missionary vitality of our Vincentian vocation”**. The Superior General with his Council, in a letter dated December 23, 2013, has announced that the theme of the Assembly will be:

***“The Congregation of the Mission:  
four hundred years of fidelity to its charism  
and the New Evangelization”***

We, the members of the Preparatory Commission, met in Rome for a meeting on March 10-14, 2014, to begin our planning. Enclosed in this packet are items which we know will be useful for your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.

We have included a **“Reflection Sheet”** to guide your local communities and your Province in its preparation for GA2016. You will notice that the questions recall the history of our foundation, the work of our previous Assembly, and the challenges which lie ahead of us over the next 6 years. Your response to these questions will aid the Commission in planning the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the GA2016.

We have also included a simple instruction sheet which explains the process we ask you to use during your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. Along with these instructions, you will find a prayer asking God’s guidance during this process of preparation. Please invite the Confreres of your province to make use of it.

Enclosed you will also find an article entitled “A Practical Guide to Provincial Assemblies”. It is meant to be an aid to you in your planning for your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.

Some items are also provided to help you with the usual tasks:

1. “Indications for the Presentation of Postulates to the General Assembly”. Each Province and confrere has the right to present postulates to the Assembly.
2. “Certificate of the Election of the Delegates for the General Assembly”. Every Province elects delegates to the Assembly according to C. 139 and S. 89 §2.
3. “Data Sheet of Participants to the General Assembly 2016”. We ask that you fill out this form and provide us with a picture of each delegate.

We ask that your Province complete your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies by September 2015. All the results of your deliberations should be sent to the Secretary General so as to arrive at the General Curia no later than **September 30, 2015**. We also ask that all the material be sent by e-mail in Word format to the Secretary General (e-mail: [ag2016@cmglobal.org](mailto:ag2016@cmglobal.org)). This will aid the Commission in its work.

The year 2017 marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our charism. We encourage every Province to celebrate it both on local and Provincial levels. You will see in the “**Reflection Sheet**” that we have provided you with the opportunity to begin planning for these events.

Thank you for your cooperation. May God fill us with his light and strength so that we might continue to be witnesses to those people who are most in need. Through the intercession of St. Vincent de Paul may our missionary vitality be renewed.

Your brothers in Christ,

Joseph V. Agostino  
*Coordinator*

Adam Borowski  
*Secretary*

Orlando Escobar  
Joaquín González Hernando  
Fernando Mucavele  
Robertus Wijanarko

## 2.

## A Practical Guide for the Provincial Assembly

Joseph V. Agostino, C.M.  
*Eastern Province USA*

**A. Introduction**

Approximately every three years, confreres gather for Provincial Assemblies (C. 144.1). When they are well organized and run, they can be moments of grace in the life of a province, thus fulfilling their purpose: to preserve and promote the spiritual and apostolic life of the province and thus of the Congregation (cf. C. 135). When done poorly, they can be counter-productive to the very community life they are meant to enhance.

An effective Provincial Assembly does not just happen. It takes months of preparation, not only on the part of the Visitor, but also on the part of all the confreres of the province. Confreres in their domestic assemblies, as well as all those who attend the provincial assembly, should participate fully in the task at hand. And the decisions made at the assembly, both as norms and as advice to the provincial, should be observed or responded to as their subject matter demands (cf. S. 82).

With these three themes (***preparation, participation, and implementation***), I propose this format as the structure for this article. Throughout the entire Assembly process it is important to keep our eyes fixed on the heart of the reason for our gathering: to discern how God continues to call us to the service of the poor as a province and Congregation. As Vincent de Paul has taught us, “Let’s be courageous! Let’s go wherever God may call us. He will be our provider, let’s not fear anything” (Repetition of Prayer, 22 August, 1655).

**B. Preparation**

Our Constitutions clearly state what is to be the purpose and scope of this gathering: “The provincial assembly, as a gathering of members who represent the province as delegates, has the following functions:

1. To establish norms for the common good of the province, within the limits of universal law and our own law, which obtain obligatory force after being approved by the superior general with the consent of his council;
2. As a consultative organ of the provincial, to deal with matters which can promote the good of the province;
3. To act on proposals which in the name of the province are to be presented to the General Assembly or the superior general;

4. To elect delegates to the General Assembly, when required;
5. To make norms for domestic assemblies, within the limits of universal law and our own law, and these do not need the approval of the superior general" (C. 143).

"The Visitor, according to the norm of our own law, convokes the Provincial Assembly; he presides over it and dissolves it, with its consent. Likewise, the Visitor, having heard his council, sets the date and designates the place in which the Provincial Assembly is to be held" (C. 146; S. 95). Thus, the Visitor and Council share a primary responsibility to organize and plan the provincial assembly, so it may achieve the maximum benefit to enhance the Mission and mission and community life of the confreres.

The Visitor, having heard his Council, also sets the Agenda for the assembly. When a Provincial Assembly is being held in preparation for a General Assembly, its theme and much of its agenda would have come from the Superior General, his Council, and the Preparatory Commission. The effectiveness of the work of the General Assembly greatly depends upon the seriousness with which the provinces engage in the tasks requested of them by Rome.

When a Provincial Assembly is an intermittent one, more time becomes available for discussion on those matters important for future vitality. Reconfiguration, the quality of community life, apostolic works, vocations, and the missionary character of the Congregation are but some themes that a province might choose to explore in an assembly. Ample opportunity should be provided for ongoing formation, spiritual enrichment (which provides an opportunity for a greater conversion for the Mission), quality prayer and Liturgical celebrations, as well as those essential moments when confreres are able to share with one another their hopes and their struggles in the living out of our Vincetian vocation.

Themes such as the above highlight the importance of having an Assembly every three years. Together, the Visitor and the confreres are responsible for the life and vitality of their province, and thus of the Congregation in that region. Together they determine the directions in which they need to go to respond to the signs of the times and the call of the Church (cf. C. 2). Furthermore, our Constitutions remind us that: "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. 37.1).

Any or many of these themes are potential Lines of Action for a province's Provincial Plan. An Assembly is another opportune moment in which a province may engage in the planning process. When confreres work together beyond their local community houses they may

grow in a greater awareness of each other's ministries and the challenges facing a province as a whole. Any planning process should have begun well before the time of the Assembly. Ideally, the Assembly thus becomes the moment in which a draft of the Provincial Project is presented, modifications are made, and the plan is approved to guide the work of the province for the next few years.

Thus we can see that legislation is only one of many facets of this community gem. And in light of our call to live in a continual state of renewal through the continual evaluation of our works and ministries (cf. C. 2), it is essential for a province to hold an Assembly at least every three years, as is our law (cf. C. 144.1). By so doing:

- The confreres have a greater personal investment in the life and works of their province because of the level of their consultation and involvement in the decisions which effect their lives;
- The confreres have a greater opportunity to build upon their relationships with each other and not with just their local community or the Visitor;
- The Visitor has a greater opportunity to understand the mind and heart of the confreres and engage with them in a constructive process of dialogue. Thus he governs in collaboration with all the confreres of the province and not just his Council; and
- There is a greater chance for the smooth running of a province when there is a greater opportunity for consultation and dialogue.

In addition to convoking the Provincial Assembly, the Visitor also appoints a Preparatory Committee to assist in its preparation and in the accomplishment of its goals. The work of this body is crucial to the smooth functioning of the assembly. And the quality of its communication with the confreres of the province, as well as the Visitor, determines how well prepared everyone will be to participate fully in this event. Our Statutes remind us that "before and during the assembly there is to be fostered free communication of information regarding the matters to be decided and the qualities of those to be elected" (S. 84).

### ***1. The Agenda of the Preparatory Committee***

No one likes to spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with the underlying mechanics of an assembly. Doing so will take away valuable time from the actual work of the confreres in assembly. It may also cause tensions within a group which do not lead to creativity. If the Preparatory Committee has done its work well, the opening session of the Assembly should move quickly and smoothly. Among the tasks to be accomplished at the start of the Assembly:

- a) The convening of the assembly by the Visitor;
- b) The presentation of the Preparatory Committee;
- c) The presentation of the moderator of the assembly (who has been nominated by the Preparatory Committee and appointed by the Visitor) by the coordinator of the Preparatory Committee. The moderator is most often a CM either from the province or from another province. This role is essential for the success of an Assembly. Without creating a job description the responsibilities of a moderator include, but are not limited to:
  - i. Explaining the process of the Assembly to the delegates and making sure that the Directory is understood;
  - ii. Maintaining the rhythm and flow of the Assembly, keeping it on track, on task, and on schedule;
  - iii. Maintaining order during the meetings with the assistance of the parliamentarian and timekeeper. The moderator guarantees that no one person or group dominates the floor of the Assembly and that everyone is given an opportunity to speak so that all voices may be heard;
  - iv. Knowing how and when: to extend the time allotted for a topic to be discussed, to move a discussion to a vote, or to simply move on to the next topic; and above all
  - v. Remaining as even-handed as possible (even neutral) regardless what postulata is being presented or what topic is being discussed.
- d) A roll call of the delegates by the moderator;
- e) The nomination and election of a secretary. In my experience, it is best for the Preparatory Committee to have already surfaced a viable candidate for this role, a confrere who has already agreed to undertake the task. That confrere is nominated from the floor by a member of the Preparatory Committee. Since there are usually very few people willing to take on this job, and capable of doing it well, that person is often quickly accepted by the assembly. It is also a best practice to have only one secretary for the entire assembly. This guarantees both the consistency and the quality of the final minutes which will be submitted.
- f) The presentation of the parliamentarian by the moderator (who has also been nominated by the Preparatory Committee and appointed by the Visitor). He has the important task of assisting the moderator of the Assembly with the smooth operation of the gathering. In his role, he assists the confreres in their following of the Directory which they will approve, knowing how to be both flexible and direct as circumstances may dictate.

- g) The presentation of the time keeper by the moderator (who has also been nominated by the Preparatory Committee and appointed by the Visitor). He also assists the moderator and the parliamentarian in the smooth running of the Assembly. By timing the interventions of the confreres (usually no more than two minutes and no second intervention until all who wish to speak have spoken), he helps to guarantee that the voice of all will be heard.
- h) The presentation of the proposed Rules and Procedures (the Directory) for the Assembly. When these have been simply and clearly drafted by the Preparatory Committee and presented to the delegates well in advance, they are often easily accepted by the assembly. A Provincial Assembly's vote on the Directory is binding (S. 101). We have found that a simplified version of Roberts Rules of Order has worked well for us in the Eastern Province and allows for both the discipline and the free-flow of discussion that constitutes a successful gathering. I have attached (at the end of this article) the Directory from a 2013 Assembly of a province as an example of how it may be formulated. It is by no means the only way to formulate a Directory.

The Preparatory Committee is also responsible to name and coordinate other confreres who will be responsible for various aspects of an assembly: vote counters (usually the two youngest confreres at the assembly who work with the elected secretary), small group facilitators and table secretaries (if needed), presiders and homilists for Eucharistic celebrations, etc. Finally, the Preparatory Committee sets the timetable and the Agenda for the work of the confreres in Domestic Assemblies as they prepare for the Provincial Assembly.

## **2. *The Domestic Assembly***

The Constitutions, Article 147 states: “§ 1. – The domestic assembly is convoked by the superior of the house or by the assistant who is exercising the total office of superior, and is held to prepare for the provincial assembly. § 2. – All those having active voice are to be called to the domestic assembly. § 3. – It is the function of the domestic assembly to deal with those things which the house wishes to propose to the provincial assembly as well as those things which the preparatory commission for the provincial assembly has proposed for discussion, and to deliberate about proposals”.

It is in the local community that every confrere has an opportunity to be engaged in the process of the assembly. Normally, more than one session would be required to accomplish the work sent from the Preparatory Commission. Thus it is very important that the Domestic Assembly is well planned:

- that the schedule and agenda for the assembly be published in advance,
- that the confreres have the materials for the sessions with ample time to prepare them,
- that a house secretary be appointed to record the minutes which need to be sent to the Preparatory Committee, and
- that the sessions be scheduled, to the greatest extent possible, so that every confrere in the house can attend them.

A review of Provincial Norms is often an agenda item for these assemblies. It is important for every confrere's voice to be heard, both in the review of the Norms as well as in the proposal of postulata for the Provincial Assembly. Creating an inviting atmosphere in which these discussions can take place is the responsibility of both the local superior as well as each confrere of the house.

Domestic Assemblies also provide an opportunity for the confreres to address those matters which most impact their missionary vocations.

- a) As a province explores the demands of reconfiguration, these local assemblies become an opportunity for the men to freely express their hopes and fears, their support and their resistance to the changes which are being proposed. It is at the local level where confreres will begin to understand how reconfiguration will impact their personal lives and ministries. It is also here that they will begin to experience the necessity for it and the benefits that will come from the creation of a new entity. Most importantly, the Domestic Assembly can underscore the fact that the confreres are in this together in order to be more effective in their service of the poor.
- b) Hopefully, the Provincial Assembly will allot time for ongoing formation on a theme of importance for the life of the province. The Domestic Assembly enables the confreres to prime the pump, so that the input given at the Provincial Assembly can have the greatest possible impact on the life of the province.

When well executed, the Domestic Assembly sets the stage for the work of the Provincial Assembly. The Preparatory Committee is responsible to communicate the results of these assemblies to the confreres so that all can benefit from the wisdom of each local house.

### **C. Participation**

Both the Constitutions (146) and the Statutes (97-100) speak of our rules regarding delegates to the Provincial Assembly. In every case, the participation of as many confreres as possible in the work of the Assem-

bly should be greatly encouraged by the Visitor. In light of this call from our Constitutions, and given the reality of the size of most of our provinces, there is little reason why every confrere of the province should not be invited to attend an Assembly.

No doubt, Article 146 speaks of those who should participate by virtue of office. However, it also clearly leaves each province considerable discretionary room in choosing delegates to a provincial assembly. In addressing this issue, the Eastern Province USA, developed the following Norm 17 to guarantee the greatest possible inclusion of confreres:

17. *Membership of the provincial assembly:*

- a) *The membership of the provincial assembly is constituted in the following manner:*
  1. *All incorporated members are invited to attend and participate, with the right to vote, provided that they are present from the beginning and remain for the duration of the assembly.*
  2. *The provincial superior, the provincial consultors, and the provincial treasurer are ex-officio members of the assembly.*
  3. *Every house must ensure that at least one member of the house will attend the assembly. If the members of a house find that this is not feasible, the superior may petition the provincial for an exemption.*

In addition, any confrere who wishes to participate in the Assembly (even if he is unable to stay for its duration) is welcomed. Though he does not have the right to vote, he is invited to speak on the Assembly floor if he so chooses.

If a Norm such as this is not feasible in the context of a particular province, it is important that the province find a way to guarantee that all of its members are well represented: the young and the old, brothers and priests, the ministries of the province, etc.

At least one month in advance, all delegates should receive a copy of all the materials for the gathering. These may include, but not be restricted to:

- the schedule for the assembly,
- a list of delegates and visitors,
- the proposed rules of order (the Directory),
- Provincial Norms, as well as proposed Postulata, Advice to the Provincial, and comments from the confreres, and
- materials needed for the work of the assembly and/or ongoing formation.

Many provinces deal with postulata at all their assemblies. A major task of the preparatory committee is the gathering and organizing of this material. A necessary function of the Preparatory Committee is the proper vetting of what is submitted by the houses. Approval by a local community may not guarantee that a house's recommendation properly falls under the category of "postulata" or "advice to the provincial".

Unless otherwise noted, the postulata compiled by the Preparatory Committee would have been originally proposed by houses. They do not require a second on the floor of the Assembly. The Preparatory Committee should clearly state the preference that every confrere submit his postulata through their local house. And if the house votes no, that postulata does not move forward.

The Preparatory Committee designates postulata under one of the following categories. A delegate may move to reconsider the action of the Committee and propose a new designation. This motion is debatable and requires a simple majority.

**NORM:** a norm is a general rule which becomes binding in the Province after a positive vote by the Assembly and approval by the Superior General.

**ADVICE TO THE PROVINCIAL:** This is voted by the Assembly.

**COMMENT:** Comments are printed in the compilation of postulata for the benefit of the Provincial and the Assembly, but are not debatable nor voted.

The distinction is made following the prescriptions of our Constitutions (143) and Statutes (91).

Every confrere has the right to submit Postulata on the floor of the Assembly. The Moderator needs to make sure that it is written in proper form and correctly presented with necessary details. Postulata proposed by individual confreres require a second before consideration. They should not be treated before the Postulata or Advice to the Provincial that have gone through the Domestic Assemblies.

Some provinces have chosen to use the occasion of a Provincial Assembly to hold the election of a new visitor. Arguments can be stated both for and against such a procedure. In its favor, confreres could say that since the entire province is present at a Provincial Assembly, it becomes an opportune moment to allow everyone to participate in the election process. An election would further dignify the purpose of an Assembly and give even more reason for its being called.

However, those who oppose such a move would argue that the power and authority of a provincial assembly is quite different than that of a General Assembly. There is the danger that an election during it might degenerate into a popularity contest or a struggle for power between factions or groups in a province. There is not enough time for adequate

discernment about the qualities of the candidates, which again raises the issue of the cult of personality. And, an election at this may unduly hamper the Superior General and his Council in the confirmation and appointment of a Visitor (cf. C. 124; S. 68).

In light of these concerns, if a province chooses to elect a visitor at its assembly, it might want to carefully consider the following:

1. That the election take place at the end of the Assembly and only as the conclusion to a process that had begun months before the start of the gathering;
2. That the Assembly itself allow sufficient time for discernment and prayer before moving to election;
3. That the process used be clearly outlined for the General Council before it is begun; and
4. That confreres be clear that a new visitor has not been named until he has been confirmed by the Superior General and his Council.

A province may be well served if the Preparatory Committee becomes the Steering Committee of the Assembly. I would like to offer a number of reasons for this recommendation:

- a) Many details arise during the planning process which need to be carried out in the course of the Assembly. The members of this Committee are best prepared to anticipate what is needed for its smooth flow;
- b) The Committee remains in the background of the Assembly while it is convened. It is the function of the moderator, parliamentarian, and time keeper to direct the work of the gathering;
- c) There can be a serious gap in the process of the Assembly when those who have constructed its methodology are not able to assist with its execution;
- d) The rules pertaining to a Provincial Assembly are not the same as the rules pertaining to a General Assembly.

No doubt, there are those who would argue against such a move. Those reasons would include:

- a) There is the danger of putting too much control in the hands of too few people, allowing for the Assembly to take on a character that the confreres might otherwise not desire;
- b) It is good to involve many people in many parts of the process so that confreres feel invested in the work of the province;
- c) There is a danger that a Visitor or a group of confreres could attempt to manipulate the work of the Assembly so that it is not truly representative of the will of the entire province.

If there is a hesitancy to ask the Preparatory Committee to serve in this dual role, one possible solution would be for the confreres, at the opening of the Assembly, to elect one or two additional confreres to serve on the steering committee. This goal could also be achieved through an Assembly's approval of its parliamentarian and time keeper, who would, by role, be part of the administration of an assembly. What now follows are a number of recommendations that the Preparatory/Steering Committee, as well as a Visitor, might want to consider in the practical conducting of an assembly.

1. Do the work necessary to create appropriate spaces for the confreres during an assembly. When at all possible, the places for prayer, for small group and large group work, for meals, and for recreation should be distinct and prepared in such a way as to create the proper ambiance for what will occur within those spaces.
2. Utilize a variety of discussion methods during the course of the assembly. The right combination of small and large group dynamics, as well as reports and other presentations, will meet the needs of the majority of confreres.
3. The Provincial Assembly is advisory to the Visitor. The provincial and his council should allow the delegates to freely offer their advice without feeling a need to dominate the floor of the assembly. This is a prime moment when those in provincial authority have an opportunity to listen to the voice of their confreres.
4. Provide adequate time in the schedule for in depth discussions of questions of major importance to a province. The Congregation is not well served when major issues such as reconfiguration or apostolic activity are not well processed during an assembly. These dialogues should incorporate a multiplicity of methods that result in some concrete resolutions being made.

Every six years, the provincial assembly elects delegates and alternates to the General Assembly (C. 143, 4; S. 102). These confreres are being chosen for a very important task on behalf of the worldwide Congregation. Thus the members of the Provincial Assembly need to carefully discern the qualities of the men whom they will elect. General Assembly delegates need to be imbued with the missionary character of the community, able to see beyond the realities of a particular province to the international nature of the Congregation.

They are servants of the poor who have a clear understanding of the needs of persons living in poverty in today's world. Elected delegates ought to be collaborative, able and willing to work during the General Assembly with their confreres in a multicultural and multilingual envi-

ronment. They know and live our Vincentian charism. And they need stamina to meet the demands of a General Assembly. Needless to say, this election is neither a popularity contest nor a reward for past service. General Assembly delegates are the prophetic voices of the Congregation's future response to the mission that has been entrusted to us by St. Vincent and the Church.

Unfortunately, too many assemblies appear to occur in a vacuum. Rarely are the decisions made at a previous assembly taken into consideration during the current assembly. This can lead to a feeling on the part of many confreres that assemblies are a waste of time and money, with no tangible results to show for them. There are a number of correctives which can be put in place to address this sentiment.

- As the first order of business, the Visitor can present the decisions of the previous assembly and address how they have been implemented in the interim.
- As the last order of business, the confreres should be asked to evaluate the assembly so that its strengths can be built upon and its weaknesses corrected. This evaluation is the last document that the Preparatory/Steering Committee should prepare for the Visitor and his council and the first document that the next Preparatory Committee should receive as it begins its mandate.

With the approval of the delegates, the Visitor closes the Provincial Assembly (C. 125, 7) and begins the task of promulgating its norms (C. 145).

#### **D. Implementation**

At the conclusion of the assembly, the Steering Committee becomes the Evaluation (or wrap-up) Committee. It collates the results of the delegates' evaluation of the assembly, and submits it to the Visitor together with the Secretary's Minutes of the Assembly and the approved *Postulata* and *Advice* to the Provincial.

After the conclusion of the Assembly, the Visitor studies with the council the *Advice* he has received as well as any other recommendations that may have been made during the course of the gathering. The Visitor is responsible to report to the Province on the results of this study.

The Visitor sends the norms of the assembly to the Superior General, who should communicate a decision within two months after receiving them (S. 96). The *Practical Guide for Visitors* recommends: "In order to facilitate the work of the Superior General and the General Council, it is advised that the Visitor send a document in which he clearly lays out the text of the former Norm, and next to it, the totally new text or the changes in the original text, however small. If it is also

decided to send to the Superior General the minutes of the Assembly, as information, it should be sent in a document apart from the Norms” (Paragraph 220).

Norms approved by the Superior General bind the Visitor, as delineated in universal law and our own law (cf. S. 94). Norms remain in effect until they are revoked by a subsequent Provincial Assembly.

## **E. Conclusion**

Assemblies, be they Domestic, Provincial, or General demand much work on the part of many confreres. Through their collaborative efforts, in an atmosphere of free and creative exchange, the life of the Congregation is strengthened and renewed.

The greatest fruit of an assembly is the rekindling of the missionary zeal of the confreres. “So then, let’s have this constant desire that the kingdom of God may be extended, and the zeal to work with all our might at it so that, having obtained the kingdom of God on earth, we may go to enjoy it in heaven. Let’s keep this lamp always lit in our hearts” (St. Vincent on *Seeking the Kingdom of God*, 21 February, 1659).

In these times when reconfiguration is a major theme for most of the Congregation, an assembly can be a powerful tool for moving us forward in response to the pressing needs of the poor and of the Church today. Vincent de Paul reminds us that we are far from the “final form” that our Congregation will take. Gathered together in prayer, discernment, and dialogue confreres can more easily hear and respond to the Spirit who ever calls us to new creativity in the proclamation of the Gospel to the poor. May we remain ever true to that prophetic mission that has been entrusted to us by our Founder.

May, 2014

## 3.

### A Possible Directory for Running a Provincial Assembly: *Notes from a Recent Provincial Assembly*

#### *The Responsibility of a Delegate:*

1. To be present during the course of the entire Assembly, from the opening on \_\_\_\_\_ until the closing on \_\_\_\_\_;
2. To participate in all discussions and Assembly processes;
3. To vote on all matters that are presented for the Assembly's consideration.

#### *The Responsibility of a Participant:*

1. To be present for as much of the Assembly as possible;
2. To participate in all discussions and Assembly processes;
3. A participant does not vote.

### **To be voted upon at the Assembly**

#### *Proposed Rules and Procedures:*

1. Every confrere present will be able to speak on the proposals. Participants need not wait until all delegates have had an opportunity to speak before they request to speak.
2. There will be a time limit of two minutes each time a confrere speaks.
3. No one can speak twice before others who want to speak have had an opportunity to do so.
4. The Steering Committee may set time limits on debate. Any delegate can move to extend debate. A second is required. The motion is non-debatable and requires a simple majority.
5. The voting is done only by delegates. The delegates include those elected and all incorporated members who have notified the Provincial that they will be in attendance from the beginning and for the duration of the Assembly.
6. Voting on the postulata will take place in the order suggested by the Preparatory Committee as approved or revised by the body.
7. If an amendment is proposed, all debate will be directed toward the amendment until it is resolved.
8. Voting will be done by a show of hands. If the decision of the Assembly is abundantly clear by a show of hands, the votes will not be counted unless requested by a delegate.

9. A “simple majority” means more than half the votes say “yes” or “no”. Invalid votes and abstentions are not counted. With an equal number of yes and no votes, the motion fails.
10. A “two-thirds majority” means two-thirds or more of the valid votes saying “yes” or “no”. Invalid votes and abstentions are not counted. If there is exactly two-thirds, the motion carries.
11. An “absolute majority” is more than half the number of valid votes.

## **Types of Postulata**

Unless otherwise noted, the postulata compiled by the Preparatory Committee will have been originally proposed by houses. They do not require a second. Postulata originally proposed by individual confreres require a second before consideration.

The Preparatory Committee designates postulata under one of the following categories. A delegate may move to reconsider the action of this Committee and propose a new designation. This motion is debatable and requires a simple majority.

**NORM:** a norm is a general rule which becomes binding in the Province after a positive vote by the Assembly and approval by the Superior General.

**ADVICE TO THE PROVINCIAL:** This is voted by the Assembly.

**COMMENT:** Comments are printed in the compilation of postulata for the benefit of the Provincial and the Assembly, but are not debatable nor voted.

The distinction is made following the prescriptions of our Constitutions (143) and Statutes (91). Norms are “general rules applicable to all cases described in them”. The Assembly is consultative to the Provincial in matters reserved to him by law or “by his executive power necessary for carrying out his office”.

## **Rules of Order**

The rules of debate, voting and procedure will be moved at the beginning of the Provincial Assembly. They may be discussed and amended. They will be enacted by a simple majority. Once enacted, they may be suspended by a two-thirds majority. When motions are proposed by a house or committee, they do not need a second. When introduced by a single confrere, they do. Postulata proposed to the Preparatory Committee by a single confrere are designated as such in the Assembly materials.

**Other motions, in order of precedence, are:**

Motion	Debatable or not?	How it is done
Raising a point of order	- not debatable	- chair recognizes
Dividing the motion	- not debatable	- simple majority
Suspending the rules	- not debatable	- two-thirds majority
Reconsidering an action taken	- debatable	- simple majority
Taking from the table	- not debatable	- simple majority
Ending debate	- not debatable	- two-thirds majority
Extending debate	- not debatable	- simple majority
Referring to committee	- debatable	- simple majority
Amending	- debatable	- simple majority

**Types of Legislation**

**NORMS** – The Provincial Assembly may “establish norms for the common good of the Province, within the limits of universal law and our own law, which obtain obligatory force after being approved by the Superior General with the consent of his Council” (Const. 143.1). “They remain in force until they are revoked by a subsequent Provincial Assembly or by the Superior General” (Stat. 94).

**ORDINANCES** – It is a function of the Provincial, “with the assent of his council, to enact ordinances for the good of the Province” (Const. 125.2). “The ordinances of a Provincial remain in force until the next Provincial Assembly, unless another provision has been made by the Provincial or his successor” (Stat. 71).

**PROVINCIAL PLAN** – “It is the function of the Provincial, in accord with the provincial norms and the consent of his council, to establish the provincial plan” (Stat. 69.1). An Assembly’s action on this is “advice to the provincial”.

## 4.

**General Assembly 2016:  
“Reflection Sheet” for Domestic and Provincial Assemblies**

**THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION:  
FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF FIDELITY TO ITS CHARISM  
AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

*“To all whom I send you, you shall go”*

(Jer 1:7)

**I. 400 years as a Congregation allows us to remember our history**

*“God is the one who calls us and who, from all eternity, has destined us to be Missioners, since He didn’t bring us to birth either one hundred years earlier or later” (SVP XI, 98, Conference of 29.10.1638).*

*“You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things” (Vita Consecrata, 110).*

1. Share with the confreres your experience in the Congregation (origins, crucial moments, joys, sorrows, etc.).
2. The Congregation of the Mission is called to follow Christ, evangelizing the poor. As we look at our life as Vincentian:
  - 2.1. at the local level:
    - 2.1.1. how do we manifest the charism?
    - 2.1.2. how not?
  - 2.2. at the Provincial level:
    - 2.2.1. how do we manifest the charism?
    - 2.2.2. how not?
  - 2.3. at the level of the Congregation:
    - 2.3.1. how do we manifest the charism?
    - 2.3.2. how not?
3. What recommendations do you have for the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our foundation:
  - 3.1. on the local level?
  - 3.2. on the Provincial level?

## II. 400 years as a Congregation invites us to renew our Vincentian missionary vitality

*“The Vincentian community is, therefore, organized to prepare its apostolic activity and to encourage and help it continually. And so, members, individually and collectively, should strive to fulfill their common mission through a wholehearted spirit of renewal in fraternal union” (C. 19).*

### *Community and mission*

4. In what ways is the communal life in your province sustaining the Vincentian missionary vitality of your apostolates?
  - 4.1. How not?
5. In what ways does the apostolate support community life?
  - 5.1. How not?

### *The Lines of Action of General Assembly 2010*

*In 2010 the members of the Congregation of the Mission resolved to develop the following Lines of Action:*

- *Formation (initial and ongoing)*
  - *Reconfiguration*
  - *Dialog with the poor and with the Vincentian Family*
  - *Creativity in our ministries*
  - *The methodology of Systemic Change*
6. How have the Lines of Action helped us to renew the Vincentian missionary spirit of our Province?
  7. Which elements mentioned in the Lines of Action do we need to continue to develop over the next 6 years for the continued growth of our Congregation?

## III. 400 years as a Congregation invites us to discover the possibilities and challenges for the New Evangelization

*“We need to let ourselves be evangelized by the poor. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way” (Evangelii Gaudium, 198).*

8. *“All of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out” (Evangelii Gaudium, 20).* Today, after 400 years, which five specific contributions should the Congregation offer to the New Evangelization?

9. Pope Francis invites us to be “*Spirit-filled Evangelizers*” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 259).
  - 9.1. What aspects of our Vincentian spirituality should be reinforced today?
  - 9.2. How vibrant are the ministries of preaching and reconciliation in our lives and apostolates as Vincentians?
10. What should we do to help in the formation:
  - 10.1. of the clergy?
  - 10.2. of the laity?
11. “*Our gracious Father wants to hear the cry of the poor*” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 187). How does the cry of the poor resound in/affect you?
12. “*All of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel*” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 20).
  - 12.1. Where are the peripheries in which your Province is serving?
  - 12.2. What are the peripheries to which your Province should move?
  - 12.3. What are the peripheries to which the Congregation should go?
13. “*The Congregation of the Mission... should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place*” (C. 2). Furthermore, the New Evangelization reminds us that both as Church and Congregation we are international and multicultural, called to work in a spirit of collaboration and solidarity.
  - 13.1. In regard to collaboration (personnel and projects) and solidarity (economic resources):
    - 13.1.1. what is your local community doing?
    - 13.1.2. what is your Province doing?
    - 13.1.3. what more can your Province do?
  - 13.2. In regard to multicultural and international nature of the Congregation:
    - 13.2.1. what are the challenges for your local community?
    - 13.2.2. what are the challenges for your Province?
    - 13.2.3. what are the challenges for the Congregation?
    - 13.2.4. should the Superior General and his Council promote the International Missions as a way to strengthen our international missionary vocation?
14. What other suggestions would you like to offer to your Province and the Congregation for consideration over the next 6 years?

## 5.

## Instructions for the Reflections by the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies

### *Before the Domestic Assemblies:*

The Preparatory Commission would recommend that the local communities spend some time in recollection together before beginning their work. We offer the following to guide this time of prayer:

Exodus 3:7-10

SVP, Conference of October 29, 1638 (SVP XI, 98)

Constitutions 2 and 19

Vita Consecrata, 110

Evangelii Gaudium, 20, 187, 198, 259

Please end your time of reflection with the “Prayer for the Time of Assemblies”.

### *The Domestic Assemblies:*

The Preparatory Commission recommends that each local community gather for as much time as necessary to consider the questions that have been posed in preparation for both the Provincial and General Assemblies. All confreres should bring with them to the Domestic Assemblies a copy of the Lines of Action of GA 2010 in order to respond to Questions #6 and #7. Question #1 is designed to be shared by the confreres in the local communities only. This sharing does not need to be sent to either the Provincial or the General Assemblies. We ask that a summary of the responses of the local communities to the rest of the reflection questions be submitted to each Province’s Preparatory Commissions, so that they may be discussed during the Provincial Assemblies. Each local house should also submit any postulates that it may have for GA 2016 for consideration by its Provincial Assembly.

### *The Provincial Assembly:*

The Preparatory Commission requests that each Province send to the General Curia in Rome the synthesis of the responses to the questionnaire except for #3 which is meant for provincial use. We ask that these responses be as concrete and practical as possible, so that they may help us to formulate realizable goals for the future. At the same time we ask that each Province submit any postulates that it has approved for GA 2016.

Please send these responses to the Curia ([ag2016@cmglobal.org](mailto:ag2016@cmglobal.org)) before **September 30, 2015**.

## 6.

## Prayer for the Time of Assemblies

O God, merciful Father,  
who has sent your Son as Savior of the World,  
you have chosen us to announce the Gospel to the poor,  
our Lords and Masters.

We give you thanks for having called us to this missionary vocation.

We are on our journey to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly  
of the Congregation of the Mission.

We ask you to give us the light of your Spirit to enlighten our minds,  
to strengthen our wills, and to make us docile to your inspirations,  
so that we can be attentive to the call of the Gospel  
and of the Church,  
and to discern the signs of the times.

Open our hearts to your divine grace.  
May this be a time of communion and of participation,  
so that we can be prophetic witnesses  
of your love to the whole world.

Living in this continual state of renewal  
may we remain faithful to the charism of St. Vincent  
in this age of the new evangelization.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal,  
as we begin the fourth centenary of our Vincentian charism,  
help us to bring the joy of the Gospel to the ends of the earth,  
so that no periphery will be deprived of your light,  
and the poor will again be in the centre of the Church  
and of our lives.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## 7.

### Instructions for Presentation of Posulata to the General Assembly

1. Every confrere, community, province or region of the Congregation of the Mission has the legitimate right to send its wishes, suggestions and petitions to the General Assembly (cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 631, 3°).
2. Not every wish, suggestion or petition presented to the General Assembly is, per se, a postulate. A postulate, properly so called, is every petition, desire or suggestion legitimately sent to the General Assembly by a physical or moral person of the Congregation, **in view of the good of the entire Congregation** or of almost the entire Congregation, be it according to the Constitutions and Statutes, be it against the Constitutions and Statutes, be it outside the Constitutions and Statutes, and which the General Assembly must treat. Concretely, the following constitute material for a postulate:
  - Requesting some modification in the Constitutions (cf. C. 137, 4°), or in the Statutes (cf. C. 137, 3°);
  - Asking to have a Decree promulgated (cf. C. 137, 3°);
  - Requesting the authentic interpretation of some point of the Statutes (cf. C. 137, 5°);
  - Asking that the authentic interpretation of some point of the Constitutions be requested of the Holy See (cf. C. 137, 5°);
  - Requesting a declaration of doctrinal or exhortative character;
  - Requesting that the General Assembly include some particular theme in the project of the Congregation for the next six years.
3. The General Assembly, as the supreme authority of the Congregation, has the right to determine which of those presented as postulates it desires to treat during the Assembly itself and which it does not, referring the latter, as it sees fit, to other forums (Superior General, General Council, Visitor, Provincial Council or Assembly, etc.).
4. Before the General Assembly, the Preparatory Commission studies the postulates received and makes appropriate recommendations to the Assembly as to how those postulates should be studied, always safeguarding the right of the Assembly to discuss and study them as it wishes (cf. Directory of the General Assembly).
5. Postulates are approved by an absolute majority of the valid votes, with the exception of those which suppose an amendment to the Constitutions or request an authentic interpretation which must be

sent to the Holy See (cf. C. 137, 4° and 5°), for which a majority of two-thirds is required (cf. Directory of the General Assembly).

6. To facilitate the work of the Assembly, it is helpful that the postulates be formed with attention to these **formal criteria**:
  - 6.1. Each postulate must be limited to presenting only one point and must be drafted on an independent sheet.
  - 6.2. The postulate must be written in a positive/declarative sense, in such a way as to allow one to pronounce clearly with a YES or a NO.
  - 6.3. Each postulate must be motivated in a clear and precise way, distinguishing between the postulate properly so-called and its motivation. The name of persons or communities (province or region) who present it must also be included in the presentation of the postulate.
  - 6.4. It is not convenient to be lavish in the presentation of postulates, nor to propose to the General Assembly that which could be the result of taking into account the principles of co-responsibility, unity in diversity, subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C. 98).

## 8.

## Certificate of the Election of the Delegates for the General Assembly

PROVINCE OF \_\_\_\_\_

Date of the election of the delegate(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of confreres with active voice in the Province on the election day \_\_\_\_\_

The Province, in conformity with the Constitutions (art. 139) and Statutes (art. 89 § 2) of the Congregation of the Mission, elected as delegate(s) and substitute(s) for the 2016 General Assembly the confreres:

Delegate(s):

Family Name and first (Christian) name	Date of birth	Date of vows

Substitute(s):

Family Name and first (Christian) name	Date of birth	Date of vows

The delegate(s) and the substitute(s), duly elected, accept their election and declare their willingness to be present at the General Assembly, which will begin on 27 June 2016 at DePaul University in Chicago, IL (USA).

Signatures of the Visitor, the Secretary of the Assembly, the delegate(s) and substitute(s).

Date of the Certificate and seal

9.

Data Sheet of Participants to the General Assembly 2016

1. Name & Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Status: Brother: \_\_\_\_\_; Priest: \_\_\_\_\_; Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Birth: Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Place \_\_\_\_\_

4. Province: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Date of Vows \_\_\_\_\_

7. Date of Ordination (Priest): \_\_\_\_\_

8. Present Ministry: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Apostolic Experiences (Work, Place, Year):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Principal Responsibilities in the Congregation of the Mission, indicating the years (for example, as superior, council member, formator, etc.):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Languages: Spoken \_\_\_\_\_  
Written \_\_\_\_\_

12. Any other information that you would like to give about yourself.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Please send your response, together with your passport size color picture, to the General Curia on or before **September 30, 2015**. Thank You.)

## 10.

## Letter from the Preparatory Commission to the Visitors

CONGREGAZIONE DELLA MISSIONE  
CURIA GENERALIZIA, ROMA

Rome, 12 December 2014

Dear Visitor,

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us!

During the second meeting of the Preparatory Commission for General Assembly 2016, we reviewed the process for the election of the Superior General outlined in the Directory. Article n. 36,1 states:

*At least six months before the Assembly, the Preparatory Commission of the General Assembly will send a letter to all the Visitors of the Congregation asking them, together with their Councils, after having consulted the confreres they wish, to present three possible candidates for the office of Superior General in order of preference...*

We encourage you to consult as many confreres as possible in this process. Some of you may choose to do so during your Provincial Assemblies.

Please email the three names of your candidates along with the results of your Provincial Assembly before **September 30, 2015**. Please send all your documents to the Curia at the following address: [ag2016@cmglobal.org](mailto:ag2016@cmglobal.org) .

Thank you for your continued collaboration.

Your brothers in Christ,

Joseph V. Agostino  
*Coordinator*

Adam Borowski  
*Secretary*

Orlando Escobar  
Joaquín González Hernando  
Fernando Mucavele  
Robertus Wijanarko

## 11.

## Letter from the Superior General to the Visitors

CONGREGAZIONE DELLA MISSIONE  
CURIA GENERALIZIA, ROMA

Rome, 12 December 2014

*To all Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

RE: Postulata for the General Assembly 2016

Dear Visitor,

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

In order to assist our confreres in the formulation of postulata for General Assembly 2016, I ask that every Visitor appoint a confrere, an expert in canon Law, to evaluate the postulata submitted from the province for General Assembly in 2016. If necessary, please ask your local expert to help formulate what is submitted in the proper form of a postulata, so that it can be brought to the floor of the Assembly. Thank you for your collaboration in this task.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

PART TWO:  
Articles for Reflection and Discussion  
for the General Assembly

1.

Reflections on the Theme of the 2016 General Assembly:  
*“To all whom I send you, you shall go” (Jer 1:7)*

Patrick J. Griffin, C.M.

Luke’s Gospel (4:16-30) captures the day when Jesus comes to the Synagogue of Nazareth and takes up the scroll of Isaiah and begins to read (Isa 61:1): *“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted...”* This passage then becomes the signature description of Jesus’ ministry in this Gospel, and the one which drew the attention of St. Vincent as he sought a way to describe the charism of the priests and brothers who composed the Congregation.

In seeking a description for his ministry, it seems natural for Jesus to seek among the writings of the major prophets. One can wonder what would have happened if Jesus was handed the scroll of Jeremiah or that of Ezekiel, what passage would he have read? In Jeremiah, perhaps the Temple Sermon would have attracted Jesus’ attention as it calls people to repentance (26:1-15), or perhaps Jeremiah’s reflection on the necessity to proclaim the word of God without compromise (20:8-9; cf. 15:16). In Ezekiel, perhaps he would have chosen the vision of the dry bones as the prophet emphasizes the power of God’s word/spirit to bring forth life as it is proclaimed by God’s agent (37:1-14). In each of these prophets, one can find numerous passages which embrace the direction of Jesus’ ministry, and, consequently, the call of the Congregation as Vincent would have interpreted it. One begins to appreciate more profoundly the prophetic character of Jesus’ proclamation and that of a missionary.

Aside from the powerful passages in action which one could identify in the prophets, one can also seek enlightenment in the vocation story, the commissioning, of each of them. Each major prophet of the Old Testament – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel – records this event. Each has a different context for his calling, but what they all have in common is a summons to be “sent” and to be armed with the Word of

the Lord. There is always a reason not to speak which is followed by an empowerment to speak. Isaiah proclaims himself a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips, and the Lord has an angel touch his lips with an ember to purify them (Isa 6:5-7). Jeremiah says that he is too young, and the Lord touches his mouth to give him words (Jer. 1:6-9). Ezekiel is repeatedly told not to be afraid of the people or of the situations, and the Lord gives him the scroll to eat (Ezek 2:6; 3:4). In each story, the prophet is always gifted with the Word of God, and so he is commanded to speak.

Empowered with the Word of God, the prophet is then “sent” – we might say made a “missionary” for his people. When the Lord God looks about to seek whom he shall authorize to proclaim his message, Isaiah speaks up: *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” “Here I am,” I said; “send me!” And [the Lord] replied: “Go and say to this people”* (Isa 6:8-9). As Ezekiel sees the heavenly vision, the Lord commissions him:

The voice said to me: “Son of man, stand up! I wish to speak to you.” As he spoke to me, the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard the one who was speaking say to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites... – to them I am sending you. You shall say to them: “Thus says the Lord GOD”” (Ezek 1-3.4).

And Jeremiah, despite the protestations of his youth, cannot avoid the force of the summons to be the one who carries the Lord’s word: *But the LORD answered me..., “To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak”* (Jer. 1:7). It is the prophet Jeremiah and this last statement (“*To whomever I send you, you shall go*”) which we have decided will exemplify the scriptural expression for our General Assembly motto: *“Let us allow ourselves to be renewed by the missionary vitality of our Vincentian vocation.”* We shall seek to learn from Jeremiah the particular lessons that he has to teach regarding mission and vitality. We can imagine the ways in which the Lord Jesus meditated upon the witness of this prophet, and the lessons that this reflection teaches us. In other presentations, other aspects of our theme will receive treatment.

The global statement of identity which colors all the other elements is that we are missionaries who proclaim God’s word and God’s vision of the future. As Vincentians, it is important for us to understand and accept this truth. It is one which all of us continue to need to ponder. The current focus of the Church on the “New Evangelization” can help in this analysis. That is our starting point: I am a missionary of the word – what does that mean for me as a confrere in the Church today.

In the presentation above, three elements were intended to emerge with regard to our charism and the Jeremiah passage: first of all, the

prophetic character of our calling; secondly, the empowerment of the Word of God; and thirdly, the dynamics of being sent, of carrying out the ministry of an apostle. The remainder of this presentation will focus on these elements and particularly as Jeremiah tutors us along these lines.

### **1. The Missionary as Prophet: A boldness of presence**

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you* (Jer. 1:5).

No scriptural figures were more embedded in their own time than the prophets. That was the very nature of their calling. They were summoned by the Lord God to take a look at the world around them and to see where the needs of people were most devalued and cast aside, and then they were to speak out with clarity and boldness. Everything about the prophet spoke this message: his clothes, his food, his words, his actions. The prophet enfleshed his message in a way that no other figure did or could. Jeremiah hears the call to be one of these powerful figures. He is sent by the Lord: *“To uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant”* (Jer. 1:10). The Lord reminds him: *“I am the one who today makes you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze, against the whole land”* (Jer. 1:18).

The message of the prophet is that which needs to be said – offering consolation as well as challenge, forgiveness as well as a call to repentance. And he is to carry out this ministry with courage and energy. These elements need to characterize the heart of a missionary. The words of the prophet which call someone or a society or oneself to change and be converted rest close to the center of the Vincentian charism and the mission. In the midst of this proclamation and witness, we present the good news.

### **2. The Missionary as Preacher – The Word of God**

The necessity for a missionary, like a prophet, to be filled with the word of God is primary. This, of course, happens in at least two ways: hearing and speaking. First of all, the missionary needs to have heard God's word with clarity. The Word of God needs to be our primary text because it is our clearest and most explicit connection to Jesus. No other writing comes close to offering this intimacy. We know how Vincent speaks about the need for confreres to study and reflect upon God's word. We know how he uses the example of Jesus culled from the Scriptures as the models for action and decision in our Common Rules.

Then the missionary must speak. There are two parts to the commission which the Lord gives to Jeremiah. We have highlighted the

first half, but the second is joined to it in spirit as well as intent as the Lord gives this charge to the prophet: *"To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak."* The missionary, as the prophet, is directed to speak the word of God. Sometimes this proclamation is a daunting task, and the servant of the Lord can be discouraged. Jeremiah knew this truth:

*"Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage I proclaim; The word of the LORD has brought me reproach and derision all day long. I say I will not mention him, I will no longer speak in his name. But then it is as if fire is burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding back, I cannot"* (Jer. 20:8-9).

Called to speak the word of God, the prophet as missionary, must do so because, in its best form, this word has become a fire within. One must cast the flame forth or be consumed by it. This message is a confirmation of the missionary's knowledge of the Lord: *"Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor, he prospered Is this not to know me? – oracle of the LORD"* (Jer. 22:16).

### **3. The Missionary as Apostle: Obedience in being sent**

The nature of a missionary is, of course, to be sent. We should be attentive to what that needs to mean for us. The response to the Vincentian vocation is not simply charity or generosity, but obedience. Having been called to this way of life and accepted the summons, we are then sent and our response must be characterized by an attentive compliance of mind and heart as well as body. Where we are sent and what is asked of us are not (totally) within our power. This element is clear in the commissioning of the prophets as well as the life of Jesus who always recognizes his being sent by the Father and who responds with obedience.

In the context of the "new evangelization," the being sent does not necessarily involve our being transplanted from one country to another, but an embracing of the missionary attitude. We are always "sent" to those whom we serve and thus our attitude is not simply maintenance, but growth and challenge. We proclaim the Gospel as if for the first time, as if we were speaking to people who had never heard it before, or at least heard it well. We emphasize that which is most basic and important about our faith. This is not to say that we speak or teach as if we were dealing with children – many of those in our communities may be better educated than we – but it is to recognize that sometimes the essentials of our faith and practice are not as clearly perceived as they might be. An intelligent, respectful, thoughtful proclamation of our faith can be appreciated by everyone and provides a true evangelization.

We note how Vincent was eager to send the early confreres forth on mission and how they were to speak about what was most important and fundamental. That continues to be good advice for the missions which we continue to carry forth.

And, we are always sent to the poor in some fashion. Sometimes, we have the privilege of dealing directly with those who have great needs. We take advantage of this opportunity with joy and desire. Sometimes, our mission may bring us to places where the poor are less evident; in these situations, the needs of the poor must always be in our heart and on our lips. Vincent was most effective in organizing and sensitizing others to the stories of the marginalized. He did more through the ministrations of others than he could possibly do himself. When we are sent to these situations, our Vincentian vocation, our call to be prophets, continues to be primary and needs to be evident.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A reflection upon other passages from the Scriptures which Jesus might have used to characterize his ministry is a useful and suggestive exercise. To seek those citations within the writings of the prophets offers a particular invitation to reflect upon his work of being sent, of proclaiming God's word, and of doing so with originality and boldness. The prophet did not simply speak God's message, he lived it and its consequences. Jesus brings that role to completion.

Vincent invites us to follow the modeling of Jesus in our ministry. As we prepare for our Assembly, we can reflect with them upon the missionary vocation of Jeremiah: "*To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak*" (Jer. 1:7).

## 2.

## Vincentian Contributions to the New Evangelization

Celestino Fernández, C.M.

**1. Introduction**

Convoked by the Superior General, Father G. Gregory Gay, C.M., the Congregation of the Mission will celebrate our forty-second General Assembly from June 27 to July 15, 2016. The theme of the Assembly is focused on the evangelizing nature of our “being” and our “doing”: *Let us allow ourselves to be renewed by the missionary vitality of our Vincentian vocation.* This theme connects us with the call for a new evangelization in which the whole Church is now involved. The General Assembly, among other things, has as its purpose: *to preserve and promote the spirituality and apostolic vitality of the Congregation* (Constitutions, 135). The best thing that we can do is to reflect on a series of fundamental questions concerning our present and future, questions that are based on our present day mission in the Church. I will summarize all of these questions into one: What can and what should we, as Vincentians, contribute to the new and urgent process of evangelization?

**2. Evangelization, the task of all Christians**

I want to make it clear that we are reflecting on the question of whether, as Vincentians, we have something to say about this universal process of evangelization. Clearly there is an urgency about evangelization which is a ministry and a universal command that is imposed on the whole church. Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, tell us: “*Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize*” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #14).

Therefore, we cannot speak about a “Vincentian evangelization” as such because this vast area of evangelization involves all Christians. Evangelization is a task that involves the whole Church. It is the Church’s fundamental task, *the* reason for her being Church. The rainbow is a combination of various colors; therein lies its beauty. It has no one specific or dominant color; rather all the colors are equally represented. Thus each color contributes to the beauty of the whole reality of the rainbow. We could say then that we are attempting to find that color which is uniquely Vincentian, so that we can contribute to the beauty of the rainbow of evangelization.

### 3. Some clarifications with regard to the new evangelization!

I am not going to enter into a discussion about the use of the word *evangelization* with or without the adjective. Personally, I believe the word has the same meaning with or without the adjective and therefore the word that is important is the noun *evangelization*. But we must also be mindful of the following. The new evangelization has two meanings:

- First of all, it obviously means that we must take up the process of evangelization anew, given the fact that secularization has disillusioned the West as its process of de-Christianization has spread. Gospel values, for example, love, unity, equality, solidarity, etc., have given way to new “secular” values, such as progress, efficiency, success, consumption. Although we continue to speak about Christian values, they are no longer rooted in our hearts.
- The new evangelization also means that we have to evangelize in anew, with fresh methods and new goals and strategies to avoid the errors of the past. The goal cannot be to re-establish Christianity, but rather must be the building up of the Kingdom of God. That task has nothing to do with the concern “to conquer the world,” but is all about a presence of witness in the midst of the world. We are not dealing with the baptism of a culture or a specific area, but we want to baptize those who believe, who want to accept and share the message of Jesus of Nazareth.
- We should also remember that Pope Francis in both his discourses and, recently *Evangelii Gaudium*, his apostolic exhortation, has continually stated that evangelization (or the new evangelization) has to place the church, the whole church, in a *state of mission*. The Church has to move out to the moral, material, geographical, existential and spiritual “*peripheries*”, and this evangelization must contain elements of dialogue, healing, hope and joy (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #20, 30, 46, 191).

Therefore, having said this, I will take up the challenge of highlighting some specific Vincentian elements or lines of action that will draw us closer to that which should be our genuine contribution to the process of the new and urgent evangelization.

### 4. General Framework of the Vincentian Mission

We have to begin with some background or a general Vincentian framework. On December 6, 1658, Vincent de Paul, in one of his conferences to the Missioners, spoke on the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission: [Our mission] “*is to make God known to poor persons; so as to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it is for persons who are poor*” (CCD: XII: 71). For me, those words constitute the best summary of

our Vincentian character as regards evangelization. Those words also echo the ideas that Blessed Pope Paul VI proclaimed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the ground-breaking Church document on evangelization. This general framework ought to inspire, guide, and find expression in our evangelizing activities; it should also influence our attitudes and dispositions. This general framework gives us a central point of the Vincentian heritage: *God, Jesus Christ, and the poor*.

- ***The primacy of God:*** God is first and is absolute. We are the channels of God's goodness and mercy. As Vincent would say, the God that Vincentians have to proclaim is the God who is "*the protector of the poor*" (CCD: X: 411).
- ***The centrality of Christ:*** Vincent's life was Christ centered and his Christology was not theoretical but alive and existential. Clearly then, our Vincentian identity is Christ-centered. Therefore, our option for the poor can only be understood from the reality that the cause of the poor is the cause of Christ. Thus, we follow Christ and proclaim Jesus Christ, the evangelizer and the servant of the poor.
- ***Passion for the poor:*** We are not simply dealing with a concern for the poor or an act of drawing closer to the poor. Rather, we are exhorted to live the words that Vincent wrote to Monsieur Almeras on October 8, 1649: "*But where can the poor turn? Where can they go? This is my worry and my sorrow*" (ABELLY III: 117).

## 5. The binding thread of the Vincentian mission

The *general Vincentian framework* is sustained by a type of *binding thread* that gives unity and coherence to the Vincentian mission. We face the constant danger that our Vincentian spirituality, could become watered down and lose its strength and attractiveness to other ecclesial groups and spiritualities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1. VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: HELEN MARIE LAW, DC (Vol. 1); MARIE POOLE, DC (Vol. 1-13b); JAMES KING, CM (Vol. 1-2); FRANCIS GERMОВNIK, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]); ESTHER CAVANAGH, DC (Vol. 2); ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, DC (Vol. 12); EVELYNE FRANC, DC (Vol. 13a-13b); THOMAS DAVITT, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); GLENNON E. FIGGE, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); JOHN G. NUGENT, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); ANDREW SPELLMAN, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: JACQUELINE KILAR, DC (Vol. 1-2); MARIE POOLE, DC (Vol. 2-13b); JULIA DENTON, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b); PAULE FREEBURG, DC (Vol. 3); MIRIAN HAMWAY, DC (Vol. 3); ELINOR HARTMAN, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b); ELLEN VAN ZANDT, DC (Vol. 9-13b); ANN MARY DOUGHERTY (Vol. 11-12); annotated: JOHN W. CARVEN, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2009. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example (CCD: XII: 71).

This binding thread is the *structure of diakonia* which is proper to the Vincentian charism. Here I am referring to *charity*, to the *service of charity*, to the *mission of charity*, to *diakonia* in its etymological sense of loving service. In *diakonia* we find the perfect union of charity, communion, service, mission and total self-giving. All the actions, thoughts and institutions of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were motivated by and focused on charity as mission and mission as charity.

Vincent de Paul united affective and effective love as two realities that become one. They should be seen in the same light as the union between charity and mission (CCD: IX: 466, 467-468, 470-471). Vincent warned his followers that affective love without a commitment to the process of evangelization, that is, charity without mission, would, at the very least, be suspicious: *Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows; for very often many acts of love of God, of devotion, and of other similar affections and interior practices of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, very suspect if they don't translate into the practice of effective love. "By this," says Our Lord, "is my Father glorified, that you may bear much fruit." We have to be very careful about that; for there are many who, recollected exteriorly, and filled with lofty sentiments of God interiorly, stop at that, and when it comes to the point of doing something, and they have the opportunity to act, they come up short* (CCD: XI: 32-33).

## 6. The agent of the Vincentian mission

In order for there to be a *Vincentian contribution to the new evangelization* there has to be Vincentian evangelizers, agents of the mission who are motivated by the Vincentian charism and by Vincentian spirituality. Therefore, it is good to outline the image of a Vincentian evangelizer and highlight the more important and fundamental aspects of this image.

- a) They are persons who have a profound experience of God and this means much more than being pious.
- b) They are persons who identify themselves with Christ, the evangelizer of the poor... they identify themselves in a manner similar to that which Vincent spoke about in his conference to the Mis-

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2. LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul: Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, 3 volume, edited by John E. Rybolt, CM; translated by William Quinn, FSC; notes by Edward R. Udovic, CM and John E. Rybolt, CM; introduction by Stafford Poole, CM; New City Press, New Rochelle, New York, 1993; future references to this work will be cited with the name Abelly, followed by the volume number and then the page number, for example, ABELLY III: 117.

sionaries: *The Son of God came to evangelize the poor. And are not we, Messieurs, sent for the same purpose?* (CCD: XI: 283-284).

- c) They are persons who are firmly convinced of sharing in the Vincentian vocation. They are nourished by Vincentian spirituality and give witness to this reality in their life.
- d) They are persons who make every effort to discern the will of God *in the signs of the time* and they read these *signs of the time* from the perspective of the needs and the situation of the poor, the marginalized, the helpless, the excluded...
- e) They are persons filled with zeal (a characteristic Vincentian virtue) and with everything that is implied in the process of evangelization, that is, they are bold and creative in order to open new paths for evangelization.
- f) They are people who feel the obligation and the urgency for ongoing formation. They are convinced that *formation in the service of evangelization* is a question of justice with regard to the poor who are to be evangelized.

## 7. The beneficiaries of the Vincentian mission

The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod on the new evangelization also gave importance to a series of new situations or new areopaghi – where today evangelization is all the more necessary and urgent. It spoke of the vast area of culture, the phenomenon of migration, the media, the global economy, scientific and technological advances, civic life (#52-60).

At the same time, even though we might be aware of the following, it is nevertheless restated that consecrated individuals ought to be in the forefront of the mission: on the periphery with those who are most poor; in those places where the calls of the poor are most urgent; on the frontier where the church confronts new and difficult missionary problems and challenges that are found in the new situations of poverty, in the desert where the gospel is little known.

Applying this to the Vincentian evangelizer a series of questions arises: where do we put the emphasis in the process of evangelization? What are the new “areopaghi” that are our concern?

Are we in the forefront with regard to the mission or have we become accustomed to a pastoral style that is sacramental and focused on preserving and maintaining the faith? Are we where we should be in relation to our charism and our spirituality? We can easily see the previous questions are related to what we refer to as the *beneficiaries* of evangelization, that is, those persons to whom our Vincentian mission is or ought to be directed. If we want to be specific about who are or should be the beneficiaries of the process of Vincentian evangelization, then we could state the following.

- a) The poor, and here we speak about the poor in the fullest sense of the word *poor* and from the perspective of the true reality of *poverty*... thus we refer to everything from economic poverty to cultural, moral, psychological and social poverty. We must also include the new poverties that, as John Paul II states in his encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, are always being fabricated by *evil mechanisms* and by the *structures of sin* (#40).
- b) Those who are in need of Christian formation and spiritual attention and who are also poor... and who because of this need are the most poor. Pope Francis speaks about this in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium: The worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith* (*Gaudium Evangelii*, #200). We must be careful here with the way in which people are classified as spiritually poor.
- c) The poor whom no one reaches out to and whom no one wants to provide for. In other words, those persons who are not even viewed as statistics with regard to poverty and misery and social marginalization... those who have lost their visibility and whom no one is concerned about making visible.

## **8. The Vincentian message (some elements from the perspective of the Vincentian charism)**

We, as Vincentians, can contribute some of the elements that are derived from our proper charism and spirituality. I am going to point out four elements within the universal message of evangelization.

- a) The living and true God revealed by Jesus Christ – if we look at the gospel we discover that we are dealing with *the God who is good*, that is, God as Father, as love, as mercy, as infinite forgiveness, as protector and defender of the poor.
- b) Jesus Christ as savior and liberator: Jesus Christ, incarnated, who became the least of all, the servant of all, who serves us through his life and death and resurrection; Jesus Christ who presents himself as the Messiah anointed by the Spirit in order to free the captives and the poor, to break the bonds that enslave people and to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4:16-19).
- c) Charity, which is the fundamental element of our life as believers; affective and effective love which is the life-giving center of the believer and the ultimate proof of faith. Saint Paul told the Galatians: *For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircum-*

*cision counts for anything, but only faith working through love* (Galatians 5:6).

d) The poor as *the sacrament of Christ* (Matthew 25:31-46) and as *our lords and masters*. This element is very Vincentian.

## 9. Fundamental attitude and some Vincentian criteria!

In other words what are some of the ways that a Vincentian can collaborate in the Church's evangelizing process... and collaborate from the perspective of his identity?

a) *The missionary spirit as a basic attitude*

On various occasions Pope Francis has used a word that is not very common in our pastoral vocabulary... I refer to the word *missionary spirit* which implies an attitude that infuses our whole life, that gives meaning to our Christian and our ecclesial life and that guides all our evangelizing activity... an attitude that goes beyond mere acts or missionary programs. This attitude, this missionary spirit, is a constitutive element of the charism, the spirituality and the best Vincentian tradition.

b) *Vincentian criteria for the process of evangelization*

I call these Vincentian criteria because they are an integral part of the Vincentian charism and because they give life to the Vincentian charism that Vincent has passed on to us.

- A clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, or what is the same, a convinced and convincing option for the evangelization of the poor. Without this criterion everything else fades into the background (Constitutions, #12.1).
- Involvement in and attention to the human reality, especially the painful reality of the victims of the system (Constitutions, #12.2).
- Recover an incarnational spirituality: we cannot have mission without Incarnation and inculturation.
- Communion with the poor: this implies a true knowledge of their problems and their needs, an authentic encounter and an acceptance of them, a true participation in their hardships, sensitivity to and respect of their rights...
- Integral evangelization, with words and actions: Vincent de Paul stated: *If there are any among us who think they are in the mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us or by others... that is to preach the Gospel by words and by*

*works and that is the most perfect way; it is also what our Lord did (CCD: XII: 78).*

- To promote, to accompany and to form the laity, especially in those matters regarding the Vincentian charism, Vincentian spirituality and the Vincentian mission.
- To form and be formed in the Social Doctrine of the church so that this becomes a living and actual revelation of the Vincentian spirit.
- Promote the idea that we refer to today as *a shared mission* in the midst of and with the Vincentian Family.
- To look anew at popular missions and to do this with boldness, creativity, a new imagination and with enthusiasm. This is one of the signs of the evangelizing identity of Vincentians.
- Organize charity in such a way that it is highlighted in our evangelization centers. This is an element of our Vincentian heritage that we should not lose sight of. Vincent de Paul recommended that a Confraternity of Charity be established in every place where a popular mission was preached... those confraternities became the visible fruit of the evangelizing activity.
- Apply the methodology of systemic change. Pope Francis states: *from the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization (Gaudium Evangelii, #178).* This means that the process of systemic change is a Vincentian criteria as we engage in the process of evangelization.

## 10. Conclusion

To evangelize from the perspective of a commitment toward the poor and with a vision that charitable service is one of the most genuine characteristics of Vincentian evangelization... this is indeed our best contribution to the new evangelization. From this Vincentian perspective the option for the poor becomes the fundamental focus of the new evangelization.

### Editor's Note:

This article is a summary of a much longer and more fully developed article that can be read in: *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, #2, March-April 2014, pp. 167-182.

See also: <http://famvin.org/es/2014/01/18/aportes-vicencianos-a-la-nueva-evangelizacion/> and <http://somos.vicencianos.org/blog/aportes-vicencianos-a-la-nueva-evangelizacion/>

## 3.

## The General Assemblies of the Congregation of the Mission: History and Outcomes

John E. Rybolt, C.M.

### 1. Introduction

The supreme authority in the Congregation, its general assembly, has been crucial for its development and direction. In its nearly four centuries of existence, the Congregation has held forty-one of these meetings, the first being in 1661. Vincent himself, however, held preliminary assemblies in 1642 and 1651 mainly to develop the rules and constitutions of the nascent Congregation. Besides facing issues specific to the community, the delegates must consider the community's dependence on Church authorities as well as its position relative to the politics of the wider world. To interpret the results of the assemblies, therefore, one must study world history as well as the experience and the law of the Church.

The assemblies dealt with too many issues to outline here. The focus of this study, therefore, is on assemblies noteworthy for their long-term impact on Vincentian life.

### 2. Earliest developments

St. Vincent based much of his thinking about rules and procedures on those of the Jesuits. For the Common Rules, he adopted some of their practices, and in the *Codex Sarzana*, the earliest text concerning assemblies, he employed Jesuit language at times. The Jesuit Latin term for assembly, *congregatio*,<sup>1</sup> conflicted with the name of the community, *Congregatio Missionis*, and probably for this reason the Vincentian term became *conventus*. The French term, *assemblée*, became, in turn, the standard for several European languages.

Many of the issues that the founder included in the early draft of the Constitutions continue to be Vincentian practice. The following list cites the Constitutions of 1668, sometimes called the "Magnae constitutiones."<sup>2</sup> St. Vincent developed these but had not completed them at the time of his death.

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<sup>1</sup> *Codex Sarzana*, John E. Rybolt, trans., ed., *Vincentiana* 35: 3-4 (1991): 307-406.

<sup>2</sup> *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum ac Decretorum quæ Congregationis Administrationem spectant. Die 2 Feb. Anno Domini 1847* [Paris], 263 pages.

1. The general assembly is superior to the superior general (C 1668, ch. I, §2), although he can summon a general assembly (C 1668, ch. I, §5).
2. Its charge is to maintain the Congregation's faithfulness to its charism and rules, and to hold elections (as of new superior general [C 1668, chs. III, VI]).
3. It considers proposals (*postulata*) from provinces (C 1668, ch. VI) and issues decrees and legislation (C 1668, ch. I, §7).<sup>3</sup>
4. The assembly elects four assistants for the superior general (C 1668, ch. II, §1) as well as his admonitor (C 1668, ch. IX).
5. The text provides for government between the death of a superior general and next general assembly (C 1668, ch. IV) and the possible replacement of a superior general.
6. This text also deals with the conduct of a general assembly (such as vocational order among delegates, voting, the secretary) and makes provision for the admittance of delegates, their substitutes, and their absences (C 1668, ch. IX).

In addition, the founder provided for two kinds of general assembly. The first and more important was that held for the election of a superior general after the death or replacement of the previous one. The second deals with the business of the Congregation during the lifetime of a superior general (C 1668, ch. XII); these were to be held every twelve years, unless an election for a superior general took place within that period (C 1668, ch. XI, §8).

The work of past assemblies resembles the procedures of more recent ones, even since the publication of the Constitutions of 1984. However, certain matters have changed, often for the sake of efficiency. Three of these are noteworthy.

1. The opening, closing, and transfer of houses formerly required an action of a general assembly (C. 1668, ch. I, §3), or, when needed, the written approval of European provinces (undoubtedly to facilitate rapid communication). The delegates almost always supported the superior general in these kinds of proposals.
2. The voting system was modeled on that for the election of a pope: the form of the ballot, the use of an urn to receive the ballots, an individual oath before voting and casting the ballot while kneeling before a table supporting a crucifix and the urn. Finally the ballots were to be burned (C. 1668, ch. 7).

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<sup>3</sup> The 1668 Constitutions specify ordinances, replies (*responsa*), rules of office, decrees, catalogues of provinces and houses along with their income, lists of members (including those who left or were dismissed), and a necrology.

3. The superior general proposed candidates for vicar-general and superior general, although the delegates were left free to make their own choice (C. 1668, ch. 3, §1-5).

The same early constitutions provided for the holding of provincial assemblies to prepare for the general assembly (C. 1668, chs. 5, 10). Two points are noteworthy: who can be a delegate and how to conduct the assembly. Many issues in those early constitutions remain part of Vincentian practice today.

The 1668 Constitutions also continued the Saint's decision to hold sexennial assemblies. Their purpose was to have a small and brief meeting at least six years after a general assembly, to discuss the health of the Congregation. This meeting would determine whether a general assembly should be called for the purpose of considering major issues facing it, such as conflicts among provinces or abuses that required remedies (C 1668, ch. 2, § 5; ch. 11). Fifteen of these were held from 1679 to 1939. They averaged only five days with about twenty-two confreres in attendance. None of them ever asked for a general assembly to be held.<sup>4</sup> Since they were basically useless, the Congregation eliminated them in 1954 from its revised constitutions.

The major outcomes of the general assemblies involved primarily the elections of superiors general and their assistants (who had no terms of office), and various decrees based on postulata submitted either by the superior general or individual provinces. In handling the postulata, many assemblies deferred to the judgment of the superior general and his council. They, then, issued responses (*responsa*) to individual provinces or groups of provinces, but these lacked the force of law for the entire Congregation, since they were mainly clarifications about points of rule or procedure. The decrees of the assemblies, even including the responses, formed the basis for Vincentian jurisprudence, our case law.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Before the French Revolution

Between the general assembly of 1661 and that of 1788, the Congregation had sixteen general and seven sexennial assemblies. The general assemblies averaged seventeen days in length with about thirty members (growing from nineteen in 1661 to thirty-five in 1788). All took place at St. Lazare in Paris.

Although many issues may seem trivial to later generations, some were so important that they have defined and regulated the Congrega-

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<sup>4</sup> The superior general and his council could also propose that a general assembly could replace a sexennial assembly; this was the case for 1668, 1692, 1849, 1867, and 1955.

<sup>5</sup> These are contained in *Collectio completa Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis* (Paris, 1882).

tion of the Mission until the present. The major issue of the first assembly, 1661, was the election of the founder's successor. René Almérás, already a close confidant of Vincent's and vicar general of the Congregation, became superior general. The assembly's only other business was the election of the assistants and the admonitor.

The second assembly took place in 1668. It was a general assembly called for the business of the Congregation, principally the still-unfinished constitutions. The discussions filled an astonishing forty-nine days in the summer's heat (15 July through 1 September), a length surpassed only by the fifty-four days spent in 1980, also in the heat of summer (16 June through 8 August). The important result of the 1668 assembly was the official constitutions, which guided the Congregation until 1954.<sup>6</sup>

Still in the seventeenth century, the 1697 assembly opened an issue that would take generations to resolve and nearly caused a schism in the Congregation. Basically, the probable election as superior general of a non-French citizen, Maurice Faure, a native of Savoy, came to the attention of Louis XIV. He vetoed it, thus implicitly denying the office to Italians, Poles, and all others except French confreres. The basic issue concerned the nature of the Congregation: was it French, since its founder was French and it began in France, or was it not. If so, what relation did non-French provinces have to it? The question was so complex that it was referred to the pope, but the resolution was unsatisfactory. Strictly speaking, the matter continued to trouble the Congregation until the election of the first non-French superior general, William Slattery, (although he had to assume French citizenship), and the transfer of the generalate to Rome, a solution that the Italians and others had been proposing for centuries.<sup>7</sup>

From as early as the 1668 Constitutions, another concern was the "primitive spirit" ("*spiritus Instituti*," 1668; "*primitivus spiritus*," 1673; "*spiritus primigenius*," 1736). While certain practices were either introduced or abandoned over the centuries, the general sense of being faithful to the spirit of the founder has remained. Questions regularly arise in assemblies on this matter, and fortunately so, since discussing them allows the Congregation to reflect on its character and purpose in the Church. A related concern was the significance of the Common Rules, understood as a basic guide to Vincentian life. The 1954 consti-

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<sup>6</sup> A selection of twenty of the most important articles was made and presented to Clement X, who approved the text (with slight changes) in 1670. They were called the "Constitutiones selectae."

<sup>7</sup> For the history, see LUIGI MEZZADRI - FRANCESCA ONNIS, et al., *The Vincentians. A General History of the Congregation of the Mission* (Hyde Park, NY, 2013), 2: 3-36. The history of other assemblies is found in various volumes of *The Vincentians*.

tutions (art. 219) called for “esteem and veneration” for them as a model of perfection but did not consider them binding under pain of sin.<sup>8</sup> The later constitutions adopted this perspective.

Jansenism, a matter on which Vincent took a firm position, returned in other forms after his death. It was particularly evident in a struggle to promote his canonization: Jansenists had their own candidate. The 1717 and 1724 general assemblies had to deal with the related question of those confreres who supported many French bishops in a struggle with the Holy See, as codified in the papal constitution *Unigenitus* (1713). The bishops supporting Cardinal Noailles of Paris refused to accept *Unigenitus*, inasmuch as it appeared to trample on the self-described “Gallican liberties.” The pope, by contrast, insisted on his authority to force the Noailles’ party of bishops to accept it. The Congregation’s neutrality helped it survive this series of conflicts, although a few confreres, including Father and Himbert (first assistant of the Congregation), were expelled for upholding the cardinal’s position in this conflict.

#### 4. From the restoration to 1919

In this period of more than a century, the Congregation held twelve general assemblies. Attendance at the beginning was small (only twenty) but ballooned to sixty by 1861 and reached ninety-five in 1919. Their average length, however, remained fairly steady at only eleven days. These totals are an important indicator of Vincentian recovery. (During the same time, six sexennial assemblies were held.)

Under Napoleon, the Congregation began a slow restoration in France. Since it was impossible, both legally and logistically, to hold an assembly until 1829, the pope appointed a series of vicars-general to govern the community: French for France and Italians elsewhere. Dominique Salhorgne was the first superior general elected in this period (the pope appointed his predecessor, Pierre Dewailly), but the elderly Salhorgne resigned after only six years. In 1835, Jean-Baptiste Nozo, the candidate of the assembly’s conservative wing, succeeded him, but he took a leave of absence in 1841. Jean-Baptiste Etienne, often referred to as the “second founder” of the Congregation, assumed office at the assembly of 1843 and presided over the general assemblies of 1849, 1861, and 1867, and over the sexennial assemblies of 1855 and 1873. Although his impact was prominent during his life, the delegates at the later assemblies began to discount his importance by neglecting his often-repeated summons to, among other things, maintain strict

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<sup>8</sup> General Assembly 32, 1955, decree 18 (“Collectio completa Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis. Nova series post approbationem Constitutionum,” p. 6).

uniformity and obedience to all the rules and practices that Etienne himself restored or originated. These assemblies, therefore, were of less importance than in earlier times.

The same cannot be said of the lengthy generalate of Antoine Fiat, following the four-year office of Eugene Boré. Fiat, elected in 1878, presided, as Etienne had, over three general assemblies: 1890, 1902, and 1914, when he resigned for reasons of health. He also held three sexennial assemblies: 1884, 1896, and 1908. Apart from the elections of his assistants, these six assemblies mainly limited themselves to clarifications about points of the rule. Nonetheless, they made at least three significant decisions. First, the 1890 assembly gave its full support to founding apostolic schools, an innovation in the Congregation. Second, the 1902 assembly had to deal with the specter of Modernism, particularly acute for Vincentians, given the large number of confreres teaching in major and minor seminaries. It was a period of significant struggle, since some confreres were either barred from teaching, such as Guillaume Pouget, or expelled, like Vincenzo Ermoni. Third, all the assemblies had to deal with threats to the existence of the Congregation, since the French confreres were expelled from their seminary work and schools. Large numbers left for foreign missions, as in China and Latin America.

After decades of both numerical growth and apostolic stagnation, the delegates at the 1919 general assembly faced several major issues. Surprisingly, the ninety-five delegates dealt with them in only thirteen days. Many of the questions dealt with the newly-published Code of Canon Law: whether Vincentians are religious; if not, what that means in practice (decrees 560-70). Another dealt with the number and nationality of the assistants of the superior general (decree 572).

During this century, many other matters came before the delegates: the rights of non-European provinces; membership of Vincentian bishops in the Congregation; the establishment of apostolic vicariates as Vincentian provinces; the expulsion or civil suppression of provinces and their impact on Vincentian life (as in Germany, Mexico, and Portugal); and temporary vows.

Minor issues were basically about points of rule, such as uniformity: clothing, schedules, community practices, and finances.

## **5. Twentieth century, 1919 to 1980**

The Congregation underwent many changes during this period. To deal with them, eight general assemblies and two sexennial assemblies took place. The most visible changes are the expansion of both their length (from 12 days in 1931 to 54 in 1980) and the number of delegates (from 112 in 1931 to 161 in 1969).

The world was also changing. Social movements (decolonization, revolutions, totalitarian regimes) and several wars, especially the Span-

ish Civil War and the Second World War, brought enormous challenges to Vincentians. Twenty-one new provinces or vice-provinces came into being, and others grew in size. New missions were founded as a consequence. At the same time, two provinces were suppressed (Iran and Algeria). New works sprang up alongside the traditional ones: universities, new styles of missions (tent missions, *Forains du Bon Dieu* in France; motor missions in the United States), and radio and television productions, to name only a few.

At the same time, the Congregation continued its long-delayed study of its identity vis-à-vis the Code of Canon Law, as required by the Church. The 1931 general assembly, in particular, laid the groundwork for further adaptations, but it would take another two decades before constitutions would appear. Even after their publication in 1954, numerous questions remained, and these would need review in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

To accomplish this review, the Church instructed every congregation to take a new look at the existing constitutions and return to the community's basic sources. The delegates at the 1963 general assembly legislated a few hesitant adaptations concerning liturgical changes and community daily prayers (decree #51). Following the conclusion of the council, by contrast, the confreres swung into action with lengthy and complex studies and analyses of Vincentian life. These culminated in the assemblies of 1968-1969 and 1980.

The first was a two-year extraordinary general assembly, and the second came to an agreement on revised constitutions. These were published, after more revisions and Vatican approvals, in 1984. This new document resolved many important matters that had agitated the Congregation since its earliest days: elections, terms of office,<sup>9</sup> French or international identity, centralization vs. decentralization, the vicar-general, and the relationships among the provinces as well as with the center, now moved to Rome. The 1974 assembly composed the juridical section on community government; with few modifications it became part of the 1980 constitutions.

## 6. Recent history, 1980 to 2016

Following the Holy See's approval of the constitutions, what remained to be done? This question arose while planning the 1986 assembly.<sup>10</sup> Besides electing the superior general (in fact, reelecting

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<sup>9</sup> This assembly requested William Slattery's resignation and specified that thereafter the superior general would have a term of office.

<sup>10</sup> See *Vincentiana* 30: 5-6 (1986) for the documents. With thanks to Robert Maloney his observations and suggestions on this study.

Richard McCullen) and electing the vicar-general and assistants, the delegates decided to analyze the responses from provinces and individuals concerning three points: evangelization of the poor, community for the mission, and formation for the mission. Out of these discussions flowed a plan, the Lines of Action, to guide the community's direction for the next six years.<sup>11</sup> The assembly also initiated another innovation: a final document addressed by the assembly to the Congregation. Previously, the superior general normally communicated an assembly's work. Despite this new procedure, the preparation of the final document in this and subsequent assemblies proved to be extremely laborious, contentious, and time-consuming. Experience shows, it must be admitted, that the delegates' earnest efforts aroused little interest in, with only limited impact on, the provinces.

The 1992 assembly discussed but did not resolve two other issues: the establishment of an ongoing formation program (the CIF), and new international missions. Both began shortly after the assembly.

The Congregation's relationships with other groups, the Vincentian Family, also took shape in these years. This climaxed in the assembly of 1998, which devoted an entire week to learning about and reflecting on various groups whose leadership had been invited to attend as observers.<sup>12</sup>

During this period two other structures developed. One, initiated in 1971 by CLAPVI in Latin America, was the conferences of visitors or provinces. These regional groups met during the assemblies, as in 2004, to draw up their own lines of action or local plans for the following six years, within the context of a Congregation-wide plan.<sup>13</sup> A second structure, dating from 1983, was a regular meeting of the visitors between general assemblies.<sup>14</sup> Although lacking legislative force, these meetings resemble in some respects the sexennial assemblies. Their purpose is to review the state of the Congregation and begin planning for the following general assembly.

The post-constitution assemblies also had to face declining membership in many provinces. This reality contrasted sharply with the energetic and hopeful calls from the assemblies to renewal and recommitment, as if no problem existed in aging provinces, numerous departures, and few vocations. One of the outcomes of the changes in membership was the move toward the fusion or "reconfiguration" of

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<sup>11</sup> See *Vincentiana* 36: 4-5 (1992).

<sup>12</sup> See *Vincentiana* 42: 4-5 (1998).

<sup>13</sup> See *Vincentiana* 48: 4-5 (2004); on the conferences of visitors, see JOSÉ MARÍA NIETO, "The Visitors' Conferences," *Vincentiana* 46: 3 (2002): 232-239.

<sup>14</sup> "Rencontre des visiteurs, Bogotá, 10-25 janvier 1983," *Vincentiana* 27 (1983): 89-217.

provinces, ultimately involving the suppression of provinces and the establishment of new ones.<sup>15</sup>

The 2010 assembly was held in Paris, the first to be held there since 1955. The 2016 assembly is planned for Chicago, the first in the Congregation's history to be held outside of Europe.

## 7. Conclusion

The importance of the general assemblies should not be minimized. Their most important responsibility is to elect the superior general, the vicar-general, and the assistants. The issues (*postulata*) submitted by individual members and by provinces stemming from the provincial assemblies have been crucial for the direction of the entire Congregation. Even though only a small percentage of the confreres attend general assemblies as delegates, every member has a responsibility for their agenda and procedures.

As the time arrives for domestic and provincial assemblies, each confrere should, to the best of his ability, take seriously his personal and communitarian responsibility to guide the entire Congregation. Some questions, such as the following, may help in this preparation:

- Am I taking seriously my responsibility to help guide the Congregation by participating actively in the deliberations of our assemblies?
- What help can I offer to the Congregation at large in the resolution of its major concerns?
- Where do I perceive prayerfully that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Congregation at this time?
- If elected as a delegate to the provincial or general assembly, what can I do to prepare myself for this responsibility?

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<sup>15</sup> Among the earliest studies is THOMAS MCKENNA, "Reorganization of Provinces," *Vincentiana* 46: 3 (2002): 239-246.

## 4.

Saint Vincent de Paul:  
History of the charism of St. Vincent de Paul

Bernard Koch, C.M.

We may say that the charism of Vincent de Paul is charity, that is, affective and active love for God and the neighbor, with its multiple implications and applications. Has this work ceased? No, since the theme of this article is the history of the charism. We will find various gifts or charisms, each of which is implied in the application of charity, as conditions for or means to a better service of God and neighbor.

There are two major phases of this trajectory in Vincent's life: the appearance or acquisition of gifts or charisms, from their origin to his first engagement in spiritual and then corporal service to the poor, in the years 1613-1617. Then comes the concrete working out of these gifts or charisms in practice: the application of charity, his great charism that unifies the others.

The divisions of this history are the dates of the various steps, approximate points in his life, together with his gifts and charisms.

1. *The first appearance of his gifts: his aptitudes, without calling this a charism, but simply how the ways of Providence were active in him.*

Before presenting these steps, it would be good to become aware of what he received from those around him and who had a part to play in his development. God calls us and waits for us through several intermediaries and signs, a long time in advance, as it was for Jeremiah. This is evidently the same for each of us.

***What he received from his ancestors,  
from 1342 to 1597 at age sixteen***

From his father's side: In 990, there was a château called Paulianum in Languedoc. In 1342, a Pierre De Paul and Jean De Paul were squires in the victorious army of the inhabitants of Languedoc against the English. In 1364, Jean De Paul received from the king the property of a defeated individual, Jacotin, from Berno in Gascony, between Dax and Bordeaux. This was how the DePauls came to Gascony. In 1486, one hundred twenty years later, south of Berno at Pouy (called today Saint-Vincent de Paul), there lived a woman, Bertrande De Paul. In 1509, again in Pouy, there was a Vincentina De Paul. Still in Pouy, there are records of a Jean De Paul, the father of Vincent de Paul in 1581. It was here that Vincent was born a century later, in 1581.

There were De Pauls also around Dax, such as a royal sergeant at Poyanne in 1545, another Jean de Paul, a canon of Dax in 1564, and in the years 1580-1590, an Etienne de Paul, prior of Poymartet, and a certain Bertrande de Paul, a cloth merchant in Dax.

The migration continued toward the south, crossing the Pyrenees. A Jean De Paul, a Dominican, lived near Zaragoza in 1498, along with others. It is probably that they were all related in some way, and that the young Vincent went to visit them. The De Paul family of Pouy is found in the list of the owners of fiefs, free lands. Jean de Paul was an important figure, called a *capcazal*, that is, a master of the house. He was not necessarily rich, since the lands were not very lucrative. These farmers had only oxen, not horses, but their social rank gave them a comfortable life amid their human relations. The young Vincent quickly became aware of the work to be done in the country, as well as of the rights and duties of a peasant.

From his mother's side: She was Bertrande de Moras (or du Morar), daughter of Pierre du Morar. The Moras (or Morar) owned a large farm, Morar, some twenty kilometers south of Dax, along with the property of the "caverie de Peyrous." This land brought with it a noble title, but it did not necessarily make the owner a nobleman. Still he was responsible for local good order and security by reason of law and legalities, and he could have horses and bear arms.

2. *The second gift, which would be very useful in many circumstances, beginning with the first letter still in existence: Vincent was an excellent horseman.*

This was the motor scooter of his time. Can we speak of his charism now? No, but only of his providential way of acting. Charism came later, and this involved the art of taking advantage of opportunities, in which he was an expert. He had two uncles: Jacques du Morar, who succeeded his father, Pierre, as the owner of Peyrous; and Jean du Morar, an attorney, a lawyer and royal procurator at the law court of Dax. It was from the latter that Vincent received knowledge of law and legal procedure, noteworthy even in his first letter.<sup>1</sup>

3. *The third gift of Providence: His relatives had good relations with the nobility of the area.*

These were the Gramont, the princes of Bidache, some thirty kilometers south of Dax, who, themselves, had a good relationship with Henry, king of Navarre before he became Henri IV, king of France. In this way, we perceive bonds that were gradually woven for the young Vincent, and his relationships extended even to the high nobility.

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<sup>1</sup> Analyzed by Canon FOURNIER, "Saint Vincent canoniste," *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 94 (1929): 767-772.

4. *Providence's fourth gift or grace, his "charism" or his "multiple charisms."*

Before he was sixteen (i.e., 1581 to 1597) – he gave his age a dozen times – we knew few details about him, but only recollections from him and his compatriots. He led the life of a schoolboy and helped his family as best he could.

***Brilliant beginnings from age sixteen to twenty-four,  
1597 to 1605***

We perceive that he was in a big hurry, not to found a religious institute, but simply to make a living, or to secure an income. What about a vocation to priesthood? His protector, Monsieur de Comet, the attorney in Dax and judge in Pouy, pushed him to begin theological studies. Was this not to provide him with a clerical income, since this was the least burdensome and very common way of doing one's studies for people of the middle class?

Vincent answered quickly and was in such a hurry that he was tonsured at fifteen and a half, and on the same day, Friday, 20 December 1596, received the four minor orders: porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte, although he did not have the required minimum age. Since the bishop of Dax had not yet received his bulls from Rome, the bishop of Tarbes, Salvat d'Iharse, a relative of the Gramont family, who conferred the orders on him in the church of Bidache, a residence of the Gramonts. This seems almost accidental, but it was a consequence of relationships with Vincent's mother's family. There would be others.

He then began his theological studies in Zaragoza. The Jesuits there have the tradition that Vincent stayed with them, and in his writings, one reads recollections about Spanish universities and the austerity of the Carmelite nuns in Zaragoza.

Vincent's father died around the end of 1598; his testament was dated Saturday, 7 February 1598. Vincent was then responsible for his mother and his young brothers and sisters, and, since he had no more resources for his studies, he had to work for himself and his family. Since Toulouse was closer to his family, he went there to continue his studies in 1597 or 1598, and he supported himself as the director of a small student residence.

He was ordained subdeacon in Tarbes, again by Salvat D'Iharse, on Saturday, 19 September 1598, and became pastor of Tilh, some twenty kilometers east of Dax, which still lacked a bishop. It was common enough in those days to be named a pastor of a parish before being ordained a priest, with a vicar doing the work. Vincent was only seventeen, and three months later, he was ordained a deacon on Saturday, 19 December 1598.

Now, the age required by the Council of Trent in canon twelve of its twenty-third session was twenty-one for subdiaconate, twenty-two for diaconate, and twenty-four for priesthood. He was thus a subdeacon four years early, and a deacon five years early, truly a person in a hurry!

On Monday, 13 September 1599, he received, again from the vicar general of Dax, the dimissorial letters for priesthood. This document stated that Vincent was "recognized as capable, sufficiently trained, and of legitimate age." One year later, on Saturday, 23 September 1600, the bishop of Perigueux ordained him, only nineteen and a half, to the priesthood at Château-l'Evêque and not at his cathedral, since it had not yet been repaired after its damage by Protestants. Vincent still had four years of theology ahead of him and was five years too young to fulfill the canonical requirements. Could anyone be in a bigger hurry?

A little later, Richelieu was ordained a bishop at age twenty-two! It was literally to lie or cheat, since Vincent certainly knew his real age. In the texts that we have, he clearly stated his age a dozen times! This practice of early ordination had been quite common, undoubtedly for centuries.

Beginning in the 1650s, it was not the same. At the death of Monsieur Vincent, his confreres could not say that their superior general had been ordained a priest at nineteen instead of twenty-four. They then engaged in a deception: they claimed he was born in 1576, which thus made him ordained a priest at twenty-four. In 1660, they claimed he had died at eighty-four instead of seventy-nine. Only in the twentieth century did Father Coste establish the truth while he was publishing more texts than his predecessors had.

##### 5. *The fifth gift of Providence: his ordination.*

This was the richest gift, although he did not attain it in any direct way, but it was still a great charism, since he could now confect the sacramental body in the Eucharist, and the mystical body of Christ in confession and catechesis. He was still unaware of this, since he was in too much of a hurry to become a priest to realize it. His goal continued to be acquiring ecclesiastical benefices. We should note here that his orientations and decisions took place either through pressure from others or through the influence of events, such as the death of his father, and others. We will see that this will continue in his life.

He finished with distinction his studies for the baccalaureate in theology and the license to teach theology in October 1604, according to documents found at his death. He certainly taught in 1604-1605 on God's grace and human freedom, the standard course for a professor's first year in the classroom. We find traces of them throughout his writings.

6. *The sixth gift from Providence: knowledge of theology.*

This gift, not received from others but from his own work, was his knowledge of theology, along with his closeness to the people since his childhood. These gifts made him a good preacher and teacher, and stalwart in the Jansenist conflict. We still know nothing about his faith life, since he continued to focus on being able to guarantee his family's future, thanks to the clerical state. It was only later that this desire was slowly purified and matured through various failures and his contact with poverty.

He was living in a region and during a period of faith and of tragedies, with religion and politics closely intertwined. Faith was closely linked with brutality during the savage wars of religion, particularly in the large regions of Béarn and Gascony, systematically ravaged by Protestant hordes. Nonetheless, he was not bitter about this, and he always preached peaceful dialogue with the reformers.

***Tested, from age twenty-four to twenty-seven,  
1605-1608***

His first great trial was not long in coming. Vincent failed at some affair in Bordeaux that he did not reveal, and at the end of June 1605 he began to pursue a swindler who had seized an inheritance that was coming to Vincent. He went as far as Marseilles, from where he returned by sea in July to travel over to Narbonne. This was a poor choice of date, since Barbary pirates were on the lookout for ships coming from the fair at Beaucaire. His ship was captured and, instead of acquiring an inheritance, he was enslaved at Tunis, a terrible experience.

An analysis of the letter in which he mentioned this event shows that he already had exceptional knowledge of economy, law, and legal procedures, and he knew the technical terms received from his family, as noted above, and from his university studies. Nothing can therefore allow any doubt about the truth of his captivity. Since he got himself out of it, which was quite rare, this provided an argument for those who deny his captivity.

First, we should note that the Turkish government was less severe in Tunis than in Algiers. All the notices about harsh captivities come from Algiers. In addition, he had been bought by individuals, who had to maintain their slaves in a good enough condition to work, unlike those enlisted for service in the city or the galleys. Vincent's good will, his capacity for good personal relations, together with his aptitude for learning languages – in Barbary, a mixture of Arabic, Spanish, and Italian was the lingua franca – put him in good stead with his four successive masters. He learned the customs of the country,

and the advice that he would later write for his confreres sent to minister to the Christian slaves in Algiers and Tunis shows a perfect knowledge of the usages and mentalities of these countries and how to behave there.

Secondly, we should also note the agreement between the tale of his escape and real circumstances. His master, a convert to Islam from Christianity, had the wherewithal to discreetly prepare a small boat. Vincent was surprised by having to wait for ten months,<sup>2</sup> which shows that his master was looking for the right conditions, namely a favorable date. In fact, this was in June, the period when the pirates left the port, which was then under a lighter surveillance, when they were moving along the Italian coasts before moving to the mouth of the Rhone in July. June was also the time when the winds were favorable and the storms less frequent. The Barbary pirates had long taken advantage of these conditions.

After two lost years, now was the time to finally begin to accomplish his plans.

*7. His captivity was, without doubt, the first step in his discovery of what he was waiting for, a new gift of providence, its seventh gift.*

We know what happened next: the arrival at Aigues-Mortes, then Avignon, where he fell in with the nuncio who was about to complete his term, and who would bring Vincent with him to Rome. There, he hoped to be able to find from the Holy See, more easily than in France, the nomination to a lucrative post in a French diocese that would also allow him to pay off his debts.

This long letter about his captivity shows something about the state of his faith when he was twenty-six, or what he would have to learn what to say about it. The letter about the captivity has never been studied from this perspective, either to deny or affirm it. A tree was hiding the entire forest.

In this letter, he did not mention Jesus or the Holy Spirit. God the Father appears only as Providence, in which Vincent had great confidence. In fact, he used the language of the pagan Romans, Fortuna, the goddess of luck. On the other hand, the Virgin Mary had a major role in his devotion. He had a great confidence in her intercession; he could speak about her in Tunis, where Muslims also respected her.

Nonetheless, Jesus and the Trinity were living in him, as we know from two of his extant early sermons, dated five or six years after

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<sup>2</sup> *Saint Vincent de Paul. Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, 14 vols. (Paris, 1920-1925), 1: 10; CCD 1:9; abbreviated SV, followed by the English version, CCD.

these events. He showed a Molinist conception of the relationship between predestination and free will in the way he spoke of the death of his benefactor's brother: "He is not dead... since God had... determined the number of his days. But God had also foreseen the number of his days since he died when he died." That is, he died because of the relationship of natural causes, the "middle knowledge" of the Jesuit Molina.

The last point is this: this entire tale was motivated by his search for income, at Bordeaux and then at Marseilles. What was he looking for now when he arrived in the papal city of Avignon? Let us read his own words, dated 24 July 1607: "This same Bishop, since he knows that I am a churchman, has ordered me to send for my letters of ordination, assuring me that he will help me and provide me with a very good benefice."<sup>3</sup>

In Rome, besides some studies that he did, he went to visit the afflicted: the poor, the sick, the wounded, in conjunction with the religious of John of God, Camillus de Lellis, and the lay confraternities of charity. He would speak about this later, like a bee making honey from these events. Still, the calls or graces from God would come to him as he dealt with the afflicted.

Unfortunately, his hopes of securing a good position through the cardinals fell through. He could amuse people with experiences gained during captivity, but nothing else. This meant that he obtained nothing that he had been hoping for. Later in life, he wrote that in Rome, one must not be in a hurry; if so, you would fail. Another wasted year. The second step in his discovery was that one must know how to wait, to accept reverses.

8. *The eighth of his gifts from Providence was that he would have to adapt to circumstances.*

He had learned much and met many people who would inspire him or who would be able to help him. In learning to adapt, he would need to be supple, not contentious, but able to confront very diverse or unexpected situations. In the second letter from Rome, dated 28 February 1608 (SV 1: 15; CCD, 1: 13)<sup>4</sup>: "The means of an honorable retirement by obtaining for me, with that end in view, a suitable benefice in France. That is why I greatly need a copy of my letters of ordination." Once again we see how he was directing his life, or God's plan for him, starting with the actions of others.

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<sup>3</sup> SV 1: 11; CCD, 1: 9

<sup>4</sup> SV 1: 15; CCD, 1: 13.

*Alternatives, from twenty-seven to thirty-two years,  
1608-1613*

He left Rome for France in October or November 1608. He arrived in Paris, so we may ask why he did not go to his native Gascony, as he should have, to meet his family, to go back to teaching, and to satisfy his debts.

Louis Abelly, his first biographer, wrote that he had heard either from him or from his confreres that he is supposed to have said that he was carrying an important document that he was to send in all discretion to the king of France, Henri IV. Although some modern scholars around 1930 have cast doubt on this, Abelly could never have dreamed this up.<sup>5</sup> Vincent had the time to become known in Rome, to speak about his relationship with a man known in Rome, his bishop, a friend of Henri IV. The bishop would have been able to confide this mission to him.

Between 1940 and 1950, Joseph Guichard, C.M., a great explorer of archives and libraries, searched for this document that was supposed to have been brought to Paris around October 1608. He found a possible way, as he noted in his notes.<sup>6</sup> He discovered in Father Meurisse's history of the bishops of Metz<sup>7</sup> the mention of two papal bulls which gave the title bishop of Metz to the young Henri de Bourbon-Verneuil, only seven years old, the illegitimate son of Henry IV and the marquise of Verneuil. The boy would receive income from the property of the diocese, and the aged Cardinal Givry would become the *de facto* bishop of Metz. We suppose that these are the bulls that Vincent was to deliver.

His arrival in Paris would change his life. Had he returned to his native area, he would have had a fine career, but he would certainly not have become a national personality. He must have delivered these confidential documents directly to Henri IV. Very soon afterward, he became one of the almoners, distributors of alms, of the queen, Marguerite de Valois, probably through the bishop of Dax and friend of the king, himself the first almoner of the queen. This gave him access to that palace where he would make friends.

He shared his lodging with a friend who was passing through, in the Gascon quarter, namely the judge of Sore, Bertrand Du Lou. One day when Vincent was ill, the delivery boy from the pharmacist came to bring him some medicine and he spied Bertrand's purse and grabbed

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<sup>5</sup> PIERRE COSTE, C.M., *Monsieur Vincent, le grand saint du grand siècle* (Paris, 1931), 1: 60.

<sup>6</sup> JOSEPH GUICHARD, C.M., "Notes et Documents," 1, 12, pp. 167-175 for Henri de Bourbon and 147-188 for Cardinal de Givry.

<sup>7</sup> MARTIN MEURISSE, *Histoire des Évêques de l'Église de Metz* (Metz, 1634), pp. 654-666, 667-674.

it without Vincent's knowing it. Bertrand accused Vincent of theft, threw him out of their lodging, told Bérulle about it, and had him publicly accused in the parish church. Vincent was simply content to say that God knew the truth. Six months later the thief was accused after another theft elsewhere.

9. *The ninth gift of Providence, similar to the eighth, was that he could bear up under calumnies.*

He had suffered a terrible trial, the loss of his freedom; now, he had lost his honor because of lies. He mentioned this later in life. He then became associated with good priests such as Monsieur de Bérulle, a priest who was promoting the reform of the clergy. During his studies, he had acquired some books in Spanish, such as those by Teresa of Avila. Bérulle, who brought Teresa's Carmelites to France, led him not only to deepen his life of union with God but to live as a priest and pastor. Vincent advanced quite quickly, but he was still looking for financial resources.

In the spring of 1610, some quite complex affairs began. On 17 May 1610, the archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, who was living in Paris, handed over to Vincent the abbey of Saint Leonard de Chaumes, near La Rochelle. Pope Paul V confirmed this action on Friday, 27 August 1610, in the bull naming Vincent as abbot of Saint-Leonard. He would take it over officially on Saturday, 16 October 1610. His hope of returning home with some resources became more focused.

Did it really happen? No; his problems began again. Protestants had ruined this abbey, and it had no monks. There was only a farmer there who cultivated the lands. Vincent would have to reconstruct the abbey and recruit monks for it on the basis of the tiny income provided by the farmer. To make matters worse, on 10 November of that year, another claimant took Vincent to court to force him to share the income. He would then have to pay the court costs of the lengthy proceedings and come several times to La Rochelle.

This city, a Protestant republic, refused to obey the king and apply the Edict of Nantes, and it granted only very few rights to Catholics. Vincent would see from personal experience the life of Protestants, and he would recall their care in teaching the catechism, even to adults. In this way, he would meet an excellent Catholic pastor. From La Rochelle, also, he certainly went at least once to his native region.

10, 11. *The tenth and eleventh gifts from Providence: the discovery of the hazards in obtaining certain posts; and the first application of his knowledge of law and legal procedures, that is, the application of his third charism.*

This prepared him for future procedures to defend the property of the poor. It was only on Saturday, 29 October 1616, that he finished

with these court cases about St. Leonard de Chaumes, since he finally found a successor as the so-called abbot. After six years of legal wrangling, he finally was able to extricate himself from them to continue to deepen his spiritual life under Bérulle's guidance and no longer pursue financial security. At the end of 1611, at age thirty, he began a sort of novitiate at the Oratory of Jesus, which Bérulle had just founded on 11 November.

Very quickly, Bérulle deemed that Vincent had advanced sufficiently in his spiritual life and was zealous and capable in his ministry, and he had him appointed pastor of Clichy la Garenne, north of Paris. He began there in 1612 and he did wonders and was finally happy. He was replacing Father Bourgoing, the cofounder of the Oratory with Bérulle.

Soon after, and nearly at the same time, Bérulle perceived his gifts as a teacher, and he obtained for him at the end of 1613 the office of teacher of the children of one of the greatest families of France, the Gondis. Vincent was thirty-two years old. Monsieur Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, general of the galleys of France, was the same age as Vincent. His very pious wife, Françoise-Marguerite de Silly, was one year older. Here is Vincent now, confined in the household of one of the kingdom's greatest families, working in service of children.

*12. Vincent ended these various steps with another gift of God, or a charism.*

He had experienced poverty and hostility, plus the ability to get out of difficulties, thanks to rare aptitude: knowing how to relate to people at all levels. This is one of his great charisms.

***His first apostolic period, from age thirty-two to forty-four,  
1613-1625***

"Confined?" Being with the Gondis would be a turning point for him, the source of two others. Accompanying the Gondis through their various properties, he helped out the pastors of the villages, where both material and spiritual poverty reigned. In addition, certain parishioners had never dared to confess mortal sins to their pastor, as they were obliged to do by Church law, and they never had a way to go to confession to others. Vincent preached, catechized, and proposed general confessions of one's entire past life. He wrote drafts of his sermons, at least of several of them, but he preached without reading his papers. We have three sermons written in his own hand during these years.

*13. His thirteenth gift was that he became a living theologian of the spiritual life and with the concern of a pastor.*

In his two sermons on Communion, between 1612 at Clichy and 1616 in the Gondi villages, he related that communion led him to speak

of the incarnation, and then also of God the Father and the Holy Spirit: Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, the three great truths of Christian faith, which he always managed to make known. He called them "the truths necessary for salvation."

14. *His fourteenth gift was that he was an excellent teacher.*

His sermon on the catechism, dating from the end of March or the beginning of April 1616, at the request of M. de Gondi, shows him as a profound theologian, aware of the history of the Church, and a fine teacher. This was a genuine charism.

15. *The rural missions, Vincent's first great work, were a new gift of God or a charism, which came about through the woman who was the mistress of the area.*

Beginning now, we see the application of these charisms: his works, sometimes accompanied with new personal charisms. His masters, the Gondis, quickly noticed his spiritual and apostolic value. On 25 January 1617, he discovered at Folleville, near Amiens, the importance of working as a team. We know about this day. While Madame de Gondi was visiting her peasants, she was struck by what a dying man told her about the benefit he at last had by going to confession to Vincent, in which he acknowledged grave sins during his life that he had never admitted to his pastor. She then asked Vincent to deliver a sermon on general confession. This sermon attracted so many people to the parish church from neighboring parishes that Vincent had to ask for some Jesuits to help hear their confessions.

This was the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, and Vincent saw in it a providential sign, the turning point for his entire life. He would spend his life giving missions in the rural areas about general confessions; the cities had enough confessors and pastors. Vincent's work would never be done alone, but always with a group of priests.

16. *The sixteenth gift, the first major charism, was inspired by God again through a woman. This was his second great work, still alive today.*

Once again, his life would change. Quite far from Paris and Picardy, Bresse, a territory of the duchy of Savoy, conquered by Henri IV after eight years of savage war and annexed to France in 1601, remained largely in ruins. The churches were ruined as well, and the Christian life was reduced or difficult.

This situation worried the archbishop of Lyons. Only the town of Châtillon-les-Dombes (renamed Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne at the time of the Revolution), located between Lyons and Bourg-en-Bresse, was still in sufficiently good material and religious condition. It was a major commercial center, and none of the belligerents wanted to destroy it. The archbishop wrote to Bérulle in October 1616 to ask him to found

his Oratory there at Châtillon to supplement the society of priests who were then administering it. If not, at least to send Bourgoing.

Since Bourgoing was founding the Oratory at Rouen, Bérulle had Vincent come. He was installed as pastor on 1 August 1617. One Sunday at Mass, at the request of a woman parishioner, he mentioned in his sermon the condition of a poor isolated family in the countryside, all of whose members were ill. Vincent himself went in the afternoon and saw a great number of women coming and going, and he then spoke to several of them. Finally, he suggested that they form an association so that this type of service of the poor and the sick could continue.

Several months later, they organized with him and established with many practical details the first Confraternity of Charity. The women members were called "Servants of the poor," and Vincent provided them with directives about their Christian life. Their spirit, he said, would be humility, simplicity, and charity, for "the spiritual and corporal service of the sick poor." The women would be in charge; the pastor would be only their spiritual advisor. These three virtues, and the association of these two services, would always go together. This is another special point about Vincent's charism, which others would quickly adopt.

*17. His seventeenth gift or charism was to bring priests and laity, men and women, together. We will see this in the following works.*

A charism? We may suppose that the Holy Spirit inspired this woman with this project. She certainly had already practiced this and instructed her pastor. Thanks to her intervention, Vincent discovered the importance and value of working not only with priests but also with lay people, women this time, to whom he confided the direction and management of the work. This differed from other confraternities, where the pastor remained in charge.

### ***Conclusion and true beginnings, from age forty-four to seventy-nine, 1625-1660***

*18. The eighteenth gift or charism was the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent de Paul's second great work after the Confraternities of Charity.*

Once again, it was done at the initiative of a woman and her husband, since they were the seigneurs of the numerous villages where these missions began. The Gondis had not agreed to his departure. They got him back for Christmas, 1617, freed him from his responsibility toward their children, and left him completely free for the missions.

From 1618 on, he gave parish missions with groups of priests in the villages of the Gondis' vast domains, and in each one he founded a

Confraternity of Charity. The pious and generous Madame de Gondi took an active part in them since they were founded on her estates, and the minutes and rules of the majority of them, signed by her, still exist.

Monsieur de Gondi saw in Monsieur Vincent a zealous missionary whose qualities were perhaps informed by his years of slavery (although he never said anything to anyone about them). Gondi had Vincent appointed Chaplain General of the Galleys of France, beginning 8 February 1619. He would then also preach missions for the galley convicts when they were in port either in Bordeaux or Marseilles, and always with a team of priests, Jesuits or others.

This time, therefore, it was a man, Monsieur de Gondi, who was the Holy Spirit's instrument in this new application of the popular missions. To assure that these teams of priests giving missions would be long-lasting, Madame de Gondi suggested that he bring together in an association or a congregation those priests who would agree to do so. On 17 April 1625, then, she and her husband signed the Foundation Contract, granting Vincent 45,000 livres for the association of priests for the missions, to be called the Congregation of the Mission. Monsieur Vincent was then forty-four and still had thirty-five years to live.

It was a significant period of time. For one thing, Madame de Gondi, who had done so much for the confraternities, died on 24 June 1625, two months after signing the contract. Some confreres have hoped to see her beatified, and rightly so. For another thing, on 4 September 1626, the first four members of the Congregation signed the Act of Association for parish missions. It did not stop there. Vincent invited one of the women to whom he gave spiritual direction, the widow Louise de Marillac, Mademoiselle Legras, to visit the various confraternities to assure their unity of spirit.

Soon afterward, some young women from villages near Paris offered to help the Ladies of Charity, who were not always ready to go and serve the poor. Two young women joined the members of each confraternity: one for the sick, and the other for teaching children under the Ladies' direction. This time, it was Louise de Marillac, Mademoiselle Legras, who took the initiative to give them their formation. Beginning on 29 November 1633, she brought the young women together with no other name than *filles* (servants), "Servants of the Charity." After some weeks of formation, and later after a year of formation, they began to work for the Charities.

Article two of their rules of 1672, which had been gradually formulated, is typical of Vincent's spirit: "...since they have much greater contact with the world than nuns, having generally for monastery houses of the sick; for cell, a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city or the wards of hospitals; for enclosure, obedience; for grate, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty; they

are therefore obliged to lead a life as virtuous as if they were professed in a religious order.”<sup>8</sup> These young women would be prepared to serve in all kinds of situations, and to suffer rejection.

This third great work was not from Vincent de Paul alone. He foresaw only the confraternities of the ladies, and the young women joined a confraternity only two by two. He feared that if they were autonomous, they would become nuns and cloistered. By contrast, Louise de Marillac worked to form them into an autonomous organization, all the while attentive that they would remain lay women. At the end, since they were called to serve the sick in some hospitals, there were as a result more than two of them in each place. As they grew more numerous, they would have a rule and a motherhouse on property belong to her in the village of La Chapelle in the outskirts of Paris.

Vincent agreed that they could be established in 1646 as an autonomous confraternity. Then, in 1655, the archbishop of Paris approved them as a Company, which has remained their name (the Company of the Daughters of Charity). They would never be “religious,” living and praying in common. Rather, their vocation, their charism, is to go out, to go to the poor.

*19. His nineteenth gift or charism is this double institution, men and women, working in complementary activities.*

Vincent could work by bringing together not only individuals but also groups, distinct and autonomous congregations of men and women, with the same but complementary spirit, to work for the kingdom of God in the same areas, just as several other founders did. The parish missions were continuing, and Vincent still loved to participate in them when he was available. For this reason, he founded mission houses where this was requested.

*20. Providence's twentieth gift to Vincent was the foundlings, his fourth great work.*

Abandoned children constituted a great plague in Paris and large cities. Vincent spoke about them to the Ladies of Charity, who proposed various solutions and considered possible resources. The work began on a very small scale in January 1638 at the mother house of the Daughters of Charity, and then a house was rented to accommodate twelve of the foundlings. In 1640, the work grew in extent, but Vincent did not like bringing together children in large groups. On Friday, 15 January 1644, he assembled the materials to have houses built on property that belonged to Saint Lazare. Each one would hold a dozen children and accommodate two Daughters of Charity. This was the

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<sup>8</sup> CCD 13b: 148, n. 3.

average size of families at that period. On 16 January 1645, the Thirteen Houses were completed.<sup>9</sup> Shortly afterward, the queen set aside for them the vast and empty chateau of Bicetre, south of Paris, where more than a hundred children were housed in its rooms. We should note that his care, or his charism, was to remain as much as possible on a humane scale.

The troubles of the Fronde, which devastated the Ile de France from the end of December 1648 into January 1649 led to a great famine along with the dangers of freebooters and soldiers. Louise wrote to Chancellor Séguier to procure some bread for the children.<sup>10</sup> Then there is a legend that is involved with this story. In 1827, a book by the novelist Jean-Baptiste Capefigue, *Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, appeared. In the chapter on the origin of the work of the Foundlings, pages 66-69, and then in 1845, on pages 40-41, he invented a story that had never been printed and which was not found in any archive. "People often saw him out in the middle of winter nights in places where snow and ice covered the roads. He would wander through the most remote districts, searching for these abandoned victims and warming them against his [p. 67] chest, and, reeling under [p. 40] his burden, would arrive at the house of the Daughters of Charity to consign his precious load to their protection."

In fact, Vincent never went out at night, after evening prayer, since he followed the rule and went to bed so as to rise at 4:00 in the morning like everyone else in the house. At the age when these trips were attributed to him – he was seventy-two – he had increasing difficulty walking, since he had sores on his legs. What happened to Capefigue during the intervals between his editions? Did his now widespread legend make him fear further research? In his 1865 edition, page 57, he still recounted Vincent's supposed trips, but with notable variations, and with no mention at all of snow or ice.

The best historians let themselves be deceived and, without citing their source, published this legend, which has become the popular image of Saint Vincent de Paul. This was the theme of numerous artists, painters, and sculptors, and led to the classic representations of

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<sup>9</sup> Archives Nationales, S 6593, found and photocopied by Prof. Simone Zurawski, De Paul University, Chicago, shared with the Vincentian Archives, Paris, 2001. Coste did not mention the thirteen houses since history depends on chance discoveries. Vincent mentioned this little hospital to M. de Contarmon but he did not name it, letter of 11 May 1654 (SV, 5: 135; CCD, 5: 139); Sister Élisabeth Charpy identified it in the light of a lease of 1645, in her note to this letter reproduced in *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines* (Paris, 1989), p. 651. Professor Zurawski discovered its source. *tre l'origine*.

<sup>10</sup> COSTE, *Monsieur Vincent*, 2: 456-478; SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Écrits spirituels* (Paris, 1983), L. 212, p. 305.

Vincent carrying an infant in his arms. Of course, he could have done so when he went to visit the foundlings, or give bread to a child, which he could have done on the street, and thus spreading the legend.

21. *His fifth great work, the twenty-first gift or charism, developed from his care for victims of warfare, which he promoted through means of communication.*

The kings of France often made war. After many conflicts of various kinds, Louis XIII and Richelieu undertook, beginning in 1631, the conquest of Lorraine, an independent duchy. Twenty-nine years of incessant battles ensued, with allies on both sides, such as the extremely cruel Swedish Protestants on the side of the French. Everything was ruined and pillaged; planting and harvesting were impossible, distress was everywhere, and refugees fled into cities as far as Paris. The Company of the Blessed Sacrament, a group to which Vincent belonged, sent help to the Lorrainers from the beginning, and then he did so directly from 1635.

Some of his first priests, deacons, and brothers brought clothing, food, and money. They did so on foot so as not to be discovered, thus avoiding the armies and armed bands. Brother Matthieu Regnard wrote about his trips and his stratagems to accomplish his mission. The confreres wrote about what they had seen and done, and Vincent had copies made for distribution to obtain charitable help. The Sisters would be also sent to the armies to care for the wounded.

22. *During the same time, he made his first foundation outside of France, his next great gift or charism.*

In October 1641, he founded a mission house and staffed the major seminary of Annecy in Savoy, at the time an independent duchy, at the request of Mother Jeanne de Chantal and the bishop, Francis de Sales. In February 1642, he purchased a house in Rome, since it was important to have a permanent residence there to handle his business with the Holy See, and also to give parish missions.

23. *Another gift or charism was his thought for his confreres and their future.*

In 1642, he held his first general assembly. The congregation's houses had become more numerous and widespread, and he had to watch over what was happening and maintain unity.

24. *His sixth great work, doctrinal this time, was his part in the Jansenist affair. Since he did not want to crush the ordinary people under too many demands, this was his next gift or charism.*

In 1640, a Flemish theologian, Cornelius Jansen (called Jansenius) published his *Augustinus*, an enormous synthesis of the works of Saint

Augustine on questions of original sin, the relationships between divine grace and human freedom, and on predestination, where he adopted the extreme positions of Saint Augustine. The French translation, likewise called *Augustinus*, appeared the following year, and the debates began among the theologians. They added the rigorist positions about Christian life espoused by Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, the abbot of Saint-Cyran, according to whom everyone had to be perfect. Antoine Arnauld, a disciple of Saint-Cyran, published *On frequent communion* (*De la fréquente communion*) which insisted so much on the perfection that one had to have to receive communion that it was no longer possible to receive often.

Some “Propositions” exposing the points worthy of condemnation in the new teaching were published by those who rejected them. They were reduced to five, such as that grace is irresistible, and thus those who do not follow the commandments of God have not received grace. They referenced the words of Jesus: “Many are called, but few are chosen,” and concluded that Jesus did not die for everyone.

These excesses grew and led to a campaign to petition Rome to condemn the five propositions. Monsieur Vincent supported this campaign. On 6 March 1642, Urban VIII, in the bull *In eminenti*, renewed the ancient prohibition about publishing anything about controversies on the subject of grace, but discussions continued nevertheless.

Monsieur Vincent wrote a theological study, *De la grâce* (On grace), where one can recognize the former professor of the years 1604-1605. He neatly attacked the teaching but never the teachers, and kept his Jansenist friends.

25. *His seventh work, the twenty-fifth of his gifts and charisms, developed from his being Chaplain General of the galleys since 1619.*

Monsieur Vincent never stopped thinking about them, and even went to give them missions in Bordeaux and Marseilles when they were free from other work. Neither did he forget those enslaved by the Turks. He surely spoke about them to the queen or to the Duchess of Aiguillon, Richelieu’s niece, since in July 1643 he opened, with her financial help, a house in Marseilles for his confreres who were helping, both corporally and spiritually, the French galley convicts, and from where they could go to Barbary (North Africa) to help the slaves.

Now, France had a consulate in Algiers and Tunis. To ensure greater stability to the Lazarist missionaries, the duchess managed to have the Lazarists installed in the consulates, with the title of French chaplains of the consulate and of the slaves. The first arrived in Tunis in 1645, followed by Algiers. Finally, she had the Lazarists named as consuls. The crowning of this work would be Madagascar in 1648, with the help of the Company of the Indies. Their behavior as conquerors sometimes did not help the evangelization either of the French or of the Malagasy.

26. *In the face of wars and poverty, Vincent's fifth great work for the relief of war victims continued.*

France wanted to conquer not only Lorraine but also Flanders, at the time attached to Spain. From 1649, the war and its disasters grew worse, and the confreres, such as Brother Jean Parre, wrote about what was happening, as happened earlier in Lorraine. This time, however, Vincent sent a copy to his friend Charles Maignart de Bernières, who had the accounts printed in four small pages, called the *Relations*. They appeared monthly and sought to raise funds for the victims. This development of broadcasting information about the needs of the poor was a gift, an aptitude, a charism.

27. *A further charism was his fundraising and managerial abilities.*

All the help he provided needed much more than just gifts alone. Vincent had been prepared for this from his early years with his family in the management of their property and goods. He was prodigious in the exploitation of lands, such as adding farms to his farms, in his management of the transportation companies on land or water, and his ability to defend the property of the poor in the face of lawsuits begun by competitors.

28. *Another gift: His political daring.*

In December 1648 - January 1649, the Fronde broke out, a revolt in Paris against the politics of war promoted by the royalty and Mazarin after Richelieu. Saint Lazare was at the time outside the walls of Paris. Monsieur Vincent went on horseback with Brother Ducournau to see the queen and Mazarin at Saint-Germain and to ask them for peace, and for Mazarin to retire temporarily. The Queen and Mazarin refused. Vincent did not return to Saint Lazare for fear that his business would become known and that the Parisians would suspect him of having taken Mazarin's side. As a result, this sixty-eight year old man had a long horseback ride in a snowstorm as far as the city of Richelieu.

Very quickly, the Fronde of the Princes in several provinces joined up with the Fronde of the Parlements of Paris. Because of the foreign wars in Lorraine and Flanders, and the civil wars found almost everywhere, the misery deepened. Saint Lazare and its farms were pillaged, and epidemics spread. During the terrible winter of 1651-1652, the religious congregations, many without great resources, collaborated in providing food for ten thousand poor persons in Paris.

29. *Another gift or charism: encountering persecutions.*

During this period, English Protestants engaged in cruel persecutions against Catholics in Scotland and Ireland. Still, Monsieur Vincent sent his priests and brothers there. In March 1652, Brother Thaddee

Lee was, in his mother's presence, martyred in Ireland, with his hands cut off and his skull crushed.

*At this same period, Vincent and several confreres held the second general assembly in 1651.*

Their purpose was to continue to prepare a definitive edition of the Common Rules of the Congregation. This all happened while the wars continued. In 1654, assistance given in Picardy and the Ile de France took place, while simultaneously he was making foundations in Italy, in Turin, and Agde. He increasingly had to manage several matters at the same time.

Faithful to his principle about not sheltering beggars in great numbers but rather in humane groups, he, together with Mademoiselle Legras, opened a small establishment, the Hospice of the Name of Jesus, for twelve poor persons, men and women living separately, to whom the workers in the neighborhood taught some skills.

30. *He also had to handle numerous other difficulties.*

In 1655, new trials began concerning him and his coworkers, such as calumnies spread by the Jansenists. Then there were the deaths of several confreres, and the plague at Genoa, the deaths of Sisters, and the shipwrecks of those leaving for Madagascar. In addition, the government was preparing what was called a General Hospital to forcibly enclose the city's beggars. Vincent, who wanted to maintain a humane scale for his establishment, refused to provide chaplains for this great enclosure of the poor. These would be diocesan priests.

31. *His last years, with trials and deaths.*

On Friday, 17 May 1658, he distributed at last the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission during a conference on the rules.<sup>11</sup> However, he grew increasingly ill. Because of problems with his legs and his urinary tract, he could no longer leave his room, except by being carried in a chair by the brothers. Still, he continued to follow matters, opening Montpellier and Narbonne. He gave his conferences on his own floor, and the Daughters of Charity came up there for their conferences.

In 1660, his first and greatest coworkers died. On 14 February, M. Portail, his first companion, died; followed on 15 March by Louise de Marillac. Vincent grew worse and often had to sleep not in his bed but in a chair. In September, some confreres began a journal of his last days, and on 27 September, he died in his chair. Shortly after, the secretary opened the envelope and found that Vincent had proposed René Almérás as superior general, and he was at length elected to this post.

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<sup>11</sup> SV 12: 1-14; CCD 12: 1-12.

**APPENDIX:**  
**The truth of the letter about his captivity  
 and of the second letter**

M. Grandchamp cast doubt on the letter with arguments that he invented. He was employed at the consulate of Tunis, and the Lazarist Pierre Coste, who did not believe in the letter, asked him about them. A specialist in Maghreb studies in Bordeaux, Pierre Turbet-Delof, found them to be false. Besides, the presence of a technical term in this letter, unknown to the public, and which Vincent did not invent, shows that he had understood it correctly. Instead of the current term *métairie* (a farm property), Vincent used the Arabic term *temat*, which Grandchamp did not know, although it appeared in a specialized dictionary: *t'omet*, which Vincent transcribed as he heard it.

In addition, the letter, different from Vincent's other letters, was written in an extremely careful hand, and it was sent not only to his protector, the judge and attorney, Monsieur de Comet, but also to the secretariat of the diocese and to his mother. It was written in Avignon before he went to Rome. Its purpose was not to tell the story of his enslavement but to request his ordination documents, which he needed to prove in Rome that he was a genuine priest.

At the same time, he admitted that he had contracted some debts, and the purpose of his letter was also to explain why he waited two years without paying his debts, but now promised to do so. This was standard practice in dealing with a notary to obtain a delay in repayment, and he correctly noted that he had sent a copy to the notary of Dax.

Analysis of his letters shows that he already had exceptional knowledge of economy, law, and legal processes. Only well-informed readers understood this and published it, such as Father J.B. Boudignon, in his *Saint Vincent de Paul, Modèle des Hommes d'Action et d'Œuvres* (Paris, 1886; English tr., 1925); Canon Fournier, *Saint Vincent the canonist*, a panegyric on Saint Vincent given 19 July 1929. He deplored that Vincent's biographers had referred only to his prudence and patience, etc., but not to his important technical competencies.<sup>12</sup>

These proofs have had little effect, and people continue to repeat Grandchamp without carefully tackling the analysis of the texts or of new documents.

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<sup>12</sup> See *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 94 (1929): 763-774, especially 767-772.

## 5.

## The Peripheries Ask for Mercy

Jaroslav R. Lawrenz, C.M.

*Missionary in Benin – Africa*

This time of preparation for the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of our missionary vocation in light of the many questions concerning our fidelity to the chosen path. The inspiration to seek for some answers can be found in the words of the homilies and discourses of Pope Francis... words that have been addressed to the clergy and that underline the need to move beyond the walls of our Churches in order to go out into the streets and seek out those who have been abandoned and who live on the peripheries of our society. Accepting this problem as a matter for an examination of conscience, we ought to ask the following questions: why should the peripheries be constituted as this specific place for our “being”? What categories can be used to define this situation with regard to our mission that is constituted by the peripheries?

The driving force behind our attempts to justify our Vincentian call is unquestionably the fundamental option of Christ: *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you* (John 15:16; cf. John 15:19). Thus, we have the beginning of the history of our calling, or perhaps it is better to say, we have the beginning of God’s call in our life, for in that way we are able to avoid a mistaken understanding of *going out* to the poor (cf. Romans 14:17-19). Saint Vincent de Paul emphasized the uniqueness of our missionary calling and pointed out the need for a motivation based on faith with regard to those matters related to talents, abilities and the soundness of human activity (cf. CCD: XI: 25-26). Following this path which enables us to search in the light of faith, I suggest that we attempt to understand the peripheries by reading the account of the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52).

**1. ...Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging (Mark 10:46)**

The place, by the roadside, on the peripheries, was a place that society had set aside for a group of people like Bartimaeus. The road, however, was intended for strong, healthy, productive individuals. The peripheries were the place for those who did not “fit into” those categories of the strong and healthy. Frequently such situations, such categorization of people, was/is justified by faith (cf. John 9:1-2).

It should be pointed out that from the perspective of those who live on the peripheries, this place, that is, the periphery, is viewed as their destiny until the time of their death. Thus it should be! The only activity of those abandoned on the peripheries is to beg – their form of survival.

How many times in my missionary experience have I encountered this uncritical acceptance of situations that should remain as they are and therefore, there is no way of changing such situations? How many times have I been cast aside without any attempt at change! *We should like to hear you on this some other time* (Acts 17:32). When I attempt to save some one on the Mission (Yumbi) from being classified as a person who brings bad luck or disease (in the Lingala language, *nodoki*), I ask for the assistance of persons who are committed to the life of the Church and seek for human concern in the midst of unfortunate situations, but I find myself before an unmovable wall. No argument is satisfactory and thus no argument is able to change the established manner of thinking.

The situation is repeated when I ask for assistance from state institutions in order to save the life of an alcoholic/addict in Greenpoint, New York (USA)... I am sent away with nothing because the infirm individual does not meet the required conditions. On another occasion I was ridiculed by a perspective candidate for the Congregation in Haiti who told me that “as a white man” I did not understand the motivations that were derived from the Haitian tradition, motivations that were entirely opposed to the gospel. Today, from the perspective of twenty-seven years of priesthood, I ask myself about the number of times that I have experienced that phenomena of rejection... only God knows the answer!

The atrocity of the peripheries is found in the fact that what is considered to be abnormal becomes a model for action, a model that finds acceptance by those who are “on the road” because such a situation is convenient and frees them from having to look at “a problem”. What is even worse, however, is that this situation is also accepted by those “on the roadside” and they are unable to imagine another form of life for themselves. How many times in the history of humankind have we found this phenomena of “the ghetto”? Fortunately, the story of Bartimaeus does not end here.

## **2. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!” (Mark 10:47)**

Here we are witnesses to an incredible situation. A person who had been specifically defined and classified according to extent social norms, was unexpectedly presented with an opportunity to view himself from a different perspective. There is something noteworthy about this situ-

ation. Bartimaeus must have heard someone speak about Jesus of Nazareth... someone must have spoken to him about Jesus' extraordinary activity. Bartimaeus' reaction was instantaneous! He heard that it was Jesus and he began to cry out to him. His words expressed a profound spiritual understanding of the person of Jesus: *son of David!* Bartimaeus was aware of the meaning of his appeal since his desperation was now being revealed to Jesus. How many individuals, listening to similar pleas, have left Bartimaeus alone on the side of the road... doctors, quacks, rich persons, philanthropists... those individuals did not touch the other in such a way that they were made to cry out. Bartimaeus humbly asked for alms, he begged for compassion... and in the presence of Jesus, the principle, "now or never", worked.

It does not seem strange to us Saint Vincent saw great value in committing oneself to the proclamation of the gospel: *how fortunate are those who use every moment of their life in the service of God* (CCD: XI: 329). Evangelization does not mean presenting or recommending **a chosen** way of life. Evangelization is not some competition to choose from among a multitude of goods that one might find on the shelves of a shop or to choose from among various services that are offered by an agency that promises to better the life of individuals. Vincent left no doubts about that matter. In one of his conferences he stated: *The Son of God came to evangelize the poor... Oh, what a happiness to do on earth the same thing Our Lord did there, which is to teach poor persons the way to heaven* (CCD: XI: 283-284).

The poor on the peripheries are condemned to such acceptance of their situation when they are motivated "by the world". When they are given the opportunity to look at their situation from the perspective of the gospel, they cry out and ask for help.

I observed with horror a human tragedy that was repeated in one area of our mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At one particular time I was asked to pray for a person who had been paralyzed from his waist down. Of course, the motivation for such a request was always the same... a belief in the evil powers of the enemies of the family. I was asked to pray for this individual because I was a missionary who represented God. My prayers did not result in the miracle of a physical cure, but the people around me at that time began to trust me and I began to listen to "their cries for change". In that new environment of openness, I understood the cause of their affliction. Yes, an evil person was the cause of "this curse" which was experienced by the paralyzed man. That curse, however, was the result of the fact that a neighboring hospital had been abandoned because of the prolonged war. The only person who remained at the hospital was a male nurse who said he was able to operate on persons who were in need of surgery because they suffered from appendicitis or had a hernia.

In such procedures he administered anesthesia through a spinal injection... and that was the cause of this unfortunate situation. The ignorant nurse had paralyzed various individuals who were in need of surgery. The cries of those “unfortunate individuals” did not make us feel helpless but rather, we were inspired by those events to make wheelchairs for those who had been handicapped in that manner... and those wheelchairs proved to be invaluable. I have to admit here that other companions from another mission took on this work and perfected our idea... and we give thanks to God for that!

The “cry of Bartimaeus” made us aware of another truth, a truth that for us, as Missionaries, is essential if we want to avoid the temptation of healing from our own narrow perspective, if we want to avoid the trap of offering help on some official level. Notice that it was not Jesus who called Bartimaeus aside in order to help him. The person seeking help knew what was needed and decided on the appropriate time to seek relief through healing grace... the appropriate time... the dialogue with Jesus provided a common ground for understanding the problem and for resolving the problem. Let us listen...

### **3. *Jesus said in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see” (Mark 10:51)***

I was twenty-seven years old when I arrived at the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Filled with enthusiasm and missionary zeal, I nevertheless lacked wisdom with regard to missionary service and experience. I would obtain experience with the passing of years. In my first international community, we became involved in many projects that provided social assistance. Because I was the youngest member of the team, I often had the responsibility of supervising these various projects. One of those projects involved the building of houses for the members of a poor Pigmy tribe (Batwa). At first sight, and after having seen the huts in which those people lived, the project seemed to be truly justified. As the project moved forward, I was discouraged to see that the people had no interest in this plan. Such a reaction created in me a negative attitude toward those people. During this time of discouragement, I realized something very important: I had never sat down with these people and asked them what they thought about the project? I do not know how many of the one hundred houses that were planned were ever completed but I do know that those that were completed were done so in accord with the desires and the motives of those who carried out the construction.

Jesus knew why Bartimaeus called out to him. What about the others: “*Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent*” (Mark 10:48). For these individuals, “the others”, Bartimaeus was an obstacle on the road. Still, in the words of the Evangelist: “*Jesus stopped*” (Mark 10:49). Jesus was

not indifferent to the situation of Bartimaeus. Jesus not only permitted but he also hoped that Bartimaeus would take advantage of this opportunity to move out from the periphery. When Bartimaeus heard Jesus' invitation, he reacted in an incredible manner: "*He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus*" (Mark 10:50). It had to be very difficult for this handicapped man to break aside from all the barriers of his incapacity and his aversion to society. Yet it was certainly worthwhile for he was able to hear the following words: "*Go your way; your faith has saved you!*" (Mark 10:52). Jesus was not some magician who performed miracles, rather it was Jesus mercy that healed people from their visible as well as their invisible wounds. God's mercy implies that those who suffer must consciously accept the way of Jesus. "*Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way*" (Mark 10:52). Liberation from the prisons of the periphery involves a process of growth, a process that takes place in light of the gospel and that enables people to make a courageous decision to break away from the model that tells them that things must remain as they are!

St. Vincent helps us to understand the subjectivity of those who live on the peripheries when he calls them "*lords and masters*" (CCD: X: 489). Those words are key in the formation of a new generation in the Vincentian Family. Those words encompass the whole teaching of the Church with regard to the human person and with regard to the dignity and the value of the human person which is derived from the act of creation, of being made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:27). According to St. Vincent, if we *turn the medal over* we can understand how the poor can break with the established social conventions and begin to value their worth as human beings. The light of faith enables us to see the truth regarding the human person.

Priests and monks accompanied the conquistadores to the Americas and they were entrusted with the task of extending the Catholic faith among the native population. Since the primary objective of the conquistadores was the accumulation of booty, the extension of the Catholic faith among the Indians took place through coercion – literally *through fire and the sword*. It is important to point out here that in 1573, Pope Paul III published a decree that stated the Indians were persons and able to accept the Catholic faith. Therefore, they should not be deprived of their freedom and possessions under pain of excommunication (although they were pagans)<sup>1</sup>.

St. John Paul II, a missionary Pope, in his official visit to South America and during his visit to his native Poland (which was still under Communism) often placed himself in the role of a representative

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. GRZEGORZ KUCHARCZYK, *Kościół i konkwistadorzy*, Milujcie się., 1/2002.

of the poor and he stated: *I make every effort to speak for you and to pray for you*<sup>2</sup>.

St. Vincent was insistent on the fact that those involved in the process of evangelizing persons who are poor must also be merciful (CCD: XI: 308-310). People are not justified by charity or compassion but by a gracious God who has bestowed upon the Church its mission. Mercy, according to St. Vincent, ought to go hand in hand with every effort to understand those who poor, with every effort to accompany those who are poor.

There is no doubt that the poor on the peripheries need us. Pope Francis, in a meeting with the Italian volunteers who are members of the Confraternity of Mercy, highlighted the importance of courage in the struggle for the well-being of humankind. He wanted the charism of those Confraternities to reveal the proper understanding of mercy. The Pope explained that the word “mercy” is a Latin words and its literal means is “to give one’s heart to the poor.”

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## 6.

## Underlying Themes of General Assembly 2016: Multiculturalism, Solidarity, and Collaboration

G. Gregory Gay, C.M. - Joseph V. Agostino, C.M.

### 1. Introduction

“Let us allow ourselves to be renewed by the missionary vitality of our Vincentian vocation” (The theme of the General Assembly 2016, announced in a March 25, 2014 ‘Letter to the Visitors’ from the Preparatory Commission).

The underlying themes of GA 2016 are not easy ones to explore. They speak to an important question for us as Missioners in today’s world: how do we establish and inculcate a universal (international) perspective as Vincentians while we are engaged in particular (provincial) realities? Perhaps we can start by mentioning an expression which is popular in English-speaking countries: **“Think globally, act locally.”** It is often used to promote social justice and the environment. And it is relevant for this article which explores how we may better develop a balanced view of the Congregation with both a ‘provincial perspective’ and ‘international perspective’ at the same time.

Life experience is often the best teacher. The authors of this article would like to begin, not from abstract principles, but from situations that they have encountered in their own lives. Few of us would question the “universality” of the Church or of the Congregation on an intellectual or academic level. But if this issue were that simple, we would not be writing about it today.

### Testimony from Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M.:

Among the important issues for our next General Assembly, I believe there are three crucial ones: ***multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration***, all of which have been wonderfully woven in my life in community and my ministry. They have been both challenging and have enriched my vocation as a Vincentian. It began when I was assigned to Republic of Panama, the mission of my province where I served for fifteen years.

I still vividly recall so many fine experiences in Panama. As a new missionary, I traded the use of a car for horseback, traveling from village to village for three years. It was a great experience of entering into solidarity with those I served. Later, I worked in seminary formation, accompanying our men in Panama as they studied philosophy and theology. Then I was named director of the internal seminary, one of

my most enriching experiences of multiculturalism. We had seminarians from Panama as well as countries in the Province of Central America.

In the fifteen years I served in Panama, I interacted with different cultures, learned a new language, and adjusted to living in unfamiliar environments all served to enrich me. It also broadened my worldview beyond the perspective of a United States citizen. I learned to see the world from a different reality, namely from the place of the poor. I learned to listen with compassion to those who felt oppressed by policies of the USA, such as the December 1989 invasion of Panama. As happens with political and military upheaval, the poor suffer most.

After years of missionary work in Panama, I was asked to serve as Visitor for the Province of Central America. This province has a rich cultural background of confreres who are Latinos and indigenous backgrounds from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Being the Visitor was challenging, as I was the only North American, but I learned methods to create dialogue with the confreres, patiently trying to come to solutions together for the poor we served.

After being Visitor in the Province of Central America, I was elected Superior General. In my ministry as the Superior General, I have made it a key priority to animate the Congregation of the Mission and Vincentian Family. I have been visiting the provinces of the Congregation and Daughters of Charity, and places in difficult parts of the world to offer support to the priests, brothers, sisters, and members of the Vincentian Family.

In my time as Superior General, many provinces and branches of the Vincentian Family have experienced multiculturalism and its positive effects, creating solidarity and community among these groups. Yet, there have also been negative experiences. Despite such tensions, I have witnessed much generosity on the part of a number of provinces in sharing their confreres and economic resources with others. Yet, there is a constant call we must heed to look beyond our own situations and immediate needs and to engage on international and interprovincial levels.

### **Testimony from Fr. Joseph V. Agostino, C.M.:**

My example begins in 2009, when my Visitor asked me to move from parish ministry (where I had the privilege to be in direct service with the poor for almost all of my priesthood) to work for the province in designing a provincial planning process.

It was a change I never sought, never asked for, never dreamed of. I asked him: where did my name come from for the job? I knew all the reasons why I didn't want to leave St. John the Baptist Parish in Brooklyn, NY at that point in my life, but this was a request I never antici-

pated. And as I look at what has gone on in my life over the last 4 years, some things have become clear to me about my world view and about God's intervention in my life.

- I came to realize on a different level that I took myself-identity more from what I did and not from who I am as a member of the Congregation;
- I was happy in my ministry – I saw myself as a pastor and a parish priest – actually for the rest of my life. I certainly never planned to change that. And the change was not easy.

Someone once said to me: I like change, as long as it doesn't affect me personally! Few of us say "I like change" when it comes to altering our own personal realities and comfort zones! I came to the realization that what I had valued – maybe even based my life on – may no longer be of use for me. I realized that I had been focused on the small "m-" of my ministry (in the parish reality) and not the capital "M-" of what "Mission" should mean to my life (as a member of the Congregation).

The call to universality which will be explored by this coming General Assembly becomes more specified as we study three ways in which it is manifested in our community life: multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration.

## 2. Multiculturalism

Accepting the call universality necessarily entail a values shift. And thus we run into the struggle we all have to deal with when we speak of universality.

We may receive great comfort in knowing that we do not stand alone in this. And we also know that Vincent de Paul walked this same road before us.

When he founded the Congregation, its purpose was simple: to preach the Gospel to the abandoned poor in the countryside of France. But we see how soon that purpose changed, even in his own lifetime. In the course of 21 years (from 1625 to 1646), Vincent saw his Little Company's Mission expand into retreats for ordinands, seminary formation, and the beginning of the foreign missions. What a change from the single-minded focus with which we were founded. And though Vincent certainly learned to rely on Divine Providence, we can have no doubt that he struggled with the personal sacrifices that these expansions caused him to make. One such example can be seen in two letters which he wrote to Charles Ozenne, a confrere working in the newly established mission in Poland:

[On newly-opened mission in Poland] *"Yes indeed, Monsieur, this consolation has reached the very depths of my heart. It also gives*

*me good reason to thank God for the consolation He grants the Company in blessing its works in this way, and to ask Him to bless it and your leadership more and more” (Volume: 5 Letter: 1807 Description: To Charles Ozenne, 27 November, 1654 Page: 234).*

*“It is He who has called you to Poland, has shown you such a bountiful harvest, and wants you to begin work on it, relying on a special trust in His grace and not on your own strength, since you have so little” (Volume: 5 Letter: 1722 Description: To Charles Ozenne, 27 March, 1654 Page: 114).*

We really can't do values in the abstract; somehow they need to have a practical manifestation in our lives for us to recognize their truth as individuals, as ministers in the Catholic Church, or as members of the Congregation. What follows are some concrete examples of what these “value shifts” may look like, and some struggles connected to them.

a) *On the human level...*

We deal with people who are different than us, be it because of the language they speak, the food they eat, or the color of their skin. And we have to be honest in looking into our hearts – there are many different levels on which we both do and don't accept others at the same time. When provinces or various apostolates within them are multicultural, it is not always easy to forge a sense of community within the mix... but we are challenged to make a conscious decision to work at it.

In the midst of this dynamic, we also have to deal with the personal struggle of learning how to be one with, though never the same as, those who are from different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural tensions can not only affect a particular apostolate, but a whole province or region of the Congregation. We are all too painfully aware of stories where ethnic / tribal / racial tensions (often times denied) may impact a community's ability to make personnel assignments and to minister effectively to the people we are called to serve. The call to move from regional concerns to universal considerations exists right in our own backyards. How we deal with this reality in our own lives will influence how successfully we work with it on the provincial and international level.

b) *On the Ministerial / Apostolic (Catholic) Level*

The issues surrounding parish mergers in the Church in Europe and North America are clear indications that we do not see beyond our own circles and comfort zones. Anyone who has had to deal with a parish merger is all too familiar with the resistances he faces. One sentiment heard often is that this particular church building is **mine** and I can't

possibly go to Mass or celebrate significant life moments anywhere else. On the other end of the spectrum, we hear how **those people in that parish** are not the same as us – why then do we have to now deal with them?

There is one major lesson we can learn here: we have a lot of work to do to help the People of God see that they are a vital part of a reality much larger than themselves and that the Body of Christ as well as the mission of the Church is ultimately not territorial but universal.

And we ourselves have just as much work to do to learn how to keep our eyes on the larger picture, namely the work of the Church (with a capital “C”) and the mission of the Kingdom as we deal with these types of specific dynamics. Creativity is born as we find ways to help both ourselves and others experience this larger reality.

### *c) On the Congregational Level*

So many confreres, while engaged in their own apostolates, show only passing interest in what their “province” is about (as long as it doesn’t touch their reality), let alone the international Congregation. And in spite of all the invitations to think otherwise (such as solidarity, the international missions, the Vincentian Family) we are still searching for more effective ways to broaden confreres’ horizons.

And while most confreres would agree with the theory behind these global initiatives, in practice it can be quite a different reality! Inter-provincial collaboration and / or reconfiguration processes parallel quite closely the dynamics of parish mergers.

Two practical examples might help illustrate this point:

- Negative example: sometimes we are open to dialogue or collaboration, when we are on the receiving end of it; that is, when a province is in need and looking for a benefit. Of course we can’t deny the importance of the need, but at the same time it can’t be the only reason that we seek to be universal. It might just be a starting point, but if it becomes a normative way of acting, it can truncate relationships, dialogue, and all possibility of future collaboration on any level.
- Positive example: provinces and individuals who demonstrate their sense of being part of a world-wide congregation by being available on many levels for collaboration (personnel, financial, etc.). They exhibit a sense of gratefulness by their generosity. They’re available to participate in Congregational and Vincentian Family efforts. They get others on board, because they live that sense of Mission. It is not a question of who we are as missionaries, but of what more can we do to be effective missionaries.

### 3. Solidarity

On July 18, 2014, in a letter to the Vincentian Family, Greg Gay wrote: "...that Vincent said with strength and conviction, 'It is true then, that I am sent not only to love God, but to make him loved. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor doesn't love him' (SV XII, Conf. May 30, 1659). Our vocation as Vincentians is to inflame the hearts of others: to do what the Son of God himself did."

Economic Solidarity is not a new concept in the Congregation. In our rule on poverty, Vincent de Paul wrote: "Members of the Congregation, individually and collectively, should understand that, following the example of the first Christians, all our belongings are common property..." (CR, 3). The Constitutions specify this further: "The Congregation of the Mission possesses temporal goods for pastoral and community needs... it administers these goods, however, as the patrimony of the poor, with solicitude, but with no attempt to grow rich" (C. 148.1). They go on to say: "Provinces and houses should share their temporal goods with each other so that those who have more help those in need" (C. 152.1.). Such assistance is a demand of charity and justice. It is not simply an act of generosity. And as such it even challenges the most generous among us to give beyond our present levels of giving.

We are an international Congregation almost since the time of our foundation. But we will not become a global community until we have embraced solidarity both as individual confreres and as provincial entities. The realization of our true missionary vocation will come about as we grow in the lived experience of belonging not to a specific ministry nor to a particular province, but to a Congregation which both encompasses and supersedes these realities. No matter where we are assigned, we are confreres called to the service of the Mission as friends who love one another deeply (cf. C. 25.1.). And as dear friends, we care for each other's needs.

Our Congregation faces many questions as we attempt to live in solidarity with one another. Provinces that are experiencing growth in personnel often are lacking in fiscal resources. How do they best provide for their economic stability while responding to the needs of those served by the Congregation – within or outside of their provincial territories? Provinces with significant resources are often facing declining personnel, whose physical and medical needs make a significant demand on their resources. How much is enough to care for our aged missionaries as we also continue to respond to the needs of persons living in poverty? Some areas that were once dependent upon outside resources are now not only self-sufficient, but in a position to assist once wealthier regions of the Congregation. How do we restructure our distribution of resources, both fiscal and personnel, so that everyone benefits?

We have spoken of these tensions for some time now, not only in meetings of Visitors but also in letters and articles that have been published for the Congregation. And some efforts have been made to respond to this expressed need, especially in the creation of patrimony funds. The recent decision by the Visitors (New York, July 2013) to take up an annual collection throughout the Congregation for this purpose is the latest example of a strategy that has been embraced. In his August 4, 2014 appeal for this collection, the Superior General reminded us: “By contributing and encouraging others to do so, you will help the Congregation of the Mission take root and grow so that many will be served! We will also be doing what St. Vincent did: establish ongoing financial support and stability, so our mission to be with and for the poor will continue.”

But much more than an annual appeal is needed. Hopefully the General Assembly of 2016 will address this question in earnest, and work together to create both the environment and the structures through which we can more fully experience our solidarity with one another. As Vincent said, we are never too poor to give, nor too rich to receive.

#### **4. Collaboration**

“In order that he might better respond to a wide variety of needs, St. Vincent brought together as many people as he could, rich and poor, humble and powerful, and used every means to inspire in them a sensitivity to the poor, who are the privileged image of Christ. He moved them to help the poor, directly and indirectly. They made this voluntary and generous dedication their own” (Constitutions, *Introduction*, p. 19).

Vincent challenged every group he founded, as well as all of his collaborators, to move from their comfort zones to where people were the most abandoned. He was very clear on this: our spiritual strength comes not from the choir but from the streets where we rub shoulders with those living in poverty, our Lords and Masters, as well as with our collaborators. Working together, even as messy as it may become at times, is a source of great energy, enthusiasm, and a release of the many gifts and talents that all of us bring to our ministries.

As members of the Vincentian Family, our understanding of collaboration lies in that particular charism given us by Vincent and our Founders: the call to serve those living in poverty coupled with the profound recognition that none of us can fully respond to it by working alone or in isolation. Every branch of our Family brings a unique perspective and contribution to this charism, which illustrates the unifying power of the Holy Spirit among us, as well as the wisdom of the legacy that Vincent left behind.

Today, more than ever, such Spirit-led, Vincentian service demands that we move from the comfort of our surroundings to those peripheries where the presence of Christ is most absent. Unfortunately, we can speak of both confreres and institutions who pay only lip service to the radical call of our charism and who are thus very hesitant to live on the edge. Pope Francis has reminded the Church – and especially us as a Vincentian Family – that our proper place is on the peripheries where Jesus and Vincent have already called us to be!

Collaboration calls forth the gifts of all those involved in common efforts, while respecting the freedom and autonomy of each one individually. The desire to work together, to share resources, and to allow projects to take shape through joint planning processes (as opposed to pre-conceived agendas) are attitudes fundamental to any successful initiative. Such attitudes often require a personal conversion, informed by the spirit of our charism. Often times these common initiatives are more easily realized on the local level than the regional or international one. Be that as it may, we acknowledge that the more collaborative we become, the truer we are to the spirit and legacy that Vincent left us.

St. Vincent reminds us: “The poor suffer less from a lack of generosity than from a lack of organization”. As we continue to learn how to combine our efforts, not only with our collaborators but also with those whom we serve, we will be more effective in the works of evangelization, systemic change, and social services. The General Assembly of 1998 as well as subsequent meetings of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family called for the creation of structures which would help facilitate this collaboration. Since that time:

- inter-branch commissions have been formed to guide the efforts of the Vincentian Family around areas of concern for our ministries;
- gatherings of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family are scheduled on a regular basis to continue to forge the bonds of unity among us; and
- a program has been developed to enhance the skills of the members of the Vincentian Family for the work of collaboration.

The Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program (VFCAP) seeks to empower the members of the Vincentian Family to work together to help both individuals and communities emerge from poverty. It seeks to nurture the participant’s Vincentian spirituality, management skills and understanding, and also to provide for a tangible experience in collaboration. There are two dominant goals of VFCAP: (1) to appreciate the worldwide Vincentian Family’s untapped potential in the struggle to eradicate poverty; and (2) to appreciate that collaboration and systemic change are ongoing processes of transformation. Under the direction of the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission, two

pilot programs had been offered in Paris; six regional programs have been requested by national Vincentian Family groups within the year since it has been offered to the Family.

There are many fine examples of collaboration in the Congregation which assist provinces in need of funds or personnel. Collaboration also exists among the various branches of the Vincentian Family, but it has been challenging. Despite our common charism to follow Jesus in evangelizing and serving the poor in the spirit of Saints Vincent and Louise, there is often a lack of coordination. Some branches remain separate; perhaps thinking it will preserve their uniqueness. A fear is that this can lead to isolation from other Vincentian Family members, negating the great potential we have when we work together. When collaboration occurs among the Vincentian Family, there is a spirit of enthusiasm, zeal, and desire to spread our charism.

As Benjamin Romo reminded us in 2009: “Today we are no longer an isolated Congregation, but rather a united family which, as such, has no other goal than making itself present among the poor to discover together with them God’s love, seeking roads of justice and love which will generate life” [*To Collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family*,” Final Document, N. 1].

## 5. Reflection

One article is not going to make us shift from provincial to universal perspectives. But the first step we can take is the recognition of how this issue is manifest in our lives. The Five Characteristic Virtues may assist us in this exploration and may help us see and appreciate realities beyond our immediate experiences.

- **Simplicity: the ability to accept that only together can we see the whole picture... I only have a small piece of the pie.**

Simply stated, this is the conviction that we need each other if we are to achieve the Mission that has been entrusted to us. This larger vision may be revealed only when each of us is willing to deal directly and clearly with each other, not holding our real thoughts or motives close to our chest, but expressing them openly and honestly so that a new understanding may come to light.

St. Vincent wrote: “*Simplicity converts everyone. It’s quite certain that, to convince and win over the human spirit, we have to act simply*”.

- **Humility: the recognition that I have biases – cultural, theological, and philosophical – through which I think and react to things in ways that are different from others.**

We have to maintain the tension which comes from recognizing that we all are different and that these differences are important and cannot be trivialized. Celebrating our differences and choosing to put them at

the service of the Mission can and will be constructive and beneficial toward our living as ONE, universal, Congregation.

St. Vincent wrote: *"The bane of Communities, especially small ones, is usually rivalry; the remedy is humility... We see that this rivalry occurred in the first Company in the Church, that of the Apostles; but we also know that Our Lord checked it..."* (Volume: 5 Letter: 2037 Description: To Louis Dupont, 26 March, 1656 Page: 528-530).

- **Meekness: I need to learn how to HEAR the perspectives that others are bringing to the table, especially when they are different than my own and acknowledge the value in them, even if I ultimately disagree.**

Mutuality, an essential component of universality, does not come about through perfect agreement on everything. But it does develop as I grow in my understanding of the needs, feelings, culture, i.e. totality, of the other.

St. Vincent wrote: *"We must be firm but not rough in our guidance and avoid an insipid kind of meekness, which is ineffective. We will learn from Our Lord how our meekness should always be accompanied by humility and grace so as to attract hearts to Him and not cause anyone to turn away from Him"* (Volume: 4 Letter: 1623 Description: To a Seminary Director Page: 571).

- **Mortification: a willingness to embrace the change in perspective (and its accompanying pain) that comes from accepting the fact that I stand in the midst of a world that is very different than me.**

I come to greatly respect the understanding that others have of our universal Mission as a Congregation without negating the value that I also bring to the dialogue. This virtue calls us to move beyond our comfort zones and into areas where we may experience ourselves as vulnerable before each other. But it is only here that we can experience the unity which the Spirit forges in the midst of diversity.

St. Vincent wrote: *"Mortification is also necessary because we have to be very firm with ourselves in order to renounce freely what we give to God, and it's by this virtue that we overcome ourselves"* (Volume: 12 Letter: 199 Description: Conformity to the Will of God, 7 March, 1659 Page: 137).

- **Zeal: the active desire to expand my horizons by shifting my vantage point (to a "balcony view") in which I seek to place my local or provincial reality in the context of the whole, the Mission of the Congregation.**

The first letter of John reminds us that "there is no fear in love" (1Jn 4:18). But in the human dynamic, we are all too aware of our

fears: the fear of the unknown (person or place), the fear of letting go of our control of a situation, the fear of leaving the familiar to live in uncertainty. These are but some of the personal peripheries which we need to move beyond in order to live the Vincentian Mission. Beyond our personal and communal boundaries is where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed today.

Thus, my personal ministry, my province, and my Visitor's conference all help me move toward this larger, universal call that Vincent left all of us as a lasting legacy. As human beings, we hunger for that which is larger than ourselves. "Where there is no vision the people, the confreres, the province, the Congregation perishes." Our challenge is to tap into this need in ourselves and our confreres so that all of us reap the benefit of working together for the sake of the Mission.

St. Vincent wrote: "*Zeal consists in a pure desire to become pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor; zeal to spread the kingdom of God and zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect?*" (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 14).

## 6. Conclusion

The 2010 General Assembly calls us "*to cultivate a vital and concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the sense of belonging to a local and provincial community*" (GA 2010 Lines of Action, 2.2). This Line of Action moves us from existing in an either – or context to living in the creative balance of a both – and situation.

All of us came to the community through provincial realities that have often mirrored the cultures in which we were born and raised. At the same time, we knew that we entered an international Congregation, following in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul. We are challenged to befriend both. And, in the spirit of Vincent, we are called to trust in a Divine Providence which never ceases to invite us to new relationships with the poor in a constantly changing world.

As we live and work in the context of our particular ministries, we do so as members of an international Congregation. The more I experience the link between MY work and OUR mission, the better I can embrace the universality of the missionary vocation. The more a Visitor understands his role as a bridge between the two, the better his confreres will understand the greater good their service is rendering to the poor both in a particular locale AND world-wide. And then the call to serve on an international level, in any capacity, is no longer seen as a drain on a province's personnel and resources, but as the fulfillment of a work that is the responsibility of us all.

If we are to embrace multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration in the Congregation, it must be done in ways that will enrich ministry

and community life. A key way they can help us is by renewing the missionary fervor of our Vincentian vocation.

Unfortunately, the opposite is true: those who are resistant to multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration often lack an ability to see beyond themselves and their own immediate needs. They miss the joy that comes from working together, sharing a common goal, and achieving results that benefit all, especially the poor. Gradually, the isolation can lead to a sense of aimlessness and ennui. Efforts slow and eventually cease, and a Vincentian vocation will be lost. At times, we get the impression that pessimism has taken root in the hearts of some confreres – it does not help us live in a faith-filled and hopeful way.

Hope is not the conviction that something will always turn out well, but the certainty that it makes sense, regardless of how things turn out. To have hope, we need courage. Such courage entails letting one's heart and convictions take the lead and not depend solely on rational, mental calculations or fears from past experiences. It takes courage to open ourselves up to multicultural experiences and look beyond our own comfort zones. We need to enter into solidarity for a greater good, and collaborate in achieving common goals. It takes courage to say, "Let's do this together", instead of wanting to do it *my* way, or seeing *my* way as the *only* way.

There remains in each of us the potential for an even greater willingness to be transformed in the name of our Christian faith and Vincentian charism. ***Multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration*** have made a tremendous difference in the lives of those who have embraced them. They can make a difference in all of our lives. Let us pray that the Lord will give us the courage of conversion to embrace multiculturalism, solidarity, and collaboration as we prepare for the 2016 General Assembly.

# VINCENTIANA

*Journal Published quarterly  
Congregation of the Mission  
General Curia - Rome - Italy*

59<sup>th</sup> Year - N. 1  
January-March 2015

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00164 Rome (Italy)  
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## **Authorization**

Tribunal of Rome  
5 December 1974 - N. 15706

## **Legal Representative**

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## **Printer**

D PRINT srls  
Via di Monteverde, 4 e/f/g  
00152 Rome (Italy)  
Tel./Fax +39 06 45 47 00 89  
dprint@fastwebnet.it

## **Subscriptions for 2015**

€ 55,00 / \$ 65 USD

*Vincentiana is published  
in English, French and Spanish,  
thanks to the collaboration  
of a team of translators*

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Cover: Fabio Elias Lorada

**In our next  
issue...**

**Commentary  
on the  
Ratio  
Formationis**

## **Explanation of Logo for the 2016 General Assembly**

The Spirit of the Lord put the flame of Evangelization into the hands of St. Vincent de Paul. With boldness and apostolic courage, Vincent converted it into a fire of love, solidarity, and service on behalf of the poor. After 400 years, that same Spirit enlivens the followers of St. Vincent de Paul, as they carry on his evangelical legacy and remain faithful to the inspiration of the Founder, following the signs of the times.

### **Artist: Arturo Asensio Moruno (Spain)**

Arturo received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Spain, where he is an artist and illustrator. He has created several artistic works for the Congregation of the Mission in Spain. In his youth, Arturo was a member of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association and also spent a brief time in the Vincentian internal seminary in Avila. In Arturo's work, we see two essential elements combined: his creativity and expertise, along with his sensitivity to the Christian message and the Vincentian charism.