

Mission Appeal Letter

Rome, October 19, 2015

To All the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

My Dear Confreres:

May the grace of the Lord be with us always.

During this month dedicated to the missions, I extend to each and every one of you my heartfelt greetings.

Before continuing to read this letter, I invite you to reflect on the following words of Saint Vincent:

Let's give ourselves to God, Messieurs, to go throughout the world to carry His holy Gospel and, wherever He may lead us, let's stand by our post and observe our practices until it's His good pleasure to withdraw us from it. We mustn't let difficulties shake us; the glory of the Eternal Father and the efficacy of the Word and Passion of his Son are at stake. The salvation of nations and our own is so great a good as to deserve to be won at any cost; it doesn't matter whether we die sooner or later, provided we die arms in hand; we'll be all the happier for it and the Company will be no poorer, "for sanguis martyrurum semen est Christianorum". For one Missioner who has given his life for the love of God, the goodness of God will raise up many others to do the good he will have left undone (CCD:XI:366).

During the month of October the Church traditionally asks us to pray for missionaries and to reflect on the missionary dimension of the Church. During the same month the Congregation calls upon the confreres to reinforce our international missions and other mission territories that are in need of assistance. At this critical moment in the Church's history, Christians are being persecuted in many different parts of the world. At the same time many significant ecclesial events have occurred: the visit of Pope Francis to Cuba and the United States where he spoke words that filled people with hope, the Synod of Bishops where the delegates are reflecting upon the important theme of the family.

Significant and important events have also occurred in the Congregation: confreres have been involved in Provincial Assemblies that are preparing the way for the General Assembly of 2016 and the process of reconfiguration is moving forward, especially in some of the European Provinces. Many parts of the world are calling upon the Mission-

aries to meet urgent needs and these cries challenge our apostolic and Vincentian generosity.

In this letter I also want to share with you an important activity that was planned by the General Curia during the year 2015, namely, the First Encounter of Superiors of the International and Provincial Missions. The gathering took place from September 14-18 (Rome). Representatives from the international missions, as well as provincial were present (the only exception was the Solomon Islands). During that time the participants shared their experiences, reflected on the theology of the mission and studied and reviewed the documents, *Ratio Missionis*, the Statutes of the International Missions and the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*.

In light of Pope Francis' message for World Mission Day 2015 and in the context of the Encounter of the Superiors of the Missions, I want to share with you three thoughts. I share these thoughts in a special way with those Missionaries who might be motivated to respond to the missionary call this year.

[1] In his message the Pope refers to a reality that is very much related to our charism: *mission is part of the "grammar" of faith, something essential for those who listen to the voice of the Spirit who whispers "Come" and "Go forth". Those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries, for they know that Jesus "walks with them, speaks to them, breathes with them. They sense Jesus alive with them in the midst of the missionary enterprise" (Evangelii Gaudium, #266)*. Our Constitutions state clearly that the purpose of the Congregation is to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. Therefore, a response to the missionary call is not simply the result of some sentimental desire but is part of our charism.

[2] In another part of his message the Pope reminds us: *there is an urgent need to reaffirm that the central ideal of mission is Jesus Christ, and that this ideal demands the total gift of oneself to the proclamation of the Gospel. On this point there can be no compromise: those who by God's grace accept the mission, are called to live the mission. For them, the proclamation of Christ in the many peripheries of the world becomes their way of following him, one which more than repays them for the many difficulties and sacrifices they make* (Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2015). Those members of the Congregation who are called to live their missionary vocation in a radical manner must be willing to offer their lives to Jesus Christ and also willing to serve those who live in situations of poverty in the existential and geographical peripheries of our world.

[3] Finally, during the gathering of the superiors of our missions I was touched by the fact that the Missionaries are able to adapt to the reality of the place where they have been sent and where they are

ministering. They are able to do this despite the fact that many of those said realities have not previously been part of their own experience. At play here is not only the capacity to adapt to another situation but also an openness that enables one to respect and to value the culture of another (an openness that is revealed by a willingness to learn the local language and to assimilate the many other aspects of that new reality). I have seen this with my own eyes as I have visited various missions. In this regard the Pope states in his message: *Today, the Church's mission is faced by the challenge of meeting the needs of all people to return to their roots and to protect the values of their respective cultures* (Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2015).

In the next part of my letter I want to present to you and remind you about some points that I have stated in previous years, matters that we must be very clear about: the reality and the needs of the missions, the criteria for the selection of the Missionaries, the steps that should be followed by the Missionaries wishing to volunteer for the missions and the manner in which you can contribute to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund.

This year it is the very Superiors of the International Mission who will speak and extend to you an invitation to engage in the missionary endeavor. Taking advantage of their presence in Rome during the gathering in September and with the assistance of the Communications Office, each one of these Missionaries has extended an invitation which you can view at (www.gospel-joy.org). There you will also find further information with regard to the theme, the various reports and documents relative to that meeting.

MISSIONARY REALITY AND NEEDS

AFRICA

- **Angola** - (2012). Local language and Portuguese. Parish ministry, accompany local communities and the Vincentian Family. Missionaries presently ministering there: Marcos Gumieiro, José Ramírez Martínez, and Jason Cristian Soto Herrera. They request the presence of more Missionaries in order to expand their missionary service.

- **Benin** - (2013). Local language and French. Pastoral ministry, assisting the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal and supporting the Vincentian Family. Missionaries presently ministering there: Stanislaw Deszez and Rafał Brukarczyk. A Missionary is preparing himself to go there but there is need for more Missionaries. This mission is supported primarily by the Province of Poland.

- **Chad** - (2012). Supported by COVIAM (the Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar). Local language and French. Parish ministry and teaching in schools. Missionaries presently ministering there:

Roch Alexandre Ramilijaona, Onyekachi Sunday Ugwu, and Esigbemi Ambrose Umetietie. Very soon one of the Missionaries will be leaving and another Missionary arriving in order to serve the diocese. More support is needed.

- **Tunis** - (2011). Local languages, French and English. Parish ministry, charitable assistance through CARITAS and ministry with the Diocesan Office of Education. Missionaries presently ministering there: Firmin Mola Mbalo and Narcisse Djerambete Yotobumbeti. These Missionaries would like another confrere to join with them in their ministry.

New invitation to participate in this mission: in a recent letter the Bishop of Tunis told me: *The members of the parish in Sousse are retired people, expatriates, many tourists, and mixed families (Christian and Muslim). It would be important to minister in this parish in order to continue to build bridges and dialogue with the Muslim community on behalf of serving the poor in this country. The Church in Tunis is positioned on the peripheries: it is not self-sufficient and there is no seminary to train future priests. The priests have to come from outside the country. The faithful in Tunis are composed of about thirty thousand foreigners, university students, workers, and expatriates. The majority of the population is Muslim and, as a result, there is always an environment of suspicion and indifference; prejudices which we attempt to change through the witness of our life.*

AMERICA

- **Bolivia, El Alto** - (1994). Local language and Spanish. Pastoral ministry with the indigenous peoples which implies rural pastoral ministry and the formation of the laity. Missionaries presently ministering there: Aidan Rooney, Cyrille de la Barre De Nanteuil and Diego José Plá Aranda. They request the assistance of one more Missionary.

- **Bolivia, Cochabamba** - (2009). Local language and Spanish. Pastoral and parish ministry. The Missionaries presently ministering there: David Paniagua, Jorge Manrique Castro, and Luis Miguel Montaña Flores.

New Invitations: Missionaries are needed for a new mission in **Beni, Bolivia**.

Sister Mary Gerald, DC, who has ministered in Bolivia for more than fifty years, wrote me a letter and stated:

We are about to conclude three popular missions that were given by the Vincentian Missionaries and together with our bishop, we are extremely grateful and satisfied with their ministry. It is hoped that these missions will bring about even greater happenings. Two of the

four Missionaries stated that these were the most difficult popular missions that they had engaged in during the two years that they have ministered together as an itinerant missionary team. The people were very happy to receive the Missionaries and are praying that they will return. The people bade farewell to the Missionaries with tears. The Daughters of Charity, who minister here as a team, are at a critical moment...

I responded to Sister's letter and told her that the confreres are promoting this mission in Beni and that I also support the idea of a shared mission, among all the branches of the Vincentian Family, especially during this Year of Collaboration in the Vincentian Family.

- **Territorial Prelature of Tefé, Brazil:** The Prelature of Tefé, located in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, had been entrusted to the Spiritans. Bishop Fernando Barbosa dos Santos, C.M., is the fourth bishop of Tefé and the first one who is not a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The Prelature extends for some 264,669 square kilometers and has a population of about 237,782 inhabitants. There are 10 cities, about 405 riverside communities and 40 urban communities. There are 88 Indigenous communities in 15 different villages with a total population of 8,500 persons. It is a poor missionary territory that needs more priests and evangelizers. The primary means of transportation is by boats (long hours of travel in precarious and difficult conditions). The language is Portuguese and the local language.

- **Chile, Punta Arenas - Tierra del Fuego** (2013). The official language is Spanish. This mission would involve pastoral ministry in Punto Arenas. At the beginning of the present year we accepted the administration of a parish in Tierra del Fuego. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Ángel Ignacio Garrido Santiago, Pablo Alexis Vargas Ruiz, and Margarito Martínez González. They request the support of one more Missionary.

- **Anchorage, Alaska** - (2014). Languages: English and Spanish. The confreres ministering there are serving an increasing number of Latinos who live in the Diocese of Anchorage. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Andrew Bellisario, Arnoldo Hernández Rodríguez, Pedro Nel Delgado and they are awaiting the arrival of Jesús Gabriel Medina Claros.

ASIA

- **Solomon Islands** - (1993). Languages: English and Pidgin. The confreres are involved in formation ministry of candidates for the Congregation (major seminary) and rural parish ministry. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Jose Manjaly, Raúl Eduardo Castro,

Gregory Cooney, Varghese Ayyampilly, and Antony Punnoth. In 2016 Ricardo Padrhan and Paulus Suparmono will begin ministry there. There is always a need for Missionaries to teach philosophy and/or theology.

• **Papua New Guinea** - (2003). Language: English and Pidgin. The mission there includes ministry in various dioceses. In addition to formation ministry in the seminary at Port Moresby, the confreres are involved in rural parish ministry and also work at the center of missionary cultural formation. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Homero Marín, Marceliano Oabel, Emmanuel Lapaz, Jacek Tendej, Neil Lams and Joel Bernardo Yco. Justin Eke continues his ongoing formation.

Present needs:

In addition to the needs of the International Missions, we also need Missionaries who are willing to support our missionary provinces:

1. Province of China: The Province of China continues to provide for the pastoral needs of the people of Taiwan and mainland China. The language is Mandarin and the confreres are involved in a variety of ministries.

2. Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius: This Vice-Province has evolved with the support of missionaries from outside the province. The number of native missionaries is increasing. Charitable works have been established there in order to provide for the material and pastoral needs of the poor. With ministry in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus the Vice-Province is willing to accept confreres who are willing to minister there (either with long-term or short-term commitments). At the present time there are missionaries from Africa, India and in a short time a Missionary from Vietnam will arrive there. The language is Russian.

Urgent calls

3. Province of Cuba: Even though this Province is searching for a way to reconfigure itself with another province, there is a lack of personnel in that province. The language is Spanish and confreres will be welcomed to minister there (either with long-term or shorn-term commitments).

4. Vice-Province of Mozambique: The members of the Vice-Province have been involved in ministry with men and women who are in great need, in formation ministry in seminaries and in a mission in South Africa. The Vice-Province is still dependent on Missionaries from other provinces in order to continue its ministry. They are most willing

to accept new members. The language is Portuguese and the local language. There are 29 ministry positions but only 17 Missionaries.

Since I began this letter with a reflection on the words of Saint Vincent when he spoke about the missionary spirit, I would like to conclude this letter with some other words of our Founder referring to two Confreres, Nicolas Duperroy and Guillaume Desdames, missionaries in Poland:

What have they suffered in that country? Famine? It's there. The plague? Both of them have had it, and one of them has had it twice. War? They're in the midst of armies and have passed through the hands of enemy soldiers. In short, God has tried them by every form of scourge. And here we are, like homebodies without courage or zeal! We'll see others risking their lives in dangers for the service of God, and we'll behave like cowards! What a pity! What weakness! (CCD:XI:365).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

VOLUNTEERS FOR THE MISSIONS "AD GENTES"

Criteria for selection

The realities of missionary life are a challenge and almost always different from the challenges that we have to confront in our province of origin. Therefore, some criteria are needed in order to select the confreres who will minister in those places. Using the following criteria the volunteer will be interviewed by some member of the General Council or his representative.

1. *The Missionaries ought to have emotional stability.* Missionary work is difficult! The interpersonal relationships with one's companions in ministry, the cultural tensions and a certain anxiety with regard to ministry, all of these increase tension. Only those persons who are emotionally stable should make a long-term commitment for missions in a different cultural context.

In order to be effective, those confreres who minister in a culture that is distinct from their own must learn another language, attain knowledge with regard to the new culture(s) so that the message of God can be proclaimed in that different and changing world context.

2. *The Missionaries ought to have a spiritual maturity.* In order to preach the gospel in an effective manner, initiative and ability are not enough. Saint Paul tells us that we are *earthen vessels* and

we ought to reveal *the surpassing power* in our ministry that proceeds from God and not from us (2 Corinthians 4:7). The missions are a supernatural work that are engaged in through the power of God. Therefore, missionaries ought to be people who *kneel before the Father* (Ephesians 4:2) in prayer. They ought to be people who live the word, not only in order to prepare their homilies and lessons but also in order to reflect upon the will of God for their own life.

3. Mindful of the local reality, *Missionaries ought to possess those qualities and be formed in a manner* that enables them to build up the Church, to form new mature Christians, and to form Church and national leaders for Christian service. Those are the essential tasks of the mission. Missionaries must avoid the temptation of transferring the culture of their Church of origin to the Church of their new mission. Rather they should minister in a manner that enables the gospel values to become rooted in the culture of the place where they are ministering.

4. *The Missionaries ought to be properly motivated.* Missionaries ought to develop a clear and direct motivation for evangelization, for the mission and for service on behalf of those who are poor. They should always be mindful of the fact that their ministry is exercised for the greater glory of God. Doubtful motives such as personal gain or vain-glory always lead to failure in achieving the objective of the mission.

MISSION APPEAL LETTER 2015 THE FOLLOWING STEPS

Information for those who wish to offer their ministry as volunteers

[1] After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer for the missions, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome by **November 20, 2015** or again by **February 20, 2016** so that we can review requests at our *Tempo Forte* meetings in December and March.

[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 the missionaries.

[3] It is necessary that the Missionary should 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. Later, the superior general will then dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.

[5] Your letter should give some background knowledge 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.

[7] If you cannot go to the missions we welcome your monetary contribution as a sign of your zeal for the missionary work of the Congregation. Every year many eligible provinces needing help seek a micro-project grant of \$5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity Office. 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.cmglobal.org/vso).

HOW TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND

Contributions from individuals and provincial houses:

- Checks only and those checks should be made out to
Congregazione della Missione

The bank will not accept checks with any other name. Checks should be sent to

**Treasurer General
Congregazione della Missione
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Rome, Italy**

- Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.
- Clearly indicate that the funds are for the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO).

In every case:

- All gifts received will be acknowledged (if your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification).
- Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money as described above.