

December 6, 1999

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

The heads of various branches of the Vincentian Family, at our annual meeting last January, decided to publish a Jubilee Declaration on behalf of the poor. Fr. Charles Shelby was commissioned to coordinate the writing process and, after numerous drafts and much consultation, the attached document has been unanimously approved. It is available in eight languages: English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, and Spanish.

Fr. Shelby is sending this document to the heads of the various branches of our family for distribution in their groups. It will also be posted on our Vincentian Family web page.

I am sending it to you today to ask that you distribute it throughout your province. Please give it the widest circulation possible: your own newsletter, local newspapers and periodicals, radio, television (where feasible), Internet. May I ask too that you coordinate your efforts with the other branches of the Vincentian Family that exist in your province so that there will be no duplication. I am attaching the document in the principal language(s) of your country. If it would be useful for you to have it in another of the above-mentioned languages, please let me know.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter which, I hope, will promote a worldwide awareness of the needs of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General



## **Jubilee 2000 Declaration on Behalf of the Poor**

### **Introduction to the Final Draft**

At the 1999 Vincentian Family Reunion in Rome last January, I was given the task to formulate a declaration on behalf of the poor for the Great Jubilee 2000. It is to be no more than one page, and it is to speak to the widest possible audience.

In developing this declaration, I have sought:

\* to use the "little method" of Saint Vincent, presenting motivation (in the Scripture passage), explanation (in the facts and convictions), and means (in the invitation). The declaration closes with the consequence of a world closer to God's kingdom. At the end are our names as the international Vincentian Family. I would hope that between September 27 and November 28 we would open the declaration to endorsements from local groups, whether divisions of our organizations or other local groups who share the vision of Vincent. The wider the participation, the greater the impact.

\* to speak for the poor, the voiceless in our society, those at the margin. I see no need to speak for those poor who can speak for themselves (although we can and should speak in solidarity with them); rather, we are speaking for the poor who are so powerless that their own voice will be ignored, in some cases even by the poor themselves. I chose the image of a threshold, a doorway, because it is one of the major symbols of the Jubilee. In the initial motivation, the reference to Scripture, I placed the poor in the person of Christ, knocking at the door. I also refer to the image of the poor Lazarus (who is voiceless himself but gains Abraham to speak for him) at the door of the rich man.

\* to use short phrases in order to put the maximum impact in the minimum space. I focused on what seemed to be the root causes of poverty. For publicity, the press often likes brief statements which they can quote. I hope that at least some of my words evoke strong images. In developing the declaration this way, I have chosen a particularly "American" format. In other cultures or languages such a format may not be suitable. With this in mind, I encourage translators to do more than simply translate the words; instead to be free in adapting the declaration to their own culture. The important points are that we speak together and bear witness to the place of the poor in the kingdom of God.

\* The statements, and especially the items in the lists, can be interpreted in a narrow, condescending, arrogant sense; or they can be seen in a broader, inclusive, and evangelistic way. The intention, obviously, is the latter. However, I do not know how to eliminate that ambiguity without producing a much, much longer essay.

Here is a summary of the process so far. I produced a very rough first draft and presented it to Fr. Maloney, Fr. Benjamin Romo, and a few others who gave some excellent suggestions. I then developed a second draft which I offered to the Vincentian Family members who had been at our reunion. They gave suggestions, comments, and critiques, which have all been very valuable. With such a wide base from which to work, some of the comments were contradictory. I have submitted this draft to Fathers Maloney and Romo before distributing it generally. I think I have completed my task. It is now up to us to translate it, offer it to our members for endorsement, and publish it.

*Charles Shelby, C.M.*

**At the Threshold of the Great Jubilee 2000  
To the Nations of the World and All People of Good Will  
On Behalf of the Poor**

*The poor of the world stand at the door and knock asking to enter  
and dine with us, to join the guests at the banquet of this Great Jubilee.*

*(see Revelation 3:20; compare Luke 16:19-21)*

We, the international Vincentian Family, following Jesus Christ and his disciple Vincent de Paul, share a deep concern for the suffering of those who are poor. We recognize these facts and hold these convictions:

- Every human being possesses a fundamental dignity and deserves respect.
- Long-existing forms of poverty remain with us: ignorance, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, low wages, sickness, addiction, lack of sanitation, oppression, the ravages of war.
- New poor and new forms of poverty have arisen in our midst: AIDS, rupture of families, denial of access to technology, environmental pollution, culture of death.
- Some of these poverties, old and new, are reinforced by the structures of our society.
- Christ our savior lives and suffers today in those who are poor.
- Effective love for the poor proclaims the good news that God's kingdom is at hand.

We, the international Vincentian Family, invite all people to unite in listening and responding to the cries of those in need. Together we can do what separately we cannot do. Let us open the doors of opportunity by:

- Building a culture of solidarity, understanding, and dialogue, as we grow in respect for the rights of each person.
- Providing the resources for education to every person, regardless of status, race, or gender.
- Assuring a living wage to all workers.
- Easing the burden of debt for those less able to pay, whether nations or individuals.

- Offering to the hungry the food, resources, and skills they need in order to feed themselves and their families.

Then all of us, rich and poor throughout the world, will join our hearts to celebrate the Great Jubilee and join our hands to move forward together in the third millennium.

We are the leaders of some of the principal branches of the International Vincentian Family:

**International Association of Charity**, founded 1617, 260,000 members

**Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul**, founded 1625, 4,000 members

**Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul**, founded 1633, 25,000 members

**Federation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul**, founded 1734, over 4,500 members

**Sisters of Charity Federation in the Vincentian-Setonian Tradition**, founded 1809, 7,000 members

**Society of Saint Vincent de Paul**, founded 1833, 930,000 members

**Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul**, founded 1845, 300 members

**Vincentian Marian Youth**, founded 1847, 200,000 members

**Association of the Miraculous Medal**, founded 1905, over 6,000,000 registered members

*Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, 27 September 1999*