

Rome, May 1, 2002

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

A few years before his death, St. Vincent said to those gathered at St. Lazare:

Are we prepared to go to Poland, to Barbary, to the Indies, to sacrifice our lives and our satisfactions to him? If that it so, let us praise God ... Let us give ourselves to God to go throughout the whole world to spread his holy gospel and, wherever he may lead us, let us stay at our post, faithful to our commitment until we are recalled at his good pleasure. May difficulties not deter us ... It matters not if we die in the fight. But let us die with our weapons in our hands, and happy too, for by our death the Company will not be the poorer, because 'the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.' For every missionary who gives his life out of charity, God will raise up others who will do the work he left behind (Abelly, Book II, Chapter I, 194-195).

As I introduce this *Ratio Missionum*, I thank God for the countless generous missionaries whom he has formed within the Congregation. Many have lived and died in the service of the poor in foreign lands. As I visit the provinces, I am struck again and again by the fidelity and creativity of our missionaries in preaching the gospel "by word and work."

The General Assembly of 1998, seeing a strong and renewed missionary drive among the members of the Congregation, asked the Superior General to name a special commission to write a *Ratio Missionum*. Soon afterwards, with the consent of the members of the General Council, I asked Frs. Antonius Sad Budianto (Indonesia), Dominique Iyolo Iyombe (Congo), Ángel Santamaría (Madagascar), Homero Elías (El Alto, Bolivia), Hugh O'Donnell (China), and Victor Bieler (General Curia) to serve as its members. The Commission met three times between January 1999 and the fall of 2000. After its first meeting, it consulted all the members of the Congregation of the Mission about the contents of a *Ratio*. Before drawing up its final draft, it further consulted all of the Visitors of the Congregation. It also met with the General Council on two occasions and asked our input at every

step. When the Commission finished its work and placed it in my hands, I then asked Fr. John Prager, who works in Panama, to serve as a final editor and unify the style of the document, the chapters of which had been written in various languages. When Fr. Prager completed the editing task, I reviewed the document once again with the members of the General Council, making a few final changes. We then unanimously approved it.

Today, with great gratitude to all of those who worked so hard in preparing this *Ratio Missionum*, I present it to you for your study. I encourage all the members of the Congregation to read this document, to meditate on it, and to search for ways in which it can shape the life and ministry of each of us. I ask too that it be studied carefully in all of our houses of formation. It should be one of the fundamental documents for those preparing for full membership in the Congregation of the Mission, since it responds to some basic questions concerning our ministry: What should a Vincentian foreign mission be like? What are its characteristics? What are the criteria for accepting and evaluating missions? How should candidates be prepared for them?

In presenting this *Ratio* today, I also ask the Visitors to organize study sessions or retreats in which the confreres and our candidates reflect on and digest the contents of this document. It will be helpful to all of us, whether we are younger or older, whether we are engaged directly in foreign missions or in other works.

As we begin to use this document in the Congregation, I think of our missionaries throughout the world. With you and for them, I join in a prayer that St. Vincent wrote spontaneously on September 27, 1647, at the end of a letter to Étienne Blatiron, who was the first of our missionaries to go to Genoa:

O God my Lord, please be the bond of their hearts; bring to flower the effects of so many holy affections you cause them to form, and give growth to the fruits of their labors for the salvation of souls. Water with your eternal blessings this establishment, like a new tree planted by your hand. Strengthen these poor missionaries in their fatigue. Lastly, my God, be yourself their reward, and through their prayers spread over me your immense mercy (SV III, 239).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General