

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Rome, 13 January 2011

To All the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

***The Congregation is not now what it once was;
nor is it what it will be.***

My dear confreres,

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

The world is not now what it once was, nor is it what it will be. My brothers, the world has changed faster than most of us would ever have anticipated. The internet is one of the key movers in this change. One web site alone, Facebook, has a population the size of the third largest country in the world, behind only China and India. We live in a world without borders. Can missionaries neglect this virtual country or choose not to engage in conversation with its citizens, most of whom are young? Have not missionaries always had to learn the language and culture of a mission territory? We hear from Pope Benedict XVI, that we are to, “...*help the men and women of our digital age to sense the Lord's presence, to grow in expectation and hope, and to draw near to the Word of God which offers salvation and fosters an integral human development. In this way the Word can traverse the many crossroads created by the intersection of all the different 'highways' that form 'cyberspace', and show that God has his rightful place in every age, including our own*” (Message for the 44th World Communications Day). How can we do this if we do not speak their language and frequently encounter them in their virtual world?

The Congregation is not now what it once was, nor is it what it will be. Just twenty years ago few in the Congregation had any awareness of how the world would be changed by technology. A mere ten years ago, at the beginning of the third millennium, our former Superior General, Father Robert Maloney wrote a series of letters, one requiring each province to have an internet connection in its motherhouse and house of formation. We have advanced to the stage where the General Curia can send e-mails to all of the provinces and vice-provinces of the Congregation and to many of the individual confreres as well. He also

encouraged each province to have a website. It is noteworthy that today only a handful of provinces have active and attractive web sites. Father Maloney also challenged us to champion the pastoral use of technology on behalf of the poor.

I have two questions to pose to you for your reflection, my brothers. First, How will the world be different in just six years? Whether we like it or not, technology will be woven more and more into the fabric of our lives, even the lives of the poorest among us. Second, Will we be ready to serve in such a world? Our Lines of Action from the General Assembly 2010 provide direction as they focus on:

1. Formation: encouraging confreres to form attitudes and develop skills necessary for pastoral ministry in the next six years;
2. Reconfiguration: being able to streamline our structures and our administrative processes;
3. Dialog: widening our horizons to discover new needs and collaborative ways of evangelizing and serving;
4. Creativity: responding courageously to new needs in a world without frontiers;
5. Systemic change: aimed at root causes of poverty. All of these goals can be greatly facilitated by the use of the internet and tools of technology.

Can we use our Vincentian technology resources:

- to work together with others, especially members of the Vincentian Family and yet beyond, in serving the poor and investigating the causes of poverty?
- to seek grants for setting up computer learning centers in the poorest countries? We had a pilot project going in Africa, specifically regarding computers and computer centers, but because of lack of financial backing, the project was not able to move forward. Yet there were eight or nine countries of our provinces in Africa interested in pursuing this means of development as a tool of helping to educate and at the same time to evangelize.
- to continue to train confreres in computer technology? I know of individual confreres throughout the Congregation who have a particular interest in this type of technology and are well equipped and are moving forward. A good example is Father Aidan Rooney in Bolivia. From Bolivia he has the opportunity to develop a great deal of technology for the service in the Diocese as well as the service of the poor that he and the men in the mission there are serving.
- to devise ways in which older confreres can help in the service of the poor through computer technology?

We have to do some reviewing and take specific steps:

- That each province have a website that is attractive, especially to the young, and that it be frequently updated. It means commitment of personnel without a doubt. And yet, a commitment that will enable a confrere or confreres to reach a good number of people in and through this technological advancement.
- At the international level, we are willing to move forward with this training. We will try to offer as much as we can to help the confreres become equipped in this means of evangelization.
- We can help to establish guidelines or perspectives on the pastoral use of the internet by missionaries.
- We can provide assistance through Famvin in setting up websites, that is, in the major languages that can be easily updated by anyone who has the basic skills of word processing.
- We have also thought about the possibility of a type of international gathering, whether it be virtual or in person in order that we might come together and share our expertise and at the same time help prepare moving others forward in this most needed advancement in technology.

Let me conclude with a great thought made by John Paul II in his document on the Church and the internet in 2002. *“Although the virtual reality of cyberspace cannot substitute for real interpersonal community, the incarnational reality of the sacraments and the liturgy or the immediate and direct proclamation of the gospel, it can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, and enrich the religious lives of users.”*

My brothers, I ask you to reflect seriously upon this message and move forward with a desire to evangelize and serve those who are our lords and masters with new ways and new means ever faithful to our call.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General