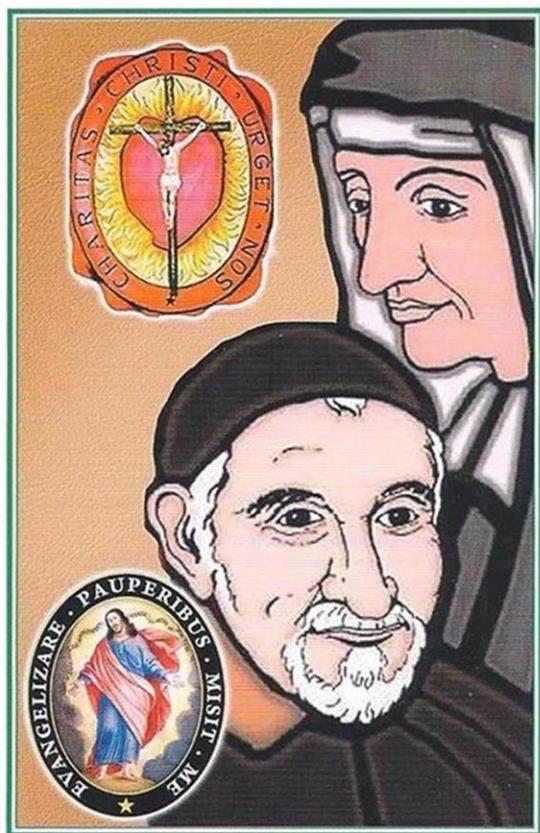


VINCENTIANA

56th Year - N. 3

July-September 2012



Ministry to the Daughters of Charity

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

This issue of *Vincentiana* is devoted to a work of the Congregation that may seem obscure to the untrained eye, but one that traces itself back to the time of St. Vincent; namely, ministry as provincial directors to nearly 18,000 Daughters of Charity throughout the world. Today, over seventy confreres serve as provincial directors to 71 provinces and 1 region of the Daughters of Charity. Indeed, when one considers the added number of confreres serving the Daughters as confessors, retreat masters, and spiritual directors, it is clear that the sons of St. Vincent continue to be faithful to this work he began over 350 years ago.

This issue contains highlights from proceedings of the July 2012 world-wide meeting in Paris meeting of the provincial directors. Organized by the Director General Fr. Patrick Griffin, it brought together confreres and Daughters to listen and learn from one another. As you will see from these articles, it was a rich and rewarding exchange of ideas. The topics discussed were far ranging, covering a gamut of historical, theological, pastoral and Vincentian charism presentations relevant to their role as provincial directors of the Daughters of Charity today.

As Sr. Evelyne Franc observed to the provincial directors in her address, "I don't think you ever thought of the possibility of this service when you entered the Congregation, even though this ministry with the Daughters is included in your Constitutions". Yet, our confreres are not only willing and adaptable, but as can be seen in these pages, deeply committed to assisting the Vincentian identity, spiritual formation and pastoral care of the Daughters. In writing on the role of the provincial director, Fr. Griffin describes it as "breathing life into the Company" by leading the Daughters to a deeper awareness of their mission, as individuals and a community. Fr. Griffin also shows a mastery of the ecclesial dimension of vowed life, weaving through various Church documents beginning with the Second Vatican Council up to post-millennial writings.

Fr. John Prager, provincial director of the Daughters in Ecuador, blends his knowledge of community history with a strong grasp of

Vincentian spirituality to demonstrate that Vincent de Paul's theological and apostolic vision made him co-founder of the Daughters of Charity. Fr. Fernando Casado, provincial director in Madrid, writes movingly on ministry to elderly sisters, and sees his work as supporting them "in the transition from doing to being... to help them to rediscover their vocation and the love they had when they began". Fr. Fergus Kelly, provincial director in Great Britain, writes honestly of the challenges church and community face today. Using winter as an analogy to describe these difficult times, he is still filled with joy and hope in his ministry with the Daughters: "I have been blessed in my eleven years as a director. I have laughed and cried, sung at jubilees and danced at provincial assemblies... it has been great!".

In this issue, we are also fortunate to have the 'feminine perspective' well represented, so important, as our provincial directors serve 18,000 Daughters of Charity! In addition to Sr. Evelyne Franc's comprehensive and faith-filled overview of the Daughters today, we also are privileged to have the wonderful work of Sr. Antoinette Marie, D.C., who focuses on the spirituality of St. Louise and the loving, lasting imprint it brings to bear on the Daughters today.

Special thanks must be extended to Fr. Griffin for making these texts available for *Vincentiana*, a considerable task consuming much time and organization. It is also important to acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed by *Vincentiana* to the Secretariat of the Daughters of Charity at Rue du Bac for their generous assistance in providing the multiple translations of these texts. As many an editor of *Vincentiana* has expressed, good translators are worth their weight in gold.

One final note: in referring to previous editors of this publication, one special person comes to mind, namely, Fr. Julio Suescun, C.M. who served as Editor of *Vincentiana* from 2007-2011. Fr. Julio was confrere with many talents, who served the Congregation well in his fifty three years of priesthood. He was a gifted preacher, erudite professor, a respected formator, an elected provincial, and lastly, Editor of *Vincentiana*. Fr. Julio also served as a provincial director of the Daughters of Charity in Spain, and would no doubt be gratified by the contents of this issue. In light of his work as a provincial director of the Daughters, it seems only fair that as we give thanks for his life, **this issue of *Vincentiana* is dedicated with gratitude to the life and ministry of Fr. Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.**

About Our Authors



Fr. FERNANDO CASADO, C.M. is from the Province of Madrid, Spain and has served as Provincial Director of the “San Vicente” Madrid Province of the Daughters of Charity since 2003. Ordained in 1990, Fr. Casado has served in seminary formation work, parish ministry, and is a member of the provincial council.



Sr. ÉVELYNE FRANC, D.C. is Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity. Sr. Evelyne has previously served as a missionary in Taiwan. She was elected Superioress General in 2003, and was reelected in 2009.



Fr. G. GREGORY GAY, C.M. is Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. A native of Baltimore, Maryland USA, he was ordained in 1980 for the Eastern (Philadelphia) Province. Fr. Gay has served as a missionary in the Republic of Panama and Visitor of the Province of Central America. He was elected Superior General in 2004 and reelected in 2010.



Fr. PATRICK J. GRIFFIN, C.M., was appointed Director General of the Daughters of Charity in 2011. He was ordained in 1979, and after completing a doctorate in Sacred Scripture, he has taught in several seminaries as well as on the collegiate levels. Fr. Griffin has served in seminary formation and University administration. He is a member of the Eastern (Philadelphia) Province.



Sr. ANTOINETTE MARIE HANCE, D.C., entered the Daughters of Charity in 1968. She has served in ministry with youth, secondary school education, formation with young Sisters, and providing pastoral outreach at the Chapel at Rue du Bac. Sr. Antoinette also serves as Sister Servant to one of the communities residing at Rue du Bac.



Fr. FERGUS KELLY, C.M. is a confrere from the Province of Ireland who was ordained in 1970. He has served as Provincial Director of the Province of Great Britain of the Daughters of Charity since 2001. He is also a member of the provincial council.



Fr. JOHN P. PRAGER, C.M., was ordained in 1982 for the Eastern (Philadelphia) Province, USA. He has worked in the Republic of Panama as a missionary where he engaged in pastoral ministry and lay formation until he was named Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity of Ecuador in 2010. He has written and given numerous retreats and workshops on Vincentian history, spirituality, and missiology.

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter on Christian-Islam Commission

Rome, 2 July 2012

*To the leaders of the Vincentian Family
To all members of the Vincentian Family*

My dear friends in Jesus and St. Vincent,

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

At the International Vincentian Symposium on dialogue with Islam, held in Pacet, Indonesia from 7-17 August, 2011 the reality that many priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission and sisters from the Daughters of Charity have been working in Islamic countries was discussed at length. In addition, it was unanimously acknowledged as a providential call for the Vincentian Family to begin a “new apostolate” of interreligious dialogue in a better and more appropriate way for the benefit of its mission.

As a result, the participants in this 2011 symposium expressed the desire that the Vincentian Family establish a permanent international commission on dialogue with Islam. In January, 2012, the preparatory commission of the symposium in Indonesia presented a detailed proposal of a future commission to the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family Leaders at a meeting in Rome.

After having thoroughly discussed the matter with other leaders in the Vincentian Family, and having received their support for this proposal, I am happy to announce the establishment of the Vincentian Commission on Dialogue with Islam.

The members of this commission for the time being are as follows: Fr. Claudio Santangelo, C.M. (coordinator), Fr. Armada Riyanto, C.M.,

Sr. Abeba Hadgu, D.C., Christa Foelting, A.I.C., Albert Zoghbi, SSVF. They will serve an initial term of three years which is renewable. They will be assisted by other Vincentian Family members experienced in this field who will collaborate as consultants.

Faithful to its nature and objectives, the Commission will be:

- An inspiring group that proposes and organizes forums and symposiums of the Vincentian Family to engage in and develop theological and spiritual reflection on dialogue with Islam;
- A help in developing ongoing formation programs at different levels (e.g. at continental levels) for members of the Vincentian Family, with regard to dialogue and working together with people from other faith, namely Muslims;
- A source of support and accompaniment for Vincentians and Daughters of Charity who are working in predominantly Muslim countries, so they do not feel alone in their mission.

The structure and functioning of the commission will be as follows:

- There will not be a fixed place for the seat of the commission;
- Members will meet at least once a year to study the requests and the proposals coming from the Vincentian Family and to plan activities and initiatives;
- Members are encouraged to make use of modern means of communicating and to have virtual meetings via teleconferencing to save time and expenses;
- A member of the Commission will assume responsibility for the maintenance and updating of their existing website: www.vindialogue.org
- The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity will be the immediate liaison between the Commission and other leaders of the Vincentian Family;
- With regard to financial matters of this commission, each participating branch of the Vincentian Family will assume responsibility for expenses of their own representative. Expenses from maintaining the website will be shared equally.

I am most grateful to the leaders of the Vincentian Family for their generous response and to all commission members for their kind availability to undertake this important work. In my recent circular letter on the occasion of the celebrations of our Holy Founder, I wrote:

"I invite you to broaden our Vincentian collaboration. To this end, I propose as a theme: Collaboration and Evangelization" (Letter to the members of the Vincentian Family, 3 June, 2012).

I am confident that the Vincentian Commission on Dialogue with Islam will be a meaningful sign of our collaboration as one family, as well as an effective tool for our evangelization in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Letter on Vincentian Family Collaboration

Rome, June 2012

To all members of the Vincentian Family:

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ live in your hearts now and always!

As you know, each year we propose a theme for reflection and study as a Family, related to the celebrations of our Holy Founder. Last year, we considered the fruits that the celebrations of the 350th anniversary produced in us as a branch of the Vincentian Family at the local level and the General level. What we experienced together, the fruit of our creativity enriched us enormously as Family in the following ways:

- mutual relationships were strengthened, other relationships with new forms of spiritual expression close to our own emerged,
- Vincentian Formation was deepened,
- creative celebrations expressed with cultural and artistic differences,
- our Vincentian vocation was affirmed,
- we grew spiritually,
- seeking proximity with those who are poor was intensified,
- the missionary dimension of our charism was strengthened.

So these were some of the fruits that were shared following last year's invitation.

This year, in line with the mystique of our Family, I invite you to broaden our Vincentian Collaboration. To this end, I propose as a theme: **Collaboration and Evangelization**, and as a slogan: **“Let us work together to share the Good News and communicate life to those who are poor”**.

Allow me to begin by recalling an event, certainly well known to everyone, but which is the beginning of everything for us. Just as we say with regard to Jesus: “Everything began in Galilee”, we can say of Vincent: “Everything began in Folleville and in Chatillon”. As the confession of the peasant who, after the Sermon in 1617 at Folleville, opens the eyes of Vincent to human misery in all its dimensions, it is the experience of solidarity aroused in Chatillon, after having recounted

the needs of a family, that reveals to him the necessity of organized action in order to meet the needs of people. It is in this same way that we were born as a Family to help those who are poor with their immediate material needs, but also sees to their spiritual needs, which make them even poorer. I would even say: a Family which, by our life style, calls out and denounces the structures which cause poverty.

Through baptism, we are part of a plan, the plan of God, revealed through his Son Jesus Christ, and which the Gospels recount clearly: it is the plan of the Kingdom and its Justice. As a Vincentian Family, we have the privilege and the blessing of having a spirituality which allows us to live this plan of Life today. Our spirituality comes from inert who asked himself each day: "What would the Son of God do in such or such a situation?"

However, this Family is plunged into a world which, day by day, is moving away from the concept of family, preferring an individualistic, competitive and egocentric life style. This is a life style which is inhuman, because to be human, in the most profound sense, has no sense without the Other.

In response to this, we offer an alternative proposal to this world. Not only because our way of living seeks to transform this world so that it might become good news for human beings – a transformation which is accomplished by announcing the Good News to those who are poor – but also because we can and want to be a model by our way of working together as a team. Each branch is very different, and this enriches us, but what unites us is Jesus Christ and each one lives that out in a different way. That's the way it has been for four hundred years: it is the Vincentian style, that is, "*Jesus Christ here and now*".

In practice, I invite you to:

1. Strengthen the local and regional organizations which make us one Family. If there are no such organizations; we must lay the groundwork for creating them.
2. Strengthen projects for those who are poor, projects done as Family. The projects each branch undertakes are good, but if we do them together as a Family, they will be even better.
3. Organize times and places of celebrations and prayer together, as a Family, enjoying the various local and regional events: anniversaries, jubilees, Vincentian Celebrations, etc.

I know that each branch, just like the Family in general, has different situations which often discourage the members and at times can make the work difficult. Sometimes, they are even tempted to follow the inhuman plans which we spoke of earlier. However, the Vincentian Family was not born for this; we were born to bring Life, and as our Master said, "*Life in abundance*". I would like us to go beyond the

qualities found within each branch and each member. If we unite these qualities, we can do great work, and our masters will benefit from it.

In conclusion, I would like us to reflect on this story as a metaphor for life that many of you can identify with. However, each time that we think about it, we can find something different to reflect upon.

Meeting in the Carpenter's Shop

In a woodworking shop there was a strange meeting; the tools held council to solve problems about their differences. The hammer was the first to hold the presidency, but the assembly informed him that he should resign; he was too noisy, he spent his time striking blows. The hammer acknowledged his fault; he asked that the wing nut be expelled because he had too many turns doing things. The wing nut agreed to withdraw, but he, in his turn, requested the expulsion of the sandpaper; he was too rough in his relationships and he always caused friction with the others. The sandpaper agreed, on condition that it be the same for the tape measure who spent his time measuring others, as if he were perfect.

At this point the carpenter entered. He put on his apron and began to work, using in turn, the hammer, the sandpaper, the tape measure, and the wing nut. When he was finished, the piece of wood had become a beautiful piece of furniture.

When the carpenter's shop was again silent, the tools continued their deliberation. The saw interrupted: "Sirs, it is so clear that we have faults, but the carpenter works with our qualities. That is what gives us value. So, let's forget our weaknesses and look at our virtues". The group found that the hammer was strong, the wing nut united and gave solidity, the sandpaper filed down the bumps and the tape measure was precise and exact. They felt like a team capable of making beautiful furniture and their differences took on a new light.

The Church exists to evangelize, to spread the Good News. In our Vincentian spirituality, this Good News is for those who are poor. May God grant us the grace to continue to be this Good News, so that our Masters in Jesus Christ may have Life and that it be abundant!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Mission Appeal Letter

Rome, October 2012

To all members of the Congregation of the Mission:

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

Once again my dear confreres, as we enter the month of October, the Church asks us to reflect on our missionary nature as the Body of Christ. The annual October World Mission Sunday Appeal of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith reminds us that, no matter where we find ourselves, we are called to be missionaries. In inaugurating the “Year of Faith” Pope Benedict XVI described the goal of the annual Sunday World Mission Appeal as a *“call to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us”*.

The ‘word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us’ reaches fruition in the deeds of missionaries who bravely proclaim the Gospel the world over. Forged by faith, they ventured forth in uncertainty and hardship to bring Christ to all continents, countries, and cultures. Our Congregation has a storied history of missionary activity, beginning in St. Vincent’s lifetime and continuing to the present day. Indeed, most of today’s provinces began as missions. St. Vincent captured this missionary spirit best when he told his confreres:

“So our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love” (Vol. 12, Letter No. 207, 30 May, 1659).

Last July, I had the exhilarating experience in witnessing the fullness of this missionary fire when I visited the Philippines for the 150th anniversary celebration of the arrival of the confreres and Daughters of Charity. For decades, the Spanish provinces generously shared their “time, talent, and treasure” with the people of the Philippines. Today, we see the results of their efforts: as the psalmist prayed, God has given *“success to the work of our hands”* (Ps. 90:17).

The “success” of the Province of the Philippines must not only be viewed by the numbers of houses, works, confreres, and native Filipi-

nos in formation. It is seen most fully in the fact that now this province has established missions in Thailand and Japan. The Province of the Philippines has also sent men to serve in Asia, Africa, and South America. They who were once mission territory have become missionaries to new lands and people.

With this in mind, let us now review the challenge put forth to us by the 2010 General Assembly. The Assembly called us to respond individually and communally to:

- *foster personal availability and mobility;*
- *to participate in new and challenging missionary projects;*
- *to undertake new works of evangelization in emerging cultures, ecumenism, and religious dialogue, and*
- *to go to the most distant missions ad gentes.*

Thus, I present to you the specifics of our mission appeal for 2012, with particulars of the places and needs of each mission.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

I begin with an update on our existing international missions where there is always an opportunity to volunteer if one feels called to do so.

1. BOLIVIA: El Alto & Cochabamba

The mission in Bolivia is comprised of two sites: El Alto and Cochabamba. Both can be challenging places to live and work, so reinforcements of confrere personnel are a priority to keep this mission moving forward. **In El Alto**, the superior of the mission is Aidan Rooney from the Eastern Province, USA. He is joined by Cyril de Nanteuil of the province of Paris, and Diego Pla of the province of Madrid. Emilio Torres has returned from El Alto to Peru after a year's service. *For further information on this mission, read Fr. Aidan Rooney's blog: <http://vocesvicentinas.org/>*

As you recall, we began a new mission last year in **Cochabamba**. Our confreres are Joel Vásquez from Colombia, David Paniagua, and Jorge Manríquez Castro from the Province of Chile. Joel will be returning to his province at the end of the year. Both David and Jorge are natives of Bolivia. The work in both El Alto and Cochabamba involves parish ministry, pastoral work, and assistance to the Vincentian Family. The language is Spanish, and local native languages.

2. THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

This mission includes a major seminary for the three dioceses of the Solomon Islands, pastoral ministry, accompaniment of our CM candidates, and work with various branches of the Vincentian family. The confreres working in the Solomon Islands include Victor Bieler, former Assistant General, who, at 83 years of age is still on mission! Other missionaries are Raul Castro from Argentina, Tewolde Negussie Teclemicael of the Province of St. Justin de Jacobis, Augustinus Marsup and Yohanes Agus Setyeno of Indonesia, Joachin Nwaorgu Udochukwu from Nigeria, and Jose Manjaly of the Province of India-North. This mission is coordinated by the General Curia with assistance from the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference.

The mission is coordinated by Greg Walsh who serves as superior and is from the province of Australia. He will be returning there in late 2013. This mission has also benefited from the help of confreres who have come for a shorter term, including Drago Ocvirk from Slovenia, Greg Cooney from Australia, and two confreres from the province of Southern India, Simon Kaipura and Thomas Kallely. *You can read more about this mission at their weblog: <http://vincentsolomon.wordpress.com/>*

3. PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In Papua New Guinea, the work of the confreres occurs on three sites: Port Moresby, where there is a seminary, Woitope, where there is a parish, and the Diocese of Alotau, where our confrere, Bishop Rolly Santos serves as the Ordinary.

In Port Moresby, Emmanuel LaPaz from the Philippines and Justin Eke from the province of Nigeria both work at the seminary. However, Justin will soon take a sabbatical to better prepare for seminary formation. Also in Port Moresby, Jude Lehme from the province of Nigeria will do parish ministry with the superior of the mission, Wlodzimierz Molota from Poland. They work with George Maylaa from the Orient province (Lebanon) to do pastoral outreach to the Woitope mission.

In the diocese of Alotau, a new mission has begun at the request of Bishop Rolly Santos. Our confrere Marceliano Oabel is soon to arrive from the Philippines. He will assist Homero Marin from Colombia in doing parish ministry and pastoral outreach on the islands of Kiriwina and Woodlark. The diocese of Alotau is at the eastern-most end of Papua New Guinea, just north of Australia. It has a territorial area of 250,000 sq. kms. and comprises 160 islands. Like Papua New Guinea, English is an official language of the country, but Pidgin English

and multiple native languages are also spoken on the various islands. To learn more about the Church in Papua New Guinea, please visit: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/pg.html>

4. CHAD

The mission in Chad is well underway. Established with the help of COVIAM, two confreres work with Daughters of Charity from the Province of San Sebastian. Albert Atching Kitikil of the Paris Province, (region of Cameroun), has returned to Cameroun after a year's service in Chad. The superior is Roch Alexandre Ramilijaona from the province of Madagascar. He is assisted by Onyeachi Sunday Ugwu of the province of Nigeria. This mission is located in one of the world's poorest countries, so it is quite a challenge. Yet, we are confident it will succeed as confreres volunteer. The language is French as well as native languages of the people.

5. ANGOLA

Fr. José María Nieto, former Assistant General, and José Martínez Ramírez from the Province of Mexico have begun work in this new mission in the Diocese of Malanje. They hope to be joined by another confrere, Henry Miguel Kristen from the Province of Venezuela. The confreres have been welcomed to Angola by the Daughters of Charity. Their work involves parish and pastoral ministry and assisting the Vincentian Family branches. Portuguese is the language spoken with native languages. It is a place of great poverty and spiritual need.

6. TUNISIA

Br. Henry Escurel from the Philippines has returned home to his province after a year's service. Fr. Fermin Mola Mbalo from the Province of Toulouse will be joined by James Kunninpurayidom, a confrere from the province of Southern India. The languages are French and Arabic, but English is also spoken by many Christians there.

NEW MISSIONS

Below are details on two new missions on the African and Latin American continents. As is true of our international missions, there is great need.

1. BENIN

Stanislaw Deszcz and Rafael Brukarczyk, two confreres from the Province of Poland, have begun a mission in Benin at the request of a local bishop. They will also provide formation and pastoral work for the Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal of Slovenia, whose sisters are Croatian. The language is French and native languages.

2. PUNTA ARENAS, CHILE

This is a new mission that holds great promise. With assistance from the General Curia and Provinces of Argentina and Chile, this new mission will undertake pastoral ministry and accompaniment of the Vincentian Family. Our confrere, Bruno Enzo Torelli, from the province of Argentina, has volunteered. We are hoping that other confreres will join Bruno. Punta Arenas is located at the southernmost point of Chile, near the strait of Magellan. The language spoken is Spanish.

SHORT-TERM REQUEST FOR MISSIONARIES

Pacific Regional Seminary, Fiji-visiting lecturers

Fr. Michael Walsh, Visitor of Australia, wrote to encourage confreres to consider shorter-term service as visiting lecturers and teachers at the Pacific Regional Seminary of St. Peter Chanel, located at the town of Suva on Fiji Island. Rector Fr. Michael O'Connor, SSC seeks to enhance the education and formation of seminarians by welcoming visiting faculty. The language spoken is English. The seminary has over 100 students from 9 dioceses and 5 religious communities enrolled. Their website is: <http://www.prsfiji.com/>

PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

The following missions, comprised of provinces and vice-provinces are places that while having made progress, are still in need of support from the world-wide Congregation.

1. STS. CYRIL & METHODIUS

In this vice-province, both the work the confreres do and the needs of the people they serve are tremendous. Two confreres, Anthony Ekpunobi Ifeanyichukwu from Nigeria, and Thomas Enchackalia from

India-South have a year of experience there and are doing quite well. With 21 confreres who make up the 7 houses of this vice-province, they do great work in responding to the needs of the poor. This vice-province is always in need of new missionaries to support them. Russian is the language of the people.

2. MOZAMBIQUE

The Vice-Province of Mozambique is a mission depending mainly on confreres from outside the country, due to a lack of native vocations. The provinces that have made missionary commitments to Mozambique include Portugal, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Eritrea, Spain and Congo. As the Mozambique mission has a number of non-natives, the turnover of personnel is high (4 confreres finish their assignment in 2013 to return to their home provinces) so new missionaries are needed. The vice-province has 21 confreres and 7 houses. The language is Portuguese and local languages.

3. CUBA

This year, the Province of Cuba will celebrate the 150th anniversary of foundation. The confreres in Cuba, while small in number, are fervent in their zeal for the mission. Recent events have made it a little easier for the Church to do its work, but both the poverty of the people and their pastoral needs are great. The language is Spanish.

4. CHINA

In the Province of China, confreres collaborate both in Taiwan and mainland China. Most of the confreres in that province are from other provinces throughout the world. I make an appeal for missionaries to go to China, not only to strengthen the mission there, but knowing it is one of the oldest missions in the Congregation. I also happily note the growth of collaboration in this province between confreres and other branches of the Vincentian Family. The language is Chinese.

5. PUERTO RICO

The Visitor of the Province of Puerto Rico has requested assistance due to greater demand for pastoral service and less confreres available. This province has taken care of Haiti, a place of great devastation and poverty. However, our request for the mission in Haiti has been

answered by two confreres from the province of the Congo: Jean-Pierre Mangulu Mobonda and Jean Baptiste Nsambi E Mbula. Besides assisting Haiti, the Province of Puerto Rico also serves the Dominican Republic. The language in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic is Spanish.

6. COSTA RICA

The Vice-Province of Costa Rica is in need of confreres to assist in pastoral work, particularly in a rural mountainous area of Santiago Apóstol, Amubri, Talamanca. Despite appeals made for help here for several years, we have been unable to staff this mission continuously, except for interim assistance generously given by Province of Colombia. The language is Spanish and the local native language.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Confreres, as you receive this Mission Appeal letter, I am in Rome participating in the Synod of the Bishops on New Evangelization, where I will speak as an elected delegate representing the Union of Superior Generals. The idea of a “new evangelization” was introduced by Blessed John Paul II during his papacy, to revive the Catholic faith and to encourage all baptized believers to live and witness as “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Instrumentum Laboris, the “working document” for the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization offers us a central truth:

“Announcing and proclaiming is not the task of any one person or a select few, but rather a gift given to every person who answers the call to faith. It is the responsibility of every Christian and the whole Church, who continually rediscovers her identity as a People gathered together by the Spirit to live Christ’s presence among us” (IL, #92).

It is important during this “Year of Faith” and “New Evangelization” that we reflect on our missionary vocation. As our Vincentian heritage and history attests, we have much to offer. We evangelize by entering into the world of the poor, depending on the Lord Jesus, one another, and our Vincentian virtues of humility, simplicity, meekness, mortification and zeal for souls. The preferential option for the poor is fundamental to the new evangelization. In living our Vincentian virtues, especially simplicity and humility, we come close to God and the poor. We can enact the new evangelization through pastoral and corporal service, especially to God’s poor.

That is why I bring this Mission Appeal before you. Please review and reflect on its content and consider volunteering. For those who simply cannot go, I ask for your prayers. As St. Vincent reminded his confreres, *“Let us no longer say: it is I who have done this good work; for every good thing ought to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* (CED, VII, 98-99).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

MISSION APPEAL LETTER 2012: NEXT STEPS

INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome by **30 November 2012** or again by **February 28, 2013** so we can review requests in 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. 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. I 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.
7. **If you cannot go to the missions, we welcome your monetary contribution to represent your zeal for the mission. 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 (through the Curia) quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful results of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (seen at www.famvian.org/vso). The financial well for the micro-project grants is going dry. Donations to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund are the only source of funding for these micro-project grants.**

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

Provincial, House and Individual Contributions:

1. Checks made payable to: “Congregazione della Missione” and with “Deposit Only” written on the back. These 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:

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

FROM THE CURIA GENERAL

Tempo Forte, October 2012

Dear Confreres,

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

I share with you, my brothers, this information concerning our most recent Tempo Forte meeting October 1-5, 2012. A new feature we adopted was to have a day of prayer and reflection before Tempo Forte in place of our ongoing formation, done during Tempo Forte. This came about from a discussion in our June meeting to assist us by reflecting on a Vincentian theme beforehand. So on Sunday, September 30, we had a conference from Fr. Nicola Albanesi, C.M., Visitor of the Province of Rome, who spoke on the theme of the new evangelization and how it relates to our charism. We made time for prayer, reflection, and discussion; a timely gathering as it was a week before the Synod of Bishops and the New Evangelization. Afterwards, we opened our Tempo Forte meeting with ongoing subjects we treat on a regular basis.

International Visitor's Meeting 2013

The first topic was a report on the status of plans for the 2013 International Visitors' Meeting which will take place July 1-14 at St. John's University, New York. We were able to discuss a number of issues and firm up the schedule. One key issue finalized was the various topics each Assistant to the Superior General will speak about to engage the assembly of the Visitors and dialogue concerning matters of importance to the Congregation.

Ratio Formationis Commission

Next, we received a draft of the work of the Ratio Formationis Commission. Their first draft consisted of seven chapters. We had a brief discussion on its major points of this draft, but decided to use December 8, a day after Tempo Forte, for discussion and evaluation.

Personnel Catalogue

Fr. Giuseppe Turati, Secretary General, gave us an update on the personnel catalogue to be published by the end of this year which will reflect changes from 2011-2013. Fr. Turati also reported on the status of the on-line catalogue and of a meeting he held in August with Fr. John Freund and Pieter Lovaas, the consultant from Niagara University. Many difficulties in bringing this catalogue to an on-line status have been worked out, and so we are moving forward.

Development Commission

We then received a report from a commission charged with evaluating and expanding our economic development efforts of the Congregation. Through efforts and recommendations, it is our hope we will be able to raise enough funds for provinces in need of support, as well as for other important projects promoted by the General Assembly for the good of the Congregation.

Reconfiguration

Then we had a discussion on reconfiguration, speaking specifically of reports we received from three provinces in Spain that have decided to come together over the next three years as one province. The three provinces of Italy have also been in discussion to join together as one province. Because of the importance of this issue, we dedicated a whole day (Saturday, October 6) after regular Tempo Forte for discussion and to deepen our understanding of reconfiguration. From these discussions, we put together a working document to assist provinces unsure or unclear of the nature of reconfiguration.

Office of Communications

We received a report from Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications on the status of the revisions for the CM-global website. The renovations are going well and the hope is to have the site live in English, French, and Spanish by December. It will be “user-friendly”

and contain much information and resources for confreres and members of the Vincentian Family. The technology parts have been challenging at times, but Fr. John Freund, who is assisted by Fr. Bernard Massarini of the Province of Toulouse, has done the work entailed in the French site. Fr. Cesar Chavez Alva, of the Province of Peru, has generously worked on the Spanish version of the website. Both Bernard and Cesar have full-time commitments in their respective provinces, so their willingness to learn the technical aspects of web work and the time they spend in translating text into French and Spanish is most appreciated. Through the fine efforts of these confreres, John, Bernard, and Cesar, the Congregation benefits from their work.

Fr. Maher also spoke about Vincentiana, noting that production was going well, and costs were being controlled. The Vincentiana Board has met twice this year and will meet once more to advise on content and direction of the journal. He also mentioned that confreres gave very positive feedback on the monthly NUNTIA digital newsletter compiled by Fr. Juventino Castillero.

CIF Program

We also received a report from Fr. Dan Borlik and Fr. Marcello Manimtim, Directors of CIF, with the hope of consolidating the CIF program in a way that serves the good of the Congregation and the Vincentian Family in general. Through their efforts and work, we hope to utilize our resources in the best way possible to strengthen this ongoing formation program. The Superior General also had an on-line session by way of "Skype" with current CIF participants in Paris. Among many matters, we spoke of the crucial role of the CIF program; the global nature of the Congregation; the deepening of our own sense of belonging to both our own provinces and the world-wide Congregation. We held a discussion of our strategic plan for the Congregation.

Commission for Promoting Systemic Change

We received a report from on the Commission for Systemic Change from Giuseppe Turati, who will be the new coordinator of this group with the General Curia. The full changeover will take place in 2014 when the new appointments to the commission will be finalized. Until then new members will gradually come on board. Thus far, the makeup of the commission will be Kerry Anthony of De Paul International (Ireland), Juan Pablo Jácome Solarte (Ecuador) for Vincentian Marian Youth, our confrere Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli (Brazil), and Jim Claffey of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (USA), who will

be Executive Secretary of the Commission. As of this date, we are awaiting for representatives to be named from the AIC and the Daughters of Charity.

Vincentian Solidarity Office

We received a report from Fr. Miles Heinen Director of Vincentian Solidarity Office, along with the digital bulletin his office sends out via e-mail. The Council commended Miles and the staff on their work, and we encourage all confreres to support the VSO spiritually by prayer and financially through contributions to continue their work to provide funding for the much in demand micro-grants for provinces in the developing world. They are on the web at: <http://cmglobal.org/vso-en/>

Econome General Report

We then had the financial report from Fr. Joe Geders, Econome General. We are still suffering financially from the after-effects of the 2008 stock market crash. We continue to search for ways to help rebuild the patrimony fund to support provinces in need. We also are committed to supporting many projects undertaken for the good of the Congregation, as mandated by 2010 General Assembly. We have striven as a Council to faithfully implement their directives, but in the interest of transparency, I must say that our financial resources are increasingly limited. New funds are needed to continue the work of the Congregation, and to protect our patrimony for future generations.

International Missions

We had a discussion on each of the different international missions. In Bolivia, the two mission sites where confreres serve are in El Alto and Cochabamba. Confreres work in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, along with new missions in Angola, Tunis, Chad, and most recently, Benin. The Assistants General of the Council are responsible for these missions, and they encourage and support confreres assigned to the above places to animate their ministry as creative and faithful evangelizers. Fr. Eli Chaves is responsible for our missions in Bolivia, and Angola. Fr. Varghese Thottamkara is responsible for the mission in Papua New Guinea which has three different sites, the mission in the Solomon Islands, as well as the new mission in Tunis. Fr. Zeracristos is responsible for the mission in Chad, as he works with COVIAM (the conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar).

Fr. Stanislav Zontak is responsible for the French-speaking mission in Benin.

We received a number of requests from confreres interested in volunteering to go to the international missions, and we were able to respond positively to two presently, asking them to provide further information to discern possible placements. We also received several requests to open new missions. One in particular I wish to bring to your attention. Fr. Michael Walsh, Visitor of the Province of Australia, informed us of a possibility of short-term placement at the Pacific Regional Seminary of St. Peter Chanel on the island of Fiji. The seminary would like to invite confreres serve as lecturers for a semester or so to enrich its academic and pastoral offerings to its students. Further details are available in the Annual Mission Appeal Letter.

We also had several new mission requests from dioceses in Brazil, Central Africa, and the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska, USA. Unfortunately, at this time, we are unable to include them in the mission appeal as we are currently trying to insure stability in the missions we already serve. However, we did contact the provinces and their visitors in the neighboring areas to see if some type of assistance can be provided to assist these dioceses.

Vincentian Family & Vincentian Marian Youth

We did a lengthy discussion regarding the Vincentian Family and the role of the Superior General and the Assistants General in working together to promote our goals. Specifically, we spoke of the role of our Congregation with the Vincentian Family, and how to encourage confreres to be faithful to the Constitutions that call us to collaboration.

We also engaged in an evaluation of the work of the Vincentian Family Office here at the Curia. Fr. Eli Chaves, who supervises Fr. Juventino Castellero and Sr. Ana Aparecida, DC are developing video presentations for various branches of the Vincentian Family who request assistance. In particular, they are working toward the “youth sector” which will celebrate together next July 19-21 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil prior to the World Youth Days in Rio de Janeiro. I encourage you to check out the video that was put together in different languages in anticipation of this meeting, which you can find at www.famvin.org. We are expecting over 2000 young people to participate. The Society St. Vincent de Paul has generously offered the use of their camp grounds for this event, for which we are most grateful.

We received a report from Fr. Jean-Pierre Mangulu Mobonda, our confrere from the Congo who is working in Haiti. He has been working faithfully with the Vincentian Family there, encouraging them toward great collaboration.

We also studied a request that came from the International Council of Vincentian Marian Youth concerning the need for a new director of the Secretariat and sub-director for the Association to assist the Superior General in his responsibilities. That candidate for that post, a confrere, has been selected. As the confrere and his Visitor have been contacted and informed of our request, further information will be forthcoming.

Calendar of the Superior General

As a Council, we reviewed our calendars for the next three months and discussed our plans. I will share with you the calendar of the Superior General. From October 7-28, he will be participating in the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization here in Rome. A key moment will be the opening Mass for the "Year of Faith" on October 11, which commemorates the actual date of the 50th anniversary beginning of the Second Vatican Council. On October 21, he will attend the canonization of seven new saints. Two well-known candidates for canonization are Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the first native North American, and Mother Marianne Cope of Molokai, Hawaii, who worked with Fr. Damien and the leper colonies.

From October 24-25, the newly formed commission on Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam will have their first meeting at the General Curia. On October 29, the Superior General along with Fr. Javier Alvarez, Vicar General, will go to Madrid to participate of a meeting with the Visitors and their councils of the three provinces in Spain that have chosen to move forward and work towards reconfiguration over the next three years.

On October 30, the Superior General will meet with Guillame Leukeumo, the regional superior of Cameroon and also president of COVIAM, responsible for the mission in Chad.

In the month of November, the Superior General will be in Cuba for a meeting with the International Council of the Association of the Miraculous Medal and also to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of confreres and Daughters of Charity in Cuba. On November 15, the Superior General will be in Paris to meet with the provincial councils of the English-speaking provinces of the Daughters of Charity.

From November 16-19, he will be present at All Hallows College, Dublin, to join with the confreres in the Province of Ireland to celebrate the inauguration of a new mission statement for the College. November 20 the Superior General will host a meeting at the General Curia for heads of Societies of Apostolic Life to discuss their reactions to the recent Synod of Bishops and the new evangelization.

From November 21-23, he will attend a workshop with the Union of Superior Generals in Rome, and the topic will also be follow up on experiences at the Synod of Bishops with the new evangelization, and its implications for religious communities.

From November 23-25, the Superior General will be in Naples to participate in European gathering of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association, and will deliver a conference on “The New Evangelization and our Charism Today”. In December, the General Council will gather together for an evaluation and planning meeting, prior to December Tempo Forte meeting.

As was done before, we will gather before Tempo Forte for a retreat day, together with our Vincentian student priests studying in Rome. Then we will have our last Tempo Forte meeting in 2012 from December 3-7. On December 7, we will celebrate with the lay employees at the General Curia as a sign of our appreciation for their hard work and dedication.

On December 8, the General Council will have a special dialogue to review the work of the Commission on Ratio Formationis. From December 14-16, the Superior General will visit the mission in Tunis, and then he will take time to make his annual retreat from December 17-22.

Then for the rest of the month, the Superior General will join the confreres at the Curia for the Christmas festivities, including celebrations with the confreres and the Italian Daughters of Charity. On December 31, the Superior General will go to Paris to celebrate the New Year with a Mass and conference to the Daughters of Charity, and to spend time with the confreres at the Maison Mere.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or comments about any of the above matters. My prayers and best wishes go with you in these autumn days!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Vincentian Family Leadership Meeting Proceedings

Fr. Juventino Elias Castellero Jaén, C.M.

The members of the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family met at María Immaculada on the Via Ezio, 28, Rome on January 13, 2012. The following members were present:

International Association of Charity	Laurence de la Brosse María Eugenia Magallanes Negrete
Congregation of the Mission	P. G. Gregory Gay, CM P. Eli Chaves, CM.
Daughters of Charity	Sor Evelyne Franc Sor Rosa María Miró
Saint Vincent de Paul Society	Michael Thio, Brian O'Reilly
Coordinator of the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family for the project of Micro-finance in Haiti	P. Robert Maloney, CM
Comisión de Formación de líderes Vicencianos	P. Joseph Agostino, CM
Office of the Vincentian Family	Sor Ana Aparecida Martins, HC P. Juventino Elías Castellero Jaén, CM

Fruits of the 350th Anniversary

Fr. Juventino Castellero shared a summary of the fruits of the celebration of the 350th anniversary, information that had been summarized by the Office of the Vincentian Family of the General Curia. This summary was made possible as a result of the reports from the different branches of the Vincentian Family, reports that were requested and sent to the Superior General.

The experiences can be grouped according to seven aspects:

- *The inter relationships of the Family were strengthened and new relationships with groups with a similar spiritual focus were initiated*

- *Deepening formation*
- *Creative expressions*
- *Strengthening of our vocation*
- *Strengthening our spirituality*
- *Drawing closer to the poor*
- *The missionary dimension of our identity was strengthened.*

After the presentation, reactions were invited. It was stated that a report should be put together and shared with the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family. Also, it was felt that some of the specific experiences should be made a part of the report.

Report of Father Maloney

Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M. reported on the project of the Vincentian Family in Haiti in collaboration with Zafèn and FONKOZE during 2011.

Projects

“Chemen Lavi Miyo” or the path to a better life

This was initiated on the feast of Saint Vincent, 2011 and is focused on those who are most poor in Haiti, especially those who must “survive” on less than \$1.25 USD daily. These individuals live in a situation of extreme poverty and many of them are not even registered in their country, thus they have no access to their rights (water, health, and education). It is as though they did not exist. It is projected that it will provide incentives to mothers (many of them with 4, 5 or more children) so that they can create their own income. This is an opportunity that is extended to extremely poor women so that they can slowly advance.

School Financing

This project has been expanded to include 36 schools that are connected to different branches of the Vincentian Family in Haiti. This project has focused on two aspects:

- There are about 9,000 children who receive a hot meal on a daily basis.
- Also, there is a scholarship plan through ZAFEN.

This project supports those children who are looking for a quality education so that they can become part of the sustainable economic solution in Haiti.

Proposals (Fr. Maloney)

- The budget for the year 2012 will be \$65,000.00 USD and this was approved.
- Fr. Maloney requested that he be relieved of this responsibility since he has many other activities which make it difficult for him to continue in this position. It was proposed that Fr. Joseph Agostino take up this position, and as he has accepted it, he will now assume this role.

Commission on the Formation of Vincentian Leaders

As a result of the XLI General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 2010 some branches of the Vincentian Family felt that it was necessary to have a commission that would coordinate the formation of Vincentian leaders. Following this motion the Commission for the Formation of Vincentian Leaders was formed. The distinct branches were asked to delegate members to serve on this commission. The first meeting of this group was held in Rome at Via Ezio and two decisions were made:

- To form a sub-commission led by Fr. Joe Agostino, C.M. that would create formation programs for the leaders.
- To draw up an outline of the work that will then be distributed to all the members of the committee. The existence of this commission is an initiative of the Congregation of the Mission. It seeks to involve all the branches of the Vincentian Family.

This commission does **not** seek to replace the essential and on-going formation that occurs and that ought to occur within each branch of the Vincentian Family. Rather, it involves itself in an effort to facilitate a formation process for those persons who exercise a role of leadership within the different branches of the Vincentian Family.

Criteria in order to participate

Participants should have a broad knowledge of their branch and a sensitivity toward the Vincentian charism, that is, a clear identity with the option for the poor. Through this experience they should also have the ability to enrich the members of their own branch, and the branches

with which there is some form of collaboration. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize some process for selecting such individuals who will participate in these formation programs. The commission ought to guarantee that the persons who participate in these sessions fulfill the minimum criteria.

Content

Lines that provide us with a point of departure for this work:

- Vincentian identity, which involves, history, the particular branch, charism.
- The leader: as servant, as missionary and catalyst, as advisor.

The program will be piloted in English and later at the appropriate time this material will then be translated into the other languages.

Meeting of Leaders of Branches of Vincentian Family scheduled for January 14-15, 2011

This was a time for formation as a family and a time to share the work of each group in light of the objectives of the Millennium Plan.

Representatives from the following groups were present at the meeting: International Association of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Vincentian Marian Youth, Miraculous Medal Association, MISEVI, Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (RSV), Brothers of Charity, Brothers of Mercy, Federation of Charity (Strasburg), Federation of Charity (USA), De Paul International and those invited for the first time are representatives from the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul (Gyzezem) and the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul (Zagreb).

The theme for reflection and formation: the witness of Frederic Ozanam and his contribution to the Social Doctrine of the church (Dr. Austin Fagan of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and Father Mizael Pugiolo, C.M. discussed this theme). There war be some time allotted so that the participants can come to know the two new groups that have been invited the presentation of the projects that respond to one or more objectives of the Millennium Plan.

Projects in the Horn of Africa

In response to the call of the Holy Father, who has requested that we focus on the Horn of Africa, we are holding meetings with all the organizations that are present in the area. The St. Vincent de Paul

Society explained that some of the projects that in collaboration with the Daughters of Charity in the northern part of Abyssinia are focused on the problems of hunger and drought. Mention was also made about a project in Ethiopia that is focused on rehabilitating persons displaced because of war, people who have means to cultivate the land or other basic necessities.

In Kenya, there is another project that is focused on 5,000 people who do not have water or food. This is an agricultural project in which people are provided with seeds and other items that are necessary to farm. In these projects the Saint Vincent de Paul Society collaborates as a branch of the Vincentian Family and also collaborates with other organizations that are present in the area.

Symposium on Islam

Fr. Claudio Santángelo shared reflections on the Symposium on Interreligious Dialogue with Islam that took place in Indonesia (a country with a large Muslim population) during the month of August. The meeting took place from August 7-17, 2011 and participation included 63 members of the Vincentian Family from 30 different countries. Participants had the opportunity to listen and discuss, as well as share their experiences in working with Muslim sisters and brothers. During this gathering, persons from the Islamic faith and the Catholic faith put forth theological, philosophical and practical aspects of dialogue, collaboration and living together.

Lines of action

These lines of action were approved by symposium participants at the meeting's conclusion.

- Create an international team for interreligious dialogue.
- Deepen this theme on the level of the universities and other centers of study.
- Multiply this experience with conferences on an international and national level.

Information concerning celebration of 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederic Ozanam

The program is focused in reflections on Ozanam as a pioneer with regard to the Social Doctrine of the Church; a Eucharistic celebration in the cathedral of Paris, a classical music concert, events that promote

his canonization, etc. Sr. Evelyn Franc, D.C. suggested that there should be a joint effort to promote the canonization of Sister Rosalie Rendu and Frederic Ozanam.

Various matters for information

- Sr. Evelyn expressed her gratitude for the help that she received from the Vincentian Family in carrying out the different activities that surrounded the beatification of Sister Marguerite Rután, D.C. last June in Dax, France. This was a wonderful example of collaborating as a family.
- Sr. Evelyn also noted since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity have invested funds in renovation of the grounds of the birthplace of St. Vincent in Dax, the facility is more useable and it provides better service for visitors and pilgrims. It can now receive groups of the Vincentian Family and is considering opening the facility to groups of international pilgrims.
- Fr. G. Gregory Gay announced that the Vincentian Marian Youth groups are involved in a campaign of self-financing. This campaign has as its motto: *Something More From You*. This information was communicated at this meeting because the branches might be approached by the VMY for assistance.
- The theme for reflection during the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul we decided that the theme for this year will be: Collaboration and Evangelization. The motto will be: *Let us work together in order to share the Good News and the life of those who are poor*.
- Lastly, the date for the next meeting of the Executive Committee and Leaders of the International Vincentian Family are sent:
 - The Executive Committee in Paris on January 12, 2013 in Paris at Rue de Bac.
 - The meeting of the Leaders of the International Vincentian Paris on January 18 and 19, 2014. The day before, that is, January 17, the Executive Committee will meet.

The meeting concluded as we were led in prayer recited the prayer of the Vincentian Family.

FEATURE

Meeting of Provincial Directors for the Daughters of Charity

Opening Mass for Directors of the Daughters of Charity

2 July 2012

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

My brothers In Christ and St. Vincent:

I am grateful to gather with you as we pray, reflect, listen, and learn about ministry to the Daughters of Charity, a ‘foundational’ work of Saints Vincent and Louise. Indeed, from the start, it was their intention that the Company of the Daughters of Charity should be imbued with a Vincentian spirit. The great responsibility to communicate the charism has been entrusted to us, the Little Company of St. Vincent de Paul. Your presence here continues over three and a half centuries of a chain of service to nourish and challenge Daughters of Charity in their vocation.

As you know, our meeting theme is “*Animating, Accompanying, and Forming Daughters of Charity*”. There’s much ‘food for thought’ in those words, so it is most appropriate we begin and end our time together with the Eucharist. Unless we seek to know and be known by the person of Jesus Christ – the Jesus of Vincent and Louise – and allow Him to animate, accompany, and form us each day, our efforts to assist the Daughters, our confreres, and those we serve will never bear fruit, at least not what Jesus called the “fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16).

The first ‘feast day’ reading from Corinthians is a one familiar to us all. I usually focus on Paul’s juxtaposition of the worldly “wise, powerful, and of noble birth” with the “foolish, weak, and lowly” disciples of

Jesus. But it is meant to be more than a lesson in humility. Paul is telling us that the true efficacy of our endeavors is not found in worldly measures of success, but in another standard; namely, that of “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”. It is a challenging, and I daresay, a discomfoting path to seek in today’s world.

However, in rereading the text, I also noticed two important words: ‘calling’ and ‘chose’. Paul reminds us that discipleship is not a job to be done, or a task to be tackled, but a mysterious calling to unite us with Christ. The unique call Jesus made to Paul, Vincent, and Louise was to follow Him, the suffering servant, the crucified one, not a triumphant Messiah. Both Vincent and Louise discovered this as their lives evolved from being an ambitious cleric and a lady of means. They found themselves ‘chosen’ by God to do something they could not have done on their own.

One result of their being called and chosen to follow Jesus was the founding of the Daughters of Charity, that which draws us together for these two weeks. Vincent’s own musings belie this reality: “*Who would have ever thought there would be Daughters of Charity? I did not think of it. God thought of it for you*” (SV, 14 June 1643, IX Conf. A-5). Given their size and scope, I believe your ministry as directors is a most important one to advancing our charism.

Why, you may ask? As Directors of the Daughters of Charity, you assist in the ineffable work of animating, accompanying, and forming the largest single group of women of a Society of Apostolic Life in today’s Church. As seen in their Constitutions, it was the intention of both Founders that your administrative tasks be minimal to allow you to focus on spiritual, pastoral, and apostolic ways to transmit our Vincentian charism. You call their leadership, – the Visitatrix, her council, and the Sister Servants – to be what Jesus is in today’s Gospel: glad tidings; first to each other, and to the poor. You help the Daughters to “proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord”.

So what should our focus be in this meeting time? As a strategy, I suggest three simple words beginning with ‘R’: reflect, react, and re-integrate. These days give us ample opportunity to ponder your individual role as a director, but also the communal ideals and challenges you all face in animating, accompanying, and forming today’s Daughter of Charity.

First, **reflect**. I urge you to take time in these busy days to reflect on the gifts and graces of your Vincentian vocation. Often, in meeting the demands of being a director, we press on doing the “harvest work” of the Lord and fail to spend enough time with the “Lord of the harvest”. In these days together, take time to reflect on your own Vincen-tian vocation, and allow the daily scriptures, the Eucharist, and the writings of our Founders to enrich and strengthen you.

Secondly, **react**. In large meetings such as this, we have great opportunities to interact and exchange information. Formally, this happens in presentations carefully crafted for you. But this meeting provides opportunities for informal discussion, or 'networking' as we say in the USA. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this word or idea, recall that Vincent de Paul, our founder, was a great 'networker', and we still benefit from the fruit of his labors today!

Lastly, **re-integrate**. When a meeting such as this ends and we return to our homes, the tendency can be to put our notes and observations away on a shelf for later reference. Due to the demands of being a director, the new insights, ideas, and possibilities are also put aside. I urge you to make at least one resolution in each of the three ways to animate, accompany, and bring formation to the Daughters of Charity you serve as their director.

On our own, our efforts can seem feeble, or piecemeal. That is why we gather for this Eucharist today and every day. With Jesus' help and the intercession of our Holy Founders, we are reminded it is the "spirit of the Lord" who enlivens and enables us. Like Vincent and Louise, we have been called by God and chosen by the Congregation to be bearers of the Vincentian charism of charity. Let us look with gratitude and hope on that challenge. Like the Daughters, may we all seek "steadfast union with God, so that in the midst of the world... we might be witnesses to the love of Christ" (DC Constitutions, # 12).

Aspiring to a Life of Interiority, Authenticity, and Solidarity: A Portrait of the Daughters of Charity Today

Sr. Évelyne Franc, D.C.

Father Gregory, Father Patrick, Father Directors,

It is a joy to welcome you to our Motherhouse for this meeting organized by Fr. Gregory, our Superior General and prepared by Fr. Patrick, our Director General. First of all, I'd like to wish you an excellent formation session and to assure you of the prayers of the Sisters of this house and of the Sisters in the Provinces which you are serving. The members of the General Council of the Company of Daughters of Charity give their wholehearted support to your meeting and, as far as possible, we will all be participating actively in it.

The Risen Christ, who has called us to follow Him according to the Vincentian charism, is at the heart of this meeting. All of us – you the Provincial Directors and we, the members of the General Council, have received the mission to accompany our Sisters, in different ways, so that they may be able to place at the disposition of persons who are poor and of their local communities all the talents the Lord has given them.

I'd like to begin my presentation by thanking you for accepting the ministry of Provincial Director. I don't think you ever thought of the possibility of this service when you entered the Congregation of the Mission, even though this mission with the Daughters of Charity is included in your Constitutions. But, as we know, from the very beginning, Saint Vincent asked good Fr. Portail to represent him to the Sisters. When Fr. Portail died, Saint Vincent wrote to Sr. Marguerite Chétif on May 24, 1660, to inform her of the appointment of Fr. Dehorgny as Director of the Daughters of Charity. Saint Vincent explained to Sr. Marguerite that he chose Fr. Dehorgny as Director to replace the late Fr. Portail because of his experience, his gentleness, and his wisdom. So, thank you once again for your availability in

accepting this ministry of spiritual and Vincentian animation with the Daughters of Charity.

I'd like to emphasize how important this service is for each Daughter of Charity. The fact of having a "Director" distinguishes us from other Societies of Apostolic Life, and we consider this uniqueness a grace, in fidelity to the thinking of Saint Louise de Marillac and our first Sisters. The changes in the role of Provincial Director over the years and the evolution of our Constitutions seem very positive to us and in line with the needs of the Provinces today.

Fr. Patrick has asked me to present to you the Company of today and of tomorrow – its present situation, with its realities and problems, and its challenges for the future. I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to you about a topic dear to my heart. I will divide my remarks into three parts; beginning with a few general remarks and some statistics of the present situation, then the challenges that we are facing, and, lastly, what we are calling the Company of the future.

I.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE PRESENT SITUATION

A. General remarks

Presenting the Company today in 2012 cannot be done without a brief reference to the past. I will not cover the origins of the Company; we will find an excellent resume of this at the beginning of the Constitutions¹, but I would like to quote two texts: first, the motto of the Company, given it by Saint Louise and which is found, beginning in 1643, on the official seal, because the vibrant, dynamic force of those eight words continues to resound in the hearts of all the Daughters of Charity: *The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us.*

Then the first paragraph of Constitution 1 (C 1a)²: *The Daughters of Charity form a Company recognized by the Church under the name of Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Servants of the Poor. The Company participates in the Church's universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of the Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac.*

This paragraph C. 1, can serve to situate the Company; the following paragraphs, which I will not quote, then define the Company on the canonical level and place it in the pastoral plan of the local Church.

¹ Constitution, p. 1.

² Saint Vincent, IX, 1.

We find in it the recognition by the Church and its participation in the mission of salvation. Mention is made of the Founders; we find the expression “Servants of the Poor”; fidelity to the charism is also mentioned.

From the twelve Sisters who came together on July 31, 1634³, to listen to Saint Vincent comment on the first Regulations, to the 17,743 Sisters who were registered in the Company on December 31, 2011, what has happened? Don’t worry, I don’t intend to comment in detail the 379 years that have passed since our foundation November 29, 1633, rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor in Paris, but I do want to note a few essential traits of our family tree, our DNA of Daughters of Charity.

- An impassioned love for persons living in poverty;
- A very strong attachment to the Company, coupled with an ability to adapt to historical events;
- An internationality-universality constructed step by step and always in a state of becoming.

a) *An impassioned love for persons living in poverty*

We can begin with the last words of Sister Andrée, which Saint Vincent gives as an example in his conference of May 25, 1654:

“I told them Sister Andrée’s reply to a question I put to her: ‘I have no anxiety, no remorse’, she said, ‘except for having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor’. And when I asked her, ‘Eh quoi, Sister! Is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?’ she replied, ‘No, Monsieur, nothing at all, other than that I had too much satisfaction when I used to go through those villages to see those good people; I used to fly, I was so overjoyed to serve them’”³.

We can also recall here Saint Catherine Labouré with the poor persons of Reuilly and our Blessed Rosalie Rendu with those of the Mouffetard district and the many, many Sisters who have spent their lives in the service of persons living in poverty. And this brings us to the letters I receive daily, either from the young Sisters who are preparing to make vows for the first time, or from senior Sisters who are celebrating 50, 60, or even more years of fidelity. We find this love for poor persons always alive in the Company.

This passion for the service of Christ in persons living in poverty has been well expressed in C. 24, whose six paragraphs translate in con-

³Saint Vincent, IX, p. 537.

temporary language, in reference to the social teaching of the Church, the spiritual and Vincentian roots of the service of Christ in the poor. Let's take one example, a quote from paragraph C. 24e:

*"The Daughters of Charity are constantly solicitous for the development of every person in all the aspects of their being. That is why they are alert to ways of helping their brothers and sisters to become conscious of their own dignity and agents of their own promotion"*⁴.

The same thing may be said of S. 8b:

*"The mission of the Daughters of Charity is channeled through the specific ministries that associate them closely with their lay contemporaries. This requires technical and professional competence, familiarity with current legislation, and concern for social justice inspired by charity"*⁵.

This passion is tangible, and it's something that strikes me during each of my visits: the Sisters' love for the service of Christ recognized and served with devotion, cordiality, and respect for persons who are the most destitute. This impassioned love needs to be formed, as we will see when we speak of challenges.

b) *A very strong attachment to the Company, coupled with the ability to adapt to historical events*

I like to note the fidelity of the Sisters, addressed first to God and the Sisters from every epoch have expressed it in their attachment to the Company. We all know that attachment may be manifested in a tension regarding ways and customs, but I call to mind here the steadfast bond that links the Sisters to the Company, and this is the moment to acknowledge our Sisters martyred during the French Revolution, in China, and in Spain.

It is time to speak also of the Sisters, who, without shedding their blood, have held fast during some infinitely troubled periods, where relations with the exterior were impossible. I'm thinking likewise of Sisters who have allowed the Company to be reborn after the dispersion of the revolutionary years in France, of the courage of our Sisters in countries taken in the communist glaze, who resisted, from Eastern Europe to China; I'm thinking of the Sisters of Latin America who see extremist political regimes of all tendencies succeed one another.

⁴Constitution C. 24e.

⁵Constitutions, S. 8b.

I think also of those who have faced dramatic situations in so many countries of Africa, and who have still remained faithfully at their post. During the war in Kosovo, the Company had Sisters in Kosovo itself, and others in Belgrade during the bombings. We can also mention the Sisters in Eritrea, Nigeria, the Near East, or Venezuela.

c) *An internationality-universality constructed step by step and always in a state of becoming*

The internationality – the universality of the Company – is an essential element of the charism, just as it is an essential element in the Church. The Church, in its deepest identity is catholic and universal because Christ is present in it and because it has been sent by Christ to the totality of the human race. This is well explained by the Council of Vatican II:

“All people are called to the new People of God. That is why this people, which remains one and unique, is destined to” (LG, no. 13).

Consecrated life is born of the mystery of the Church; it is a gift that the Church receives from the Lord. It is called to witness in various ways to the very love of God. So then, Christian life and consecrated life bear the mark, the stamp of universality. The successive evolutions, from the sending of the Sisters to Poland by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in 1652, have culminated in the beautiful text of C. 6:

“The company is international. The charism is incarnated and made visible in various cultures and countries throughout the world:

- by its life,
- by its membership,
- by its organization and representation,
- by communion, collaboration, and sharing among the Provinces.

In the words of St. Vincent, it is God who willed this Company of young women from different regions and wanted all of them to be of one heart!”⁶.

By way of example, let us read what St. Louise writes in 1655 to Sr. Marguerite Moreau, Sr. Madeleine Drugeon, and Sr. Françoise

⁶Saint Vincent, IX, p. 195.

Douelle, who had been in Warsaw since 1652, about sending some new Sisters:

“You have always assured me that, although you are three persons, you are but one in heart; in the name of the most Holy Trinity that you have so honored and must continue to honor, I beg you to open wide this heart to allow our three Sisters to enter into this cordial union, so that the last three arrivals will be indistinguishable from those who arrived first... May I ask something of you, my dear Sisters, which seems very necessary to me? It is that you never speak Polish among yourselves without letting our Sisters know what you are saying. This will help them to learn the language more quickly and will prevent other problems which could arise if you acted otherwise... I hope, my dear Sister Marguerite, that you will not refuse them the little advices they will need, just as you have not denied them to our other Sisters, because you are well aware that none of them will have the slightest idea of how the poor are served where you are”⁷.

We see in this text the beginnings – true, just modest ones – of internationality, with the mention of learning a foreign language, the concern for communication among the Sisters, and the emphasis put on a different way of serving poor persons according to the various places.

B. Statistics (cf. the booklet distributed to each Provincial Director)

a) *Presence of the Company in the world today*

The Company counts 17,743 Sisters, of which
 228 are in the various Seminaries
 489 have not yet made vows
 17,026 have made vows

These 17,743 Sisters are distributed in
 94 countries
 71 Provinces
 1 region
 2,114 houses and 66 annexes

⁷Saint Louise, *Spiritual Writings*, pp. 478-479.

OUR PRESENCE BY CONTINENT IS AS FOLLOWS:**Africa:**

- 24 countries
- 9 Provinces
- 138 houses and 4 annexes
- 825 Sisters – 61 in the Seminary

America:

Most of the countries of the Americas (North, Central, South) and the large islands of the Caribbean, count on the presence and ministry of the Daughters of Charity in 23 countries and 628 houses. Their works are quite varied.

United States and Canada:

- 2 countries
- 2 Provinces
- 91 houses and 6 annexes
- 676 Sisters – 3 in the Seminary

Spanish-speaking Latin America:

- 20 countries
- 15 Provinces
- 329 houses and 12 annexes
- 2,454 Sisters – 48 in the Seminary

Portuguese-speaking Latin America:

- 1 country
- 6 Provinces
- 208 houses
- 1,445 Sisters – 19 in the Seminary

Asia:

The Daughters of charity have the joy of serving the Lord in:

- 16 countries
- 9 Provinces
- 251 houses and 12 annexes
- 1,839 Sisters – 70 in the Seminary

Australia:

- 3 countries
- 1 Province
- 14 houses and 5 annexes
- 58 Sisters

Europe:

Despite the difficult moments they have experienced because of the decrease in vocations, the Company is present in:

28 countries

29 Provinces

1 Region

1,083 houses and 27 annexes

10,446 Sisters – 27 in the Seminary

Currently, the Company is present on the five continents and in the poorest countries. In 2005, we began missions in the Cook Islands and in Magadan in the far eastern part of Russia (closer to Alaska than to Moscow). In 2006, the Provinces of Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo opened a house in Tanzania; the Provinces of Nigeria and North Africa began a work in Burkina Faso in 2009, and on June 15 of this year, three Sisters of the Province of Central Africa and two Sisters from Eritrea left for the Central African Republic.

It seems important to us to highlight the presence of Daughters of Charity in Muslim countries: Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Chad, Tunisia, Turkey, etc.

The affirmation of St. Vincent, “The Daughters of Charity... are Sisters who come and go like seculars”⁸ remains very relevant.

b) *Evolution of the Company*

God, who is the author and Master of the Company, is leading it where He will. There is no doubt that he is directing it toward the Provinces of Asia, and Africa and toward Eastern Europe, and Central and South America.

The **Company**, as a whole, sees the **number of its members decreasing** greatly each year. If we consider simply the last six years, the decrease has been, on the average, more than 500 Sisters per year. Deaths and departures are the two factors involved in these large drops in number. The **deaths** correspond to the many entrances of 50 and 60 years ago and the departures – mainly of Seminary Sisters and Sisters who have not yet made vows, are notable challenges. From this we have to draw lessons for the pastoral plan of vocation, discernment, initial formation, and formation in general, key topics that you are going to be treating during your meeting.

⁸Saint Vincent, VIII, p. 276, L3077, to Jacques de la Fosse.

Today's challenges are mentioned in our Inter-Assemblies document, the message the 2009 Assembly has placed in our hands, as a gift, a sure guide to continue our way under the guidance of the Spirit⁹.

II. THE CHALLENGES: THE COMPANY IS CALLED TO LIVE AN ONGOING PENTECOST

The General Assembly, impelled by the breath of the Holy Spirit, has let itself be enkindled by the fire of a new Pentecost for the Company¹⁰.

The Inter-Assemblies Document offers us ways of living vocation and mission under the breath of Pentecost. It has been well utilized widely in the provincial plans (70 of which have been approved since the General Assembly), and I am going to take my inspiration from them again to develop this part.

A. An ongoing Pentecost needs to be rooted in Jesus Christ “source and model of all charity”¹¹

Rooted in Jesus Christ

The Daughters of Charity need to be rooted in Jesus Christ in order to live an ongoing Pentecost. Pope Benedict XVI took up the expression in the letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: “*So then, continue on your way in Christ Jesus the Lord, such as you have received; be rooted and grounded in Him, established this way in the faith*”¹², as the theme for World Youth Day in Madrid last year.

This shows the importance of being open to grace, of working daily at the formation of our hearts, deepening our spiritual life, nourishing it with the Word of God and the Sacraments, and expressing it in charity. “*If faith does not find a new vitality, by becoming a deep conviction and a real force, thanks to the meeting with Jesus Christ, all other reforms remain ineffective*”¹³, as Pope Benedict XVI emphasized in his annual discourse to the Roman Curia at the end of 2011.

⁹Inter-Assemblies Document, p. 3.

¹⁰Inter-Assemblies Document, p. 5.

¹¹Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document, p. 9.

¹²Col. 2:6-7.

¹³Benedict XVI, November 22, 2011.

A life rooted in Jesus Christ preserves the ability to wonder and knows how to savor in joy the beauty of everyday things. The almost permanent invasion of external stimuli (e-mails, telephone, radio, television, etc.) day after day can cause people to be very scattered, and make reflection, interiority, and discernment difficult.

The effective force of the Word of God

The Inter-Assemblies Document highlights the importance of giving a central place to the Word of God and of finding His active force in our lives¹⁴.

The Word is an effective force if it prompts an impetus of renewal and if it encourages us to begin anew, to live the struggle for the faith enthusiastically, and to bear fruits of charity, for *“Faith without charity bears no fruit, and charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt”*¹⁵.

The Word is an effective force if we let it enlighten us; it is also a mirror that reveals inconsistencies and mediocrity.

Challenges for the life of faith

We have to strengthen our faith convictions, and be concerned about ongoing formation to proclaim the Gospel in a world where the loss of the religious sense constitutes the greatest challenge for the Church, as our Holy Father Benedict XVI emphasizes: *“In vast areas of the world, faith runs the risk of going out like a flame that no longer finds anything to feed it”*¹⁶.

In certain milieus, we discover contradictory phenomena: a growing thirst for spirituality, which can culminate in esoteric cults and lead to extremes and, on the other hand, a secularization that is subtly polluting consciences and seeping into our societies.

The directives for initial formation that we sent to the Visitatrixes after the 2011 Seminarium stress the fact that our present epoch is going through a time of various ideologies, some of which are contrary to faith. This demands of those in authority, *“an enlightened judgment both for the choice of presenters and of the teachings proposed”*¹⁷.

¹⁴Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 9.

¹⁵Apostolic Letter Porta Fidei, no. 14.

¹⁶Benedict XVI, discourse of January 27, 2012, to participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

¹⁷Orientations for Initial Formation. After the Seminarium of May 2011, p. 4.

The present times are not easy and, faced with so many forms of internal and external pressure, which lead to a, superficial life and to a certain moral relativism, you are called to orient, galvanize, and encourage Sisters in the life of faith.

B. An ongoing Pentecost implies living well together, so that our community life may become a prophecy of love and a way of hope¹⁸

The prophetic witness of communion with one another

Living well together is a call to make communities the setting for *sharing the experience of God, open, welcoming communities with a view to mission*¹⁹. Living well together is an attractive witness that raises questions and can awaken an interest in the faith. *“The Church really needs such communities which, by their very existence, represent a contribution to the new evangelization because they show in a concrete way the results of the ‘new Commandment’”*²⁰.

Community is a gift, rather than a human construction; it’s a theological space where the Lord makes himself present²¹; it’s a place of vocational growth. How, in your Provinces, do you encourage the Sisters to create, in community, this ambiance of faith that sustains and spurs on the vocation of each one? How do you support the Sister Servants, who bear the daily responsibility for this?

A spirituality of communion

The Inter-Assemblies Document, echoing the invitation of the Church, calls us to deepen the spirituality of communion²² that leads to compassion and to ward off *“the egoistic temptations that continually lay snares for us”*²³.

In an ambiance that excludes and marginalizes, it is essential to learn how to integrate diversity. Interculturality and differences of age and mentality are current characteristics to which we should pay atten-

¹⁸ Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 11.

¹⁹ Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 11.

²⁰ Vita Conscrata, no. 45.

²¹ Cf. Mt 18:20; Vita Consecrata, no. 42; Fraternal Life in Community, no. 8.

²² Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 11.

²³ Novo Millenio Ineunte, no. 43; cf. Begin again with Christ, no. 29.

tion. *“Formation will have to educate persons to community dialogue in cordiality and in the charity of Christ, while teaching them to welcome differences as richness and to assimilate various ways of seeing and feeling”*²⁴.

Life style reflects the quality and depth of our total gift to God. The Inter-Assemblies Document shows the need to adopt a life style that respects the environment. The Guide for the Sister Servant highlights the need to reflect on what is necessary and what is superfluous and to revise our *way of living poverty*²⁵. The use of new technology, most especially when it invades community spaces and times, requires an attentive discernment.

C. An ongoing Pentecost implies serving *“by coming and going, with creativity and boldness, and manifesting in this way God’s love for persons living in poverty”*²⁶

Responses to be renewed in face of the challenges of new forms of poverty

The Inter-Assemblies Document asks us to *“renew our ways of responding to the challenges of the new forms of poverty exacerbated by the global crisis and dare to take prophetic stances against injustice”*²⁷. Fidelity to the legacy of the Founders urges us to be prophets of charity in today’s world.

In his message to the General Assembly of 2009, Pope Benedict XVI called us to *“pursue with boldness and creativity the material and spiritual service of the most destitute persons in your societies”*²⁸. We are invited to live in friendly communion with all the citizens of an inter-cultural world of profound change, incredible scientific and technological advances, of a world where equally injustice, oppression, human trafficking and the culture of death stretch forth their tentacles with astonishing normality.

If solutions too often escape us and remain out of our reach, we still have closeness of heart, compassion, and personal contact with *“the suffering faces that cause us pain”*²⁹.

²⁴ Begin again with Christ, no. 18.

²⁵ Cf. Guide for the Sister Servant, p. 58.

²⁶ Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 13.

²⁷ Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 13.

²⁸ Message of Benedict XVI to the General Assembly of 2009.

²⁹ Aparecida Document 2007, no. 407.

It is on the Vincentian charism that these options to be taken are founded, the way of serving, and the way of collaborating. *“Do we draw up, in our Provinces, missionary priority plans and periodically review our ministries and services?”*³⁰.

Availability and attitude of servant

Availability and gratuitousness are the expression of a simple, humble love. These attitudes are essential for assuming, beyond personal desires, the responsibilities and ministries entrusted by the Community. To live in an attitude of servant demands detachment from self, great freedom of spirit, and a deep understanding of the mission of the Company.

Every service of the Daughter of Charity is the expression of her total gift to God; she carries it out in the name of the Company and is sent by the Company. How do you help the Sisters to remain available, to feel that they have been sent on mission? How do you reawaken the Vincentian enthusiasm of Sisters which helps them to *“turn everything to love?”*³¹.

Collaboration and networking

The Inter-Assemblies Document underlines the importance of *promoting new forms of collaboration with the laity, and fostering their formation in the Vincentian spirit*³².

I would like to emphasize the importance of establishing collaboration with the laity on a sound basis. In a world that offers many choices, it is essential to assure the Christian identity and Vincentian spirit of the ministries of the Daughters of Charity; the missionary plan of the ministry must include the whole person in both the human and transcendent dimension. The witness of charity must be visible; attention for the most destitute persons always remains a priority.

For good collaborative ministry, it is important to define clearly the role of the Province, to which certain responsibilities are delegated and to specify the system of accountability and supervision. One important issue is the preparation of Sisters in knowing how to work as part of a team, in listening to the opinions of others and in learning from them. We must likewise see that we offer all our collaborators a solid Chris-

³⁰ Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 23.

³¹ Constitutions, p. 8.

³² Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 26.

tian formation (when possible) and a formation in Vincentian values (always). The ministries of the Company must be able to achieve the apostolic purpose for which they are founded; we are responsible for this. *Do we see that the ways of serving and the operational criteria remain truly the visible expression of the charism?*

The Inter-Assemblies Document invites us to *strengthen networking in the Company, with the Vincentian Family, and in the Church*³³. It is important to study ways to improve and develop networking in order to share and encourage project and accomplishments. It is a systematic work of collaboration and complementarity for fostering common projects with an overall view. This requires efforts of coordination, sharing of experiences, information, etc. All that demands that we broaden our outlook beyond local and provincial actions, and to be open to acting with more universal criteria.

I note with joy that real collaboration is growing among the Provinces on the international level, to respond to urgent needs, as well as a generous sharing of personnel and resources, including the missions in Kenya, Tanzania, Fiji, and Vincentian missions in Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, services in Ukraine, and the recent establishments in Africa.

D. An ongoing Pentecost implies “deepening our sense of belonging to the Company and taking responsibility for the Company of the future” (cf. C. 59)³⁴

Deepening the sense of belonging to the Company

The sense of belonging reflects the vitality of vocation and is expressed by consistency of our lives with the Constitutions and Statutes. Some clear expressions of belonging are also: availability, mobility, joyous acceptance of the directives of the Company, co-responsible participation in the common mission, and an interest in all that involves the Company.

Formation, whose finality consists in strengthening the motivations and dynamism of vocation,³⁵ helps one to deepen communion with the entire Company as well as the sense of belonging. I am sure you are concerned with consolidating in the Sisters, from the time of initial formation, the appropriation of the values of the Company, the basis of belonging.

³³ Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 25.

³⁴ Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 15.

³⁵ Cf. Constitution 49.

Revitalizing our missionary vocation

The Inter-Assemblies Document urges us insistently to “*revitalize the missionary vocation of the Company from the time of initial formation and all during our lives*”³⁶.

The new evangelization to which the Church urges us is a challenge that requires new evangelizers. As you know, the concept of the mission ad Gentes has been broadened and goes beyond a simply geographic and territorial comprehension. In certain cases, we have to leave traditional ministries to go to people both near and far; the whole world and the heart of each person are mission territories. What efforts are we making to give a new missionary impetus in our Provinces?³⁷

Giving an impetus to youth and vocation ministry

It is in the framework of faith that vocation ministry is seen. It is the Lord who calls whom He wills, when He wills, and how He wills. For our part, we should act with enthusiasm and perseverance, and accompany and encourage Sisters chosen for this area of the pastoral plan.

It is important to prepare the local communities to welcome young people, to form them to help those young people to grow in their faith and to discern their vocation. Are the Sisters attentive to diocesan directives? How do they collaborate in the diocesan pastoral plan and with the parishes? Do they invite young people to get to know the beauty of the charism, by offering the opportunity to visit poor persons and to have some activities to help them make a commitment in the service of the most destitute?³⁸

III.

THE COMPANY LOOKS TO THE FUTURE WITH HOPE, IN THE LIGHT OF PENTECOST

“If you wish to live of the Holy Spirit, preserve charity, love truth, desire unity”³⁹

At the last General Assembly, the Company welcomed the call to live an ongoing Pentecost and traced out a clear path: to let ourselves be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

³⁶Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 25.

³⁷Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 15.

³⁸Cf. Inter-Assemblies Document 2009, p. 15.

³⁹Saint Augustine, Sermon 267, 4.

Under the impetus of Pentecost

The light of Pentecost enlightens the Company today and shines on a future that is unknown to us. The transforming action of the Holy Spirit prepares hearts to welcome the signs of God present in the new realities that are being lived by humanity, the Church, and the Company; it spurs us on to confront the challenges of our time with a joyous serenity and an outlook of faith; it invites us to live a paschal experience and to die in order to be born to a new life. *“We are hoping for a new Pentecost that will deliver us from fatigue, disillusion, and conformity with the prevailing milieu; a coming of the Spirit who will renew our joy and our hope. That is why it will be indispensable to create welcoming zones of community prayer that feed the fire of an overflowing ardor and make possible an attractive witness of unity ‘so that the world may believe’ (Jn. 17:21)”*⁴⁰.

With the ability for renewal and change

The Company has known how to constantly adapt its structures to the needs of the mission. St. Vincent noted this energy of the Company in face of changing times: *“And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it was not then what it is now, it is to be believed that it is still not what it will be when God has brought it to where He wants it”*⁴¹.

The current reality of the Company requires a lucid, serene analysis to see how we are living the charism and what shoots of life we need to strengthen, what fragile points are causing us to stumble. As in other stages in the history of the Company, certain changes in organization at general and provincial levels are necessary. Several have already taken place, some are about to happen, others are still in embryo. I can bear witness that they are inspired by a creative fidelity to the charism and a desire to be more in line with the reality we are living.

I would like to invite you to take a quick look at the history of the Company. Here are a few examples of the evolution of the number of Provinces and General Councillors:

In 1997: 72 Provinces, 4 Vice-Provinces, 7 Regions.

In 2012: 70 Provinces and 1 Region.

⁴⁰ Aparecida Document 2007, no. 362.

⁴¹ Saint Vincent, IX, 245 (Fr.).

The number of Councillors has evolved since the beginning of the Company: 3 until 1956⁴² (Assistant, Treasurer, and Bursar); 6 from 1956 to 1968; 8 from 1968 to 1997; and 10 since 1997. These changes entail renouncing certain securities that have no future; they oblige us to cast off the moorings that hold us to the pier. The changes sometimes involve suffering, but are growth factors, when they are well prepared and worked out with the participation of all the Sisters. Changes have positive aspects if they are lived in faith, joy, openness, trust, and humility, as a grace and as the passage of the Lord. New horizons open up, new possibilities, new challenges, new calls.

We have a great historical responsibility. The strength of the Company is not in the number of Sisters, nor in the number and quality of the works, nor in the recognition of society, it is in *“the Charity of Jesus crucified, which animates the heart of the Daughter of Charity and sets it on fire, urging her to hasten to the relief of every type of human misery”*⁴³. Our responsibility is at this level, first of all: to keep this flame alive in ourselves and in the Sisters and to be sure that *“service nourishes their contemplation and gives meaning to their community life, just as their relationship with God and their life in common continually revitalize their apostolic commitment”*⁴⁴.

Then the Sisters, convinced of the relevance of the Vincentian charism, live a deep experience of gratitude to God for the gift of their vocation, feel proud to belong to the Company, and are fully committed and enthusiastic in their ministries, whatever they may be; their life becomes a vocational proposal.

Confidence in Providence

Our Founders taught us to discover the hand of Providence who protects and guides us and who directs events, for *“I don’t know what a Daughter of Charity who does not have this confidence is good for”*⁴⁵, said St. Vincent.

St. Louise lived deeply anchored in Providence, in such a way that she saw trust in Providence and sisterly communion as the two pillars that were maintaining the beginnings of the Company⁴⁶. *“Oh! Blessed be God”*, St. Vincent said with firm conviction. *“There is reason to hope*

⁴²Histoire des Filles de la Charité, Matthieu Bréjon de Lavergnée, Fayard, p. 256.

⁴³Constitutions, p. 15.

⁴⁴Cf. Constitution 16b.

⁴⁵Saint Vincent X, 506 Fr.

⁴⁶Cf. Saint Louise de Marillac, Spiritual Writings, A. 75.

*that the Company will do much good, provided you trust in Providence and do not interfere with its guidance*⁴⁷.

I have used with you, dear Father Directors, as I did with the Visitatrixes last May, the path the Inter-Assemblies Document traced out for us: a search for interiority, a need for authenticity, and a new sense of solidarity. The young, or less young, who present themselves to the Company aspire to this and want to live it and to see it lived. This document, as we have seen, presents the challenges of today and contains seeds of the Company of the future.

Allow me once again to thank you for having accepted – some of you for the first time; others already several times – this Vincentian service of animation and accompaniment in collaboration with the Visitatrix and her Council⁴⁸. The Sisters of the General Council and I myself express to you our cordial gratitude.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Saints Vincent and Louise, bless you!

⁴⁷ Saint Vincent X, 510-511 Fr.

⁴⁸ Constitution 75a.

Vincent de Paul: Co-founder of the Daughters of Charity

John P. Prager, C.M.

If we took Vincent de Paul at his word, this would be a very short conference. *I never thought about this*, he reminds the first sisters when he talks to them about the foundation of the Daughters of Charity (SV IX, 202). Vincent had a way of looking back at foundational events and giving them a mythical re-interpretation. Usually he downplayed his own role and highlighted the action of God in the history of his foundations.

One problem in talking about this topic is that we have to approach it in a way that St. Vincent himself avoided. Obviously the Company of the Daughters of Charity didn't fall from heaven. St. Vincent was heavily involved in the foundation of the Company. He made important contributions for a quarter of a century.

A second, bigger problem, is that he was a co-founder, not the only founder. St. Louise had a big hand in the foundation. On the day to day level, clearly things fell more directly on her shoulders. But, on almost every level of development of the Company of the Daughters of Charity the two founders acted together. They shared so much, sometimes in ways we don't know about (lost letters, private conversations, etc.) that it is difficult to separate one influence from the other.

I have taken that as the key to this conference. I found it unhelpful to try and separate the roles and actions of the two founders. The foundation is not a mathematical equation where you can talk about percentages and clear divisions of influence. It seems to me a better approach, somehow reflected in the history of the foundation, to point out three areas where St. Vincent's contribution was important, without trying to ask who was the bigger influence in a particular area.

1. A Theological Vision

One of the reasons that St. Vincent gave so many conferences to the first sisters was his desire to share a his vision with them. Every time he speaks with them he finds a way to help them understand the world,

God and a Vincentian way of living the Gospel. Even when his topics are very practical, there's an underlying theological vision which animates the conference.

A. *Vision of the world*

The Church in the Seventeenth Century was reacting to the ideas of the Renaissance, especially its exaltation of humanity. The position of many, perhaps most, theologians, was to emphasize God's grace and the sinfulness of humanity. By rejecting the world as a place of evil, they hoped to defend the need for God and his grace. Orthodox theologians, like Berulle and his followers would have accepted this basic scheme. Flight from the world became the road to perfection in this vision. Taken to an extreme, this Augustinian theology led to Jansenism.

A second, more positive, theology grew up around Francis de Sales and his disciples. Without negating the presence of sin or the weakness of the human person, Francis saw the world in positive terms. Since the world was God's creation, it became the place to experience salvation or to live the Gospel. The path to salvation was the response to God's love in the world. In the first pages of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* Francis tells his readers that the life of devotion is simply the life of love. Everyone is capable of responding to God's grace, without escaping the world, by living a life of love.

St. Vincent was familiar with both schools of thought. Many of his friends were influenced by the dominant Augustinian theology. Berulle was one of his early spiritual guides. He frequently used the negative language and expressions of the French School. Nonetheless I think he uses the idiom of the times with a different meaning. The content is almost always closer to the theology of Francis de Sales despite the language. He found in the Bishop of Geneva a kindred spirit. Francis was his image of a good, pastoral man. More importantly, I think Francis gave him a way to understand his own experience of finding God in the world of the poor.

A lot of St. Vincent's language only makes sense in the framework of a positive theology of the world. *Coming and going, secular, not religious* – phrases that appear all of the time in his conferences – reflect a positive image of the world. It is the place where God acts and the sisters come to holiness.

B. *An Understanding of God*

St. Vincent spent a long time avoiding God and the poor. Almost half his life was spent running from the encounter with God. At the heart of his conversion experience, the fruit of all those events like

Clichy, Folleville, Chatillon and the rest, was a profound experience of Christ's presence in the poor. He spent a lot of energy in his early days escaping poverty. For a while he was able pursue his own plans for a comfortable life.

One of the things he came to realize was that God entered his life to bring him to salvation. The farther away he was from the poor, the farther away he was from God. Little by little he was able to open his life to God's love as he opens his life to the poor. So he begins to understand that God is Providence. That's not *Christian Good Luck*. It's God's will to save. God who had saved him, acts in love to bring the poor to salvation. Everything is in God's hands.

C. A Missionary Ecclesiology

Like most of his contemporaries in the age of the Catholic Reform, the saint was influenced by the decisions of the Council of Trent. Many of his projects (clerical reform, missions, etc.) grew out of the concerns of the Council. The agenda at Trent was affected by the need to reform abuses in the Church and the struggle with Protestantism. The strong criticisms by the Protestant reformers of the Catholic sacramental system and practice moved the bishops to focus on priestly ministry. The need to reform abuses caused them to ask the question: How do we organize the Christian community better? The response of the Council centered around a well organized community, directed by the hierarchy and a better trained clergy. The ecclesiology of the Council was inner-directed.

Vincent shared some of the concerns of the post-Tridentine reformers. But his own missionary experience colored his ecclesiology. The fundamental question for him became not how do we organize the community, but rather, how do we evangelize the poor? It was a shift to a missionary model of the Church. That missionary ecclesiology in turn raised the questions about ministry. St. Vincent began to understand ministry (lay men and women, Daughters of Charity, priests of the Mission) to go out to the poor in new ways.

D. A New Form of Religious Life

Everyone knows that St. Vincent insisted that the sisters were not religious. The first Daughters of Charity were part of the Confraternities of Charity. Later on they evolved into the Company of the Daughters of Charity. These were ways to avoid assuming the structures of religious life, especially the cloister. The great fear for the founders was that the ordinary way of living religious life would become an obstacle to the service of the poor.

I think there's another element to this that is not always recognized. The first sisters were poor women. Religious life was mostly the preserve of the wealthy in the seventeenth century. They were the only ones who could afford the dowry. Some of those communities of religious women also offered a limited service of the poor. But they did it as rich women from a cloister.

It's interesting that the model for the Daughters of Charity was Marguerite Nazeau, a poor woman from the country. St. Vincent frequently refers to the virtues of country girls. He was slow to accept women who were not poor into the Company. He wanted women who would serve the poor, not from above or outside the world of the poor, but from the reality of the poor. The idea was so radical it still causes us problems four hundred years later. The lack of a cloister wasn't so much about bars on the windows of a building. It was a way to insert people into the life of the poor. The best way to do that was with poor women living like the poor.

2. The Vincentian Charism

When St. Vincent and St. Louise took the first steps to found the Company they both had passed the mid-point of their lives. It's interesting that at a moment in life where most people become more conservative, they became more radical. The two founders were on fire with the charism. They inspired the first sisters with that charism.

By 1617 St. Vincent knew that God was calling him to dedicate his life to the service of the most abandoned. It took him longer to understand that God was also calling him to share that charism with others. As events unfolded in his life he had discern what were the steps he needed to take to include others in the charism. Vincent was always practical and he could see the difficulties in founding communities inspired with this new vision. This was especially true in the case of the Daughters of Charity. As early as 1630, St. Louise was suggesting that they found some type of community. St. Vincent hesitated for three years until he was sure that they could organize a group of women around the Vincentian charism.

In the twenty-seven years that followed the coming together of the first sisters in St. Louise's house, the Daughters of Charity would find their own way of embodying the charism of service to the poor. They shared many things with the other Vincentian groups. However they developed their own structures and life-style and organization. St. Vincent's role here was to keep calling them back to the initial inspiration for those structures in the service of the poor.

3. Vincentian Spirituality

Vincentian spirituality is perhaps St. Vincent's most lasting contribution to the foundation of the Daughters of Charity. Vincentian spirituality is a way of living the Gospel according to the Vincentian charism. The path to holiness for any Christian is the Gospel. In his conferences and letters, St. Vincent points out to the sisters (frequently at St. Louise's suggestion) ways to live the Gospel. Let me point out a few of the characteristics of that Spirituality:

A. *Christocentric*

Christian spirituality is always centered on Christ. Different spiritualities reflect different experiences of Christ. In the Vincentian tradition the image of Christ is the poor Christ who evangelizes the poor. By word and act Jesus communicates God's love to the poor. The Gospel is Good News because it responds to the bad news that the poor experience all of the time. The biblical accounts show Jesus preaching the in-breaking of the Kingdom. In each instance he finds a way to respond to people's needs. So to the hungry, he provides food; to the sick, healing; to sinners, forgiveness.

St. Vincent says over and over again that we participate in the mission of Jesus. Following Jesus among the poor means assuming Jesus' cause, the Kingdom of God.

B. *Sacramentality of the poor*

The following of Christ is not a static or abstract. He invites us to follow him among the poor. So we find him present among the abandoned or we do not find him. In the Vincentian tradition it is not either Christ or the poor; but rather, Christ in the poor.

The presence of Christ in the poor is not transparent or self-evident. St. Vincent doesn't say we see Christ in the poor. He says the poor represent Christ to us. There is a sacramental quality to this presence. When we go to the poor, we serve the poor as our brothers and sisters in need. We see the poor. It is a faith experience that enables us to find Christ in the experience. If you think about the Seven Sacraments you get some idea of how this works. At the Eucharist we see a piece of bread. My faith tells me something more is present.

We sometimes say that the poor evangelize us. I think people mean by that the good poor. The people who give good example in the midst of their poverty, live a moral life, go to Church. I think even the poor who are not so good, those who don't go to Church or

lead a moral life also evangelize us. They call us to love the unlovable. They give us the opportunity to expand our horizons to include the excluded.

C. *Missionary*

Following Jesus on the periphery of society means going to an encounter with the poor on the margins. The poor live in another reality where different values hold sway. Following Jesus is missionary because it means leaving our place in the center of society and entering another place with the economic and social outcasts. It's the free choice of making the world of the poor our world. We cross the boundaries of race, class, culture and status in order to live the Gospel with the most abandoned. The missionary seeks to love in unfamiliar territory by being a herald of God's mercy among those who have been shown no mercy.

Missionary in this sense is not so much a geographical change. It is the willingness to enter the world of the poor and abandoned. The virtues of the Company have a lot to say in this context. St. Vincent offered simplicity, humility and charity to the sisters because they were the things he himself lacked as a young priest. He knew from his own experience that without them it was impossible to enter the world of the poor.

D. *Secular*

Vincentian spirituality is secular. That doesn't mean atheist or separated from God. It means being in the world. Vincent points that out to the sisters in that famous conference:

*For a monastery the streets of the city; for a cell a rented room
For a chapel the parish church; for a veil, holy modesty...*

This is a call for insertion into the world and its problems. Vincentian spirituality does not lead to the chapel, but to the houses of the poor. Where else can we live the Gospel – charity, forgiveness, justice, humility – if not in the world of the poor?

The secular dimension of Vincentian spirituality points out that spirituality is always lived out in relationships with other people, especially the poor. Whatever you do to the least of my brothers – in the words of Matthew 25.

E. *Contemplative in action*

When we say that we don't live the Gospel in the chapel, we don't mean that the chapel is not important. Nothing is possible without prayer. By prayer I don't mean common exercises or acts of piety (as important as they may be) I'm talking about the personal dialogue with the Lord about the events of life. It's sharing with God about what's happening in community, ministry and my personal life.

Everyone needs moments of silence, time apart to concentrate on the dialogue with Christ. It's about creating spaces in the midst of responsibilities and an active life. In this conversations with Christ it's always important to ask: Where is Christ in the different situations I encounter? What are the Gospel values and the disvalues? What does Christ tell me here?

F. *Charity*

The goal of any spirituality is charity. This life leads to love or it makes no sense. It always has something to with relationships. Charity is an encounter between people. In the Vincentian tradition it is meeting the poor with the spirit of God's love. It is the response to our brothers and sisters who are in need. We can pay people to do our work. But we can never replace the fraternal encounter with the poor.

Every time we go to the poor in charity something happens to them and something happens to us. What is Good News for them becomes Good News for us as well. For them it is a response to their needs and maybe the experience of God's love. For us it is the path to love on in ever-deeper ways.

4. Conclusion

St. Vincent made many contributions to the foundation of the Daughters of Charity. The three things I mentioned in this conference – a theological vision, the Charism and Vincentian Spirituality – seem to me to be the most important. All the all the other things he did with the sisters flow from these fundamental elements.

Louise de Marillac and the Spirituality of the Daughters of Charity

Meeting of Provincial Directors

Sr. Antoinette Marie Hance, D.C.

Introduction

Louise de Marillac is an extraordinary woman and a great mystic, and to speak of her and her spirituality is, in a certain sense, to marvel anew at God's loving plan for humanity, for the Church, for persons living in poverty, and for God's preference for the lowly and humble of heart. Yes, God always surprises us, and in taking a new look at the life of Louise de Marillac, and dwelling on the spirituality shared with the first Sisters, we see how God constantly borrows from our ways to reveal His love.

I'm going to begin by letting St. Vincent speak. On July 24, 1660, two months before his death, he exhorted the first Sisters as follows: "*Sisters, after the example of your good mother, take the resolution to work at becoming holy and to detach yourselves from what displeases God in you*"¹. "After the example of your good Mother". I think that looking at Louise to learn from her how to work at making ourselves holy according to God's plan for us, and to detach ourselves from what displeases God, is characteristic of a spirituality: proposing a special path of holiness, a particular way of following Christ.

The 350th anniversary of the deaths of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac was certainly a special opportunity to discover Louise or to get to know her better. So I am not going to speak about her spiritual journey, even though it is important to keep it in mind, for it was in her own special context that her personality was shaped, as well as her spirituality, which was the source and driving force of her service of persons living in poverty.

This will be a three-part presentation based on the spiritual writings of Saint Louise. It will highlight some very classic points, which, however, are the foundation and basis of the spiritual life of Saint

¹ Conference of St. Vincent "Virtues of Louise de Marillac" (X, p. 587).

Louise and of what she shared with the Sisters. They are to be understood in our present context, where many currents – philosophical, spiritual, and others – of unequal merit, cross one another, making the interior construction of the person difficult. Hence, the need and the urgency of fostering the growth of an authentic spirituality for a holistic development.

So the three parts will treat:

1. The strong points of the spirituality of Saint Louise de Marillac
2. Sharing her spirituality with the first Sisters
3. The coat of arms of the Company, icon of the spirituality of the Daughters of Charity

I. THE STRONG POINTS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC

We read in *Vita Consecrata*, no. 93²,

“...the spiritual life, understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit, presents itself as a path of increasing faithfulness, on which the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church. All these elements, which take shape in the different forms of the consecrated life, give rise to a specific spirituality, that is, a concrete program of relations with God and one’s surroundings, marked by specific spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ”.

In the spirit of *Vita Consecrata*, we can say that Louise’s meditations are indicative of her concept of God and of the way she received the Gospel and made it her own. There are not many of these meditations, but they are intense enough to let us see her spiritual experience. They reveal the extent of her theological knowledge, the depth of her thinking, and her personal prayer.

Fr. Benito Martinez makes this observation in his book *Mademoiselle Legras and Saint Louise de Marillac*: “Her spirituality of following Christ and her Marian devotion was born in the eternal plan of God. It is on this plan that Louise built her theology and Christology”³.

This first part will take us to the heart of this close relationship Louise had with her God, with the Trinity, with Jesus, and with Mary.

²*Vita Consecrata*, no. 93.

³*Mlle Legras and St. Louise de Marillac*, 1992, p. 126.

I have noted five strong points that mark and characterize her spiritual journey:

1. Seeking the will of God;
2. contemplation of the Trinity and of the Incarnate Word;
3. Another strong point that nourishes her contemplation is the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation.
4. The Virgin Mary, masterpiece of God;
5. the Eucharist summarizes everything.

1. Seeking the will of God

The primary aim that orients the entire life of Louise is the accomplishment of the will of God. As the years go by, she is more and more convinced that compliance with the good pleasure of God is the only way of pure love of God. Her meditations show that she has only one desire in the depths of her heart: to know God's will in order to conform herself to it! *"O my God... to live for as long as it pleases You, but with Your life which is one of total love. May I flow into the ocean of Your Divine Being!... loving and willing Your good pleasure"*⁴.

Wanting to express her deep attachment to God and to do God's will, she wrote her act of protestation, inspired by the one suggested in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* of Francis de Sales, in it she commits herself to live the grace of her Baptism, which made her a child of God, and to give herself entirely to God to love and serve God with greater fidelity. *"On the day of my sacred Baptism, I was consecrated... to my God to be his daughter... Trusting in the infinite mercy of my God... I now renew... the profession made to my God on my behalf... and resolve irrevocably to serve and love God with greater fidelity, giving myself totally to him... abandoning myself entirely to the plan of his holy Providence for the accomplishment of his will in me"*⁵.

Along this path of doing God's will, she ardently desires to let the grace of the Holy Spirit act, noting *"Eternal Light, take away my blindness, simplify my spirit... may the power of love you have placed in my soul dwell no longer on the disordered state of my self-sufficiency which is... only a hindrance to the pure love I should have by the infusion of the Holy Spirit"*⁶.

Progressively, as events unfolded, Louise feels called to follow the obedient Christ, in an "evangelical plan" of the Spirit: the *Light of*

⁴*Spiritual Writings*, A. 26, p. 817, henceforth cited as SW.

⁵SW, A. 3, p. 693.

⁶SW, A. 26, p. 817.

Pentecost will become for her a real journey of seeking God and holiness. She will have the courage to inspire others with her ideas, convictions, and positions but also the ability to be open to new perspectives and to change her own point of view. Assiduous seeking of God's will is her only desire, for she grasps fully that God wants nothing but the happiness of his children, and to share his infinite, gratuitous love with each and every person without exception. "*On the Feast of Saint Sebastian, the martyr*", she writes, "*I felt a strong desire to give myself to God to fulfill His holy will for the remainder of my life. I offered Him the inspiration He had given me to seal this desire by vow once I had obtained permission... The following Saturday, I begged God earnestly to make known what His goodness desired of me...*"⁷.

2. Contemplation of the Trinity and of the Incarnate Word

The mystery of the Trinity enlightens the entire existence of Louise. Because she knows who God is, Louise knows what she ought to be. Her contemplation of the Trinity produces in her an intense desire to adapt her life to it, to exist ever more only for God. "*The Triune God, in the unity of His essence*" she writes, "*has created me for Himself alone. He has loved me from all eternity. Seeing that I could neither come into being nor subsist without Him, since He is my first and only origin, He wants also to be my end*"⁸.

Louise constantly marvels at the beauty and grandeur of divine love at the heart of the Blessed Trinity. "*I adore you, Most Holy Trinity... one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*"⁹.

She loves to contemplate the Trinity holding council, seeking to recreate humanity, telling us all its love, deciding together the Incarnation of the Word. We read in her retreat notes: "*As soon as human nature had sinned, the Creator who wanted to repair this fault... ordered in the council of his Divinity, that one of the three Persons should become man*"¹⁰.

Strongly nourished by theology, Louise made her own the thinking of Berulle, an apostle of the Incarnate Word. Louise's spirituality is configured around the Mystery of God made man, center and source of all Christian life. "*The invention of His Divine Love teaches me... to attach myself to the most holy humanity of His Son... which shall be the only example for my life*".

⁷SW, A. 15b, p. 692.

⁸SW, A. 19, pp. 709-710.

⁹SW, A. 49b, p. 770.

¹⁰SW, A. 7, p. 799.

3. Another strong point that nourishes her contemplation is the mystery of the redemptive incarnation

In reading her writings, we are struck by noting to what point Louise contemplated this Mystery of the Incarnation, combined with the Mystery of the Cross. Louise contemplated at length the Son of God made man, a man fully human, except for sin. It is precisely because he is not a sinner that Christ is fully human. In contemplating Christ, Louise discovers who God is, and who the human person is.

Each meditation is, for her, a meeting with Jesus: *"You truly love us, since you are only one with the Father, who willed to show us his love by giving you, his Son, to us"*¹¹.

She contemplates the intensity of the Mystery of the Incarnation and discovers the incredible love of God for humanity: *"The love of God for mankind willed that the Son should take human flesh because His delight is to be among His creatures. By becoming like them, He could bear witness to the fact that God has loved them from all eternity. This He did throughout His human life upon earth"*¹². God, who by nature, is *"inaccessible to all being"*, found only one way to reach the human person, *"his Incarnation... which makes God man and man God"*¹³.

She meditates on this mission of the Incarnate Word, who comes to propose to humanity reconciliation and the renewal of the Covenant, and when she dwells on the Passion of Jesus, Louise recognizes the incredible love of God for humanity: Jesus, who gives himself totally on the Cross, and, at the same time, leaves the human person entirely free to respond to Him. She writes this admirable reflection: *"I thirst! This word is addressed to us so that we might understand that His death is not sufficient to save us if we do not accept it... let us listen to Him saying, 'I thirst for your faithful love'"*¹⁴. For her entire life, Louise will keep her eyes fixed on "Jesus Crucified".

Jesus is not only the Son of God made man, He is also the Redeemer. *"The Incarnation of the Son of God is, according to His plan from all eternity, for the Redemption of the human race"*¹⁵.

Along these same lines, Louise admires the humility of Jesus and the reasons for this humility. *"The Son of God... willed to come into this world in a manner not at all consistent with His grandeur. He came as*

¹¹SW, A, 27, p. 829.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³SW, A. 13b, p. 800.

¹⁴SW, A. 21, p. 702.

¹⁵SW, A. 31b, p. 830.

*humbly as can be imagined... This humble act shows us how great this virtue is in God*¹⁶. And elsewhere, *"I must learn to remain hidden in God, content that He sees what I am striving to become"*¹⁷.

The conclusion of her meditation on Baptism shows us in summary the depth and intensity of her Christocentric contemplation: *"Let us live, therefore, as if we were dead in Jesus Christ. Henceforth, let there be no further resistance to Jesus, no action except for Jesus, no thoughts but in Jesus! May my life be solely for Jesus and my neighbor so that... I may love all that Jesus loves"*¹⁸.

Louise recognizes in Jesus the most human among human beings: totally for others, He is the fullness of all that is human. *"In his meeting with the Samaritan woman, the place and the words express only love"*¹⁹.

4. The Virgin Mary, masterpiece of God

For Louise, God's eternal plan is the principle of her Marian doctrine. She situates Mary at the very heart of God's loving plan for humanity: *"I gaze upon you today, most pure Virgin Mother of Grace, since it is you who not only provided the matter for the formation of the sacred body of your Son... By bringing him into the world, you have become both Mother of God and Mother of a man"*²⁰.

Louise contemplates the intimate relationship of the Virgin Mary with the Blessed Trinity, desiring that everyone should give the Blessed Virgin the glory she merits: the *"beloved daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit"*²¹.

She marvels at the Trinity, which does not hesitate to associate a woman in a very special way to its divinity. *"Throughout my life... I desire to love and to honor the Blessed Virgin... by my gratitude to the Blessed Trinity for the choice made of the Holy Virgin to be so closely united to the Divinity"*²².

She also contemplates the splendor of Mary as the woman who brought forth in her humanity the Son of God: *"O my God... You have shown me the great dignity of the Blessed Virgin... the Mother of your*

¹⁶SW, A. 7, p. 700.

¹⁷SW, A. 8, *Retreat*, p. 718.

¹⁸SW, A. 23, p. 786.

¹⁹SW, A. 7, p. 700.

²⁰SW, A. 14b, p. 775.

²¹SW, A. 4, p. 696.

²²SW, A. 31b, p. 831.

*Son!... With good reason the Church addresses her as the Mother of Mercy because she is also the Mother of all Grace*²³.

She likewise admires the way Mary responded to God's plan: *"May this beautiful soul, chosen from thousands of millions for her adherence to God's plan, be eternally glorious"*²⁴.

We also know of Louise's very special devotion to the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Mary is full of grace, since she gave birth to Grace itself. Indeed, to bring about His redemptive incarnation, Mary was showered with grace and preserved from all sin. *"Reflecting on this Holy Conception, I saw... the application of God's plan in the Incarnation of His Son... The most pure body of the Blessed Virgin is a worthy dwelling place for the soul God created for her... her most pure Conception comes from the merits of the death of her Son"*²⁵. Louise associates Mary with all the mysteries of her Son.

She also considers Mary's deep humility and often asks her to put in her the sentiments she always had. *"She is the only pure creature who has always found favor in the eyes of God. This makes her the astonishment of the Heavenly Court and the admiration of all humanity"*²⁶.

5. The Eucharist summarizes everything

For Louise de Marillac, the mystery of the Eucharist is the recapitulation of everything: it is the Sacrament of Christ who gives himself as food to human beings to transform them into himself. So, she writes, *"The Son of God was not satisfied with taking a human body and living in the midst of us. But, wishing an inseparable union of the divine nature with human nature, He accomplished this by the admirable institution of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar"*²⁷.

Christ is the perfect man, the pure reference to God and to others. The Eucharist makes us more human because it is more divine. *"He seems to give himself to us in the holy host for our sanctification"* she will note, *"...wanting us to be like Him by His love"*²⁸.

For Louise, It is clear that the basic plan of God is to unite all men and women in love and to have them share His own life. God created humanity to espouse it, and He espouses it by becoming man. To espouse, in the fullest sense of the word, is to become only one flesh

²³ SW, A. 14b, p. 775.

²⁴ SW, A. 4, p. 696.

²⁵ SW, A. 31b, p. 830.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ SW, A. 14, p. 784.

²⁸ SW, A. 71. p. 779.

with humanity. Christ became food in order to become flesh of the flesh of humanity. "*At Holy Communion*", she also wrote, "*it seemed to me that Our Lord was inspiring me to receive Him as the spouse of my soul...*"²⁹.

Whether receiving Holy Communion or in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, Louise constantly contemplates God's desire of "*the loving union of His Word with humanity*", and she ardently desires to respond to this call³⁰.

Having grasped interiorly this immense desire of God to join humanity even in its poverty, Louise de Marillac consecrated herself to Christ to serve Him in the person of the poor, whoever they might be. One retreat day she wrote, "*I felt in my prayer... a great attraction for the holy humanity of Our Lord, and I desired to honor it insofar as I was able in the person of the poor and of all my neighbors*"³¹.

The corporal and spiritual service of persons living in poverty is like a continuation of the Incarnation and Redemption, allowing those who are humiliated, sick, crushed, or rejected to rediscover their full quality of human being and child of God.

And I will end this first section by once again allowing Saint Louise to speak; she manifests to us her interior determination and dynamic missionary force, which shows that her actions were nothing other than the work of God (as they were for Saint Vincent. Isn't that why the Vincentian Family is still very much alive today?) "*I want to imitate... Our Lord when He came to earth to do the most Holy Will of God His Father, and to help my neighbor as far as I can both spiritually and corporally...*"³².

II.

SHARING HER SPIRITUALITY WITH THE FIRST SISTERS

We might say that Louise de Marillac transmitted to the Daughters of Charity a spiritual tradition.

In this second part, I will present briefly six basic elements – what we might call the pillars that constitute in, a certain sense, the spirituality of Daughter of Charity, and which Louise particularly stressed when she was responsible for the formation of the first Sisters – elements that she herself lived, as we have just seen in the preceding section.

²⁹SW, A. 50, p. 705.

³⁰SW, A. 21b, p. 732.

³¹SW, A. 26, p. 820.

³²SW, A. 40b, p. 784.

We will find these elements in her letters to the first Sisters:

1. A constant seeking of the will of God;
2. a deep life of union with God and her radicality in living humility and charity;
3. living well together;
4. a passion for persons who are poor;
5. reviewing one's life in the light of the Gospel;
6. love of the Blessed Virgin.

1. By her constant seeking of God's will, Louise leads the sisters to give themselves totally to God to do his will (*Louise seeks only the will of God*)

She is attentive to a true education in holiness. Louise expects a great deal of the Sisters and wants to help them lead a holy life by seeking only the will of God. To Sister Anne Hardemont she writes, *"I beg you, my dear Sister, to send us frequently news of yourself and of our dear Sisters. I hope they are filled with holiness so that they may work usefully at God's work... We must have continually before our eyes our model, the exemplary life of Jesus Christ, which we are called to imitate not only as Christians, but as persons chosen by God to serve Him in the person of His poor"*³³.

Louise leads the Sisters to get rid of their routine, in order to give themselves to God in the person of the poor, to strive to be converted to Christ, and to find His constant presence in everyday activities. She exhorts and encourages them to even greater sacrifices. We heard this already, *"Let us live, therefore, as if we were dead in Jesus Christ. Henceforth, let there be no further resistance to Jesus, no action except for Jesus, no thoughts but in Jesus! May my life be solely for Jesus and my neighbor so that... I may love all that Jesus loves"*³⁴.

Louise knows that it takes an entire lifetime to become a saint; she realizes this for herself and for others. She is attentive to helping the Sisters move forward and proposes a certain radicality to them. She encourages them to enter more deeply into the Gospel spirit of the gift of self. She urges them to persevere in their resolutions, for she is well aware that we are always being put to the test by the temptation to return to freedom, individualism, free will, and to doing our own will. She invites the Sisters to follow God's plans with all their heart.

³³SW, L. 217, pp. 260-261.

³⁴SW, A. 23, p. 786.

To Sister Madeleine Mongert, she writes, “*We have to belong to God, who wills that we want nothing other than what He wills*”³⁵. To the Sisters in Nantes, she says, “*We must belong to God, and all to God, and to do this well, we have to detach ourselves from ourselves*”³⁶. And the same insistence with Sister Barbe Angiboust, “*We must willingly submit to the good pleasure of God in what has happened to our good Sister. I would regret her loss if I dared, but instead, I pray that the holy will of our great Master may always be done by all of us and in all of us*”³⁷.

Seek and do the will of God in all things!

2. By her deep faith, Louise helps the sisters to construct their spiritual life

(Louise has great love for the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnate Word)
She helps the Sisters to construct their life of faith.

Imitating Christ the Servant

Louise’s fervor encourages the Sisters to move toward the same spiritual heights. She invites them to walk in the footsteps of Christ. She assists them in fixing their attention on the imitation of Christ in the service of persons living in poverty. This means contemplation of “the holy humanity of Our Lord” in order to imitate Him, and to adopt His ways of thinking and acting: His gentleness, His humility, His spirit of service, and His obedience to His Father.

To the Sisters in Angers, she writes: “*We cannot go on except by following Jesus, who was always working and suffering*”³⁸. Louise helps them to draw upon a strong, solid spiritual life, and to develop a sense of interiority. Christ’s attitude during His public life must become their point of reference. Daily meditation on the Gospel will give the Sisters renewed strength, a new power of love. Prayer and meditation on the Word of God are means for self-forgetfulness, which are necessary for growth. God alone brings about conversion of heart.

³⁵ ...

³⁶ ...

³⁷ *SW*, L. 127, p. 82.

³⁸ ...

Trust in Providence

As she herself draws her courage from God, Louise never ceases to encourage the Sisters to have great trust in the guidance of Divine Providence, especially when they have to face the difficulties of each day, accepting whatever comes and abandoning themselves to the love of God in contemplating the Cross of Christ.

To the Sisters in Ussel, she writes, “*Don’t worry if, for a very long time, you do not see things reach the point you may desire; do the best you can in great peace and tranquility to give place to God’s guidance of you, and don’t be concerned about anything else*”³⁹. To Sister Madeleine Mongert: “*Be thankful for the care Divine Providence takes of you by providing you with all that is necessary*”⁴⁰.

The spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity

Louise advises the Sisters to contemplate the Son of God who came into our world, and to ask Him to give them His spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity. To Sister Genevieve Doinel: “*You will learn from Jesus in the crib to practice solid virtue, as He did in His holy humanity, as soon as He came down to earth. It is from His infancy that you will obtain all that you need to become perfect Daughters of Charity. You will do so by entreating Him to grant you His Spirit*”⁴¹.

To the Sisters in Richelieu: “*Gentleness, cordiality, and forbearance must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity, just as humility, simplicity, and love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ, who is perfect charity, is their spirit*”⁴². Louise galvanizes the Sisters, communicates her dynamic force to them, and encourages them to walk in the same direction in communion with one another. To the Sisters in Angers: “*Begin by a true desire to please God, recalling that His Providence has brought you to the place where you are established and has united you so that you can help one another to grow in perfection*”⁴³.

³⁹SW, L. 519, p. 614.

⁴⁰SW, L. 441, p. 75.

⁴¹SW, L. 647, p. 666.

⁴²SW, L. 377, p. 406.

⁴³SW, L. 104b, p. 113.

3. By her witness of community living, Louise leads the sisters to live quality relationships among themselves, with poor persons, and with their collaborators (*Louise's Sisterly love*)

Louise teaches the Sister to live well together and with persons who are poor.

Living well together

Contemplating the Blessed Trinity, Louise encourages the Sisters to live together in the image of the Trinity, in close communion, where each one commits herself with all her faith and love. To the Sisters in Montreuil: *"We must have but one heart, and act with one mind as do the three divine Persons"*⁴⁴.

Louise constantly exhorts the Sisters to live closely united and to be cordial with one another. Cordiality is the kindness that allows one to discover what is good and beautiful in others: *"If we acquire the practice of esteeming our Sisters and of speaking well of them, a spirit of union, gentleness, and true charity will grow in the Company, in keeping with the plan of God when He formed it"*⁴⁵.

Louise encourages them to support one another mutually, with patience, kindness, and indulgence. To the Sisters in Angers: *"If our Sister is depressed or forlorn, if she is too quick or too slow, what in the world do you expect her to do about it? This is part of her character"*⁴⁶. Louise knows the Sisters well and knows that temperaments differ, that moods change and tensions may arise. During one of her absences, she writes to Jeanne Lepeintre, who is replacing her as Sister Servant at the Motherhouse, pointing out to her the precautions to be taken to maintain good sisterly relations: *"I beg you, Sister, if any Sister seems bitter or agitated, to calm her without seeming to do so, so as to maintain gentleness and cordiality"*⁴⁷.

When Françoise Carcireux encounters difficulties with a young Sister Anne, Louise encourages her to overcome her own feelings and to be very attentive and kind to her younger Sister: *"I ask you, dear Sister to be a great consolation to our dear Sister Anne and to anticipate her needs by your support and cordiality. Sometimes the initiation of marks of respect or deference is very helpful in winning hearts"*⁴⁸.

⁴⁴SW, A. 85, p. 771.

⁴⁵SW, A. 74, p. 787.

⁴⁶SW, L. 104b, p. 114.

⁴⁷SW, L. 52, p. 135.

⁴⁸SW, L. 647b, p. 668.

In every situation it is important to learn how to support one another: *"We have to live in great peace and forbearance with the faults of one another"*⁴⁹.

Quality relationships with persons living in poverty

Louise asks for the same quality relationship with persons who are poor: *"I recommend to you and to all our Sisters that dear cordiality and support that are so necessary for the union of perfect Daughters of Charity, gentleness and holy affection for your poor patients, and modesty and reserve in all your actions..."*⁵⁰.

To Sister Barbe Angiboust: *"We are obliged... to carry out patiently the work of God, doing everything without haste; our vocation of servants of the poor calls us to practice the gentleness, humility, and forbearance that we must have... for the poor because they are the members of Jesus Christ and our masters..."*⁵¹.

To Sister Anne Hardemont: *"My dear Sisters, practice great gentleness toward the poor... because they are your masters"*⁵².

To Sister Anne: *"Serve your sick poor in a spirit of gentleness and great compassion, in imitation of Our Lord, who acted that way with the most unfortunate"*⁵³.

To the Sisters in Angers: *"My dear Sisters, be very gentle and courteous toward your poor. You know that they are our masters and that we must love them tenderly and respect them deeply. It is not enough for these maxims to be in our minds; we must bear witness to them by our gentle and charitable care"*⁵⁴.

Quality relationships with all those with whom the Sisters collaborate

When the Sisters collaborate with others, Louise strongly advises them to show respect, gentleness, and true humility in all their least actions and gestures:

To the Sisters in Montreuil: *"Our Sisters must have great respect for the women and girls who have run the hospital for a long time, and manifest great love and cordiality toward them"*⁵⁵.

⁴⁹ SW, L. 187, p. 214.

⁵⁰ SW, ...

⁵¹ SW, L. 424, p. 468.

⁵² SW, L. 200b, p. 209.

⁵³ SW, L. 383, p. 434.

⁵⁴ SW, L. 284b, pp. 320-321.

⁵⁵ SW, A. 85, p. 772.

To the Sisters in Angers: *“Remember always to show great respect to the Fathers of the Poor. Continue to welcome warmly the ladies and gentlemen who visit the hospital... We must welcome cordially those who come to visit the poor”*⁵⁶.

4. Through her experience of Ministry to persons living in poverty, she teaches the sisters to give themselves freelt to serve Christ in the poor (*Louise’s passion for persons who were poor*)

In the first stage, Louise helps the Sisters to make a clear choice.

Why have they come? Louise emphasizes the motives for this ministry. The step taken by the Sisters who are coming to serve poor persons is an act of faith, a response to the Lord’s invitation to give themselves entirely to Him to be entirely given to persons who are poor. For Louise, ministry to persons living in poverty is a special way of committing themselves in depth to evangelical conversion. Louise teaches the Sisters to give their lives for those who are poor, and shows them that service is like an extension of the Redemption, allowing poor persons to take on new life and to become, once again, living human beings.

To Sister Jeanne Lepeintre: *“Isn’t it only reasonable, my dear Sisters, that, since God has honored us by calling us to His service, we should serve Him in the way that pleases Him?”*⁵⁷.

In the second stage, she helps the Sisters to discover poor persons from the inside. Louise knows how to communicate to her Sisters the passion for persons living in poverty. She teaches them to recognize suffering humanity as a continuation of the suffering humanity of Christ. At the school of Louise, the faces of poor persons no longer have the same meaning. The Sisters do not go to them because they feel some attraction but do it to satisfy their suffering hearts, seeing in them the suffering and dying Christ. It is no longer the beauty of the body that calls to them; it is compassion that is unfolding.

To Sister Jeanne-Francoise: *“Please continue serving your masters, His dear members, with devotion, gentleness, and humility, **always seeing God in them**”*⁵⁸. To Sister Claude she writes: *“Please God by serving your masters and His dear members with devotion, gentleness, and humility, and don’t be upset if your senses rebel”*⁵⁹.

⁵⁶SW, L. 284b, p. 321.

⁵⁷SW, L. 319, p. 252.

⁵⁸SW, L. 361, p. 421.

⁵⁹SW, L. 547, p. 81.

In the third stage, Louise stresses the demands of service.

When the Sisters leave for different places more or less distant from Paris, living and working conditions are sometimes difficult. Louise is attentive to writing down regulations corresponding to each mission and particular situation in order to give the Sisters clear points of reference and specific goals aimed at providing a structure for the Sisters and developing their sense of belonging to the Company.

Louise assures the formation of the Sisters so that they may be competent and attentive to the needs of poor persons. She repeats to them what is basic for their vocation: **to be servants, following Christ the Servant.** To Barbe Angiboust: *“The Sisters must recall and possess the qualities of **servants of the poor**, in order to remain faithful to their duty”*⁶⁰.

And, in order to be real servants, they must “clothe themselves with the spirit of Christ, gentle and humble of heart”. Louise stresses the virtue of humility, in imitation of Jesus Christ, who abased himself even to the torture of the Cross. This virtue of humility must be reflected in all the behavior of the Sisters.

To Sister Barbe Angiboust, she points out, *“our vocation of servants of the poor reminds us of the gentleness, humility, and support we must have for others; that we must respect and honor everyone; the poor, because they are the members of Jesus Christ and our masters; the rich, so that they may give us the means of doing good for persons living in poverty”*⁶¹.

She insists on the need for the availability of the servants of the poor and associates it with obedience to God’s will, in imitation of Christ on the Cross. To Sister Turgis, *“Store up a good provision for when Divine Providence calls you elsewhere. Don’t think about when this will happen, but live in detachment”*⁶².

5. By her review of life in the light of the word of God, she teaches the sisters to examine their lives in the sight of God

Louise proposes to the Sisters apostolic and community reviews.

With Louise, the lives of the Sisters are seen in review, not in a methodic and moralistic way, but in the context of events and needs. She asks Vincent if it wouldn’t be a good idea *“to assemble all the Sisters so they can share their thoughts with one another, encourage one*

⁶⁰SW, L. 419, p. 456.

⁶¹SW, L. 424, p. 468.

⁶²SW, L. 182, p. 206.

another, and call attention to any faults that might be committed in the service of the poor, in their dealings with the ladies, and in the area of cordiality with one another"⁶³.

For Louise, there is no spiritual progress outside the time frame of the past, reviewed and unified in the light of the Gospel. By her many letters, Louise guides the Sisters to an understanding of God's will for the Company. She takes the time to listen to what the Sisters are living and to clarify situations in the light of the Gospel. She points out difficulties, analyzes problems, puts failures into perspective, and always considers difficulties as stepping stones to better results.

To Sister Jeanne Lepeintre she writes, "*I praise God with all my heart for the guidance of His Divine Providence on the Company. We have such good reason to adore Him that we should be the most ungrateful people in the world if we failed to entrust ourselves to it. It is Providence alone, my dear Sister that should maintain us and provide for all our needs, particularly those which human prudence can neither foresee nor meet. With all my heart, I hope that all our Sisters will enter totally into these sentiments without ever relying on anything else*"⁶⁴.

6. By her deep Marian devotion, Louise gives Mary to the company as its only mother

Louise invites the Sisters to take Mary as its only Mother and as teacher of the spiritual life.

She passes on her love of Mary to the Sisters, constantly encouraging them to place themselves under the direction of Mary and to model themselves on her hidden life, for Jesus cannot be dissociated from Mary. She stresses the example of Mary's life and virtues, particularly her availability as servant. "*In what we do, let us cast our eyes on those of the Blessed Virgin, and think that the greatest honor we could render her is to imitate her virtues, especially... her humility, since, through her, God did such great things*"⁶⁵.

With Mary Immaculate, Louise believed that we, too, receive our life as a gift, and, like Mary, we are invited to trust and gratitude. That is why, in imitation of Jesus, she constantly repeats to her Sisters, "*Behold your Mother... We must carefully consider the advantages that the Blessed Virgin has enjoyed over all other creatures as a consequence of her*

⁶³SW, L. 128, p. 72.

⁶⁴SW, L. 153, p. 164.

⁶⁵SW, M. 33, p. 785.

Immaculate Conception"⁶⁶. The Sisters are to imitate the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, and learn from her how to love Christ in the person of the poor, and to give Him their love with humility.

"*Pray that the Blessed Virgin may be your only Mother*"⁶⁷. We could say that Louise identified the Company with Saint John, who was entrusted to Mary, and who learned through her the practice of virtue. In 1644, during her pilgrimage to Chartres, Louise chose to make of Mary the one and only Mother of the Company, that she might sustain all the Sisters, present and to come, in remaining faithful to their vocation.

In her report of the pilgrimage, she writes, "*Seeing in the Blessed Virgin the fulfillment of the promises of God to humanity, and seeing the fulfillment of the vow of the Blessed Virgin in the accomplishment of the Mystery of the Incarnation, I asked her for the grace of fidelity for the Company*"⁶⁸.

For twenty-seven years, Louise worked at the formation of the Sisters. She summarized the strong points and the difficulties in a letter she wrote to Sister Marguerite Chétif on January 10, 1660:

*"You surely know that some of our Sisters have come from farther away, but this requires strong characters, who desire the holiness of true Christians, and who want to die to themselves by mortification and a real act of renunciation, which they already made at the time of their holy Baptism, so that the Spirit of Jesus Christ may abide in them and grant them the strength to persevere in this way of life, which is totally spiritual, although they will be employed in exterior works, which appear lowly and despicable in the eyes of the world, but which are glorious in the sight of God and His angels"*⁶⁹.

III.

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE COMPANY, ICON OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

Louise was able to communicate to her Daughters her love of poor persons, a love that had its source in the Heart of Christ. She gave them as a motto the expression of Saint Paul, "*Caritas Christi urget nos*"⁷⁰,

⁶⁶SW, A. 31b, p. 830.

⁶⁷SW, *Spiritual Testament*, p. 835.

⁶⁸SW, L. 111, p. 122.

⁶⁹SW, L. 651, p. 673.

⁷⁰Cf. 2Cor. 5:14.

which she took as example and rule for her whole life and for all the Sisters.

Beginning in 1644, we find on the fragment of sealing wax which she used on her letters, the imprint of the traditional seal of the Company: a heart surrounded by burning flames, on which the Crucified Jesus stands out, with the inscription, "*The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us*". With no hesitation, we can say that this coat of arms is the synthesis of the spiritual journey of Saint Louise: it shows what must remain fundamental for the spiritual life of the Sisters and of the burgeoning Little Company.

Let us consider this coat of arms an icon.

The coat of arms evokes symbols and, in this sense, it encourages openness of heart for a deep interior understanding. It appeals to the understanding of the heart and to the lights of the Holy Spirit, leading us to God's plan for the Company. Let us simply take this symbol of the coat of arms of the Company, with which we are familiar, and look at it with new eyes.

1. The heart

In every language in the world the symbol of the heart designates what is the deepest center. When we consider the Heart of Jesus, we understand what Christ holds as most intimate; this center is filled with the Mystery of God. In this heart reigns the infinite love by which God gives himself. "*Learn of me that I am gentle and humble of heart*"⁷¹ also speaks of the gentleness and humility of the Heart of the Father. God truly loves us, and, in the Heart of Jesus, this love has become irrevocable.

All men and women are called to embrace the mystery of God and His love, by letting themselves be transformed by Him: "*You will joyfully draw water from the fountains of salvation*"⁷². In the Heart of Jesus, burning with love for humanity, full of goodness and compassionate mercy, everyone finds shelter, especially the poorest of the poor. "*We have seen the love God has for us and have believed in it*"⁷³. Close to the heart of Jesus, the human heart learns to understand the meaning of life, the value of the gift of self, and how to unite filial love for God to love for the neighbor.

⁷¹ Mt. 11:29.

⁷² Is. 12:3.

⁷³ 1 Jn. 1:4,16.

Saint Louise tried to delve into this mystery: *“The infinite goodness and wisdom of God leave the soul free to draw on the infinite sources of His love. He is so good that He communicates His prodigious love to all”*⁷⁴.

The fiery red color

Of the Heart of Jesus emphasizes the intensity, depth, and ardor of His love, which gives itself constantly: *“I have come to bring fire on earth and how I wish that it were already enkindled”*⁷⁵. Louise knows that what poor persons need, first of all, is love, that only if we love them deeply will we place ourselves totally at their service, and that it is from the Heart of God that we will draw the dynamic love that will call forth and sustain our availability in their regard. To Sister Madeleine Mongert: *“I desire that all the Sisters be filled with a great love, which will immerse them so sweetly in God and so charitably in the service of the poor”*⁷⁶.

In imitation of Saint Louise, the Daughters of Charity strive to deepen their relationship with the Heart of Jesus, so as to revive in themselves faith in the love of God, by welcoming it ever better in their own lives.

2. The cross

The Cross is the most profound expression of the gift Christ made of His life

Saint Louise invites the Sisters to contemplate Jesus Christ on the Cross, in order to know the limitless love God has for us. The transpierced side of the Redeemer is the source of the love of God. Louise urges the Sisters to draw from this fountain so that they may come to the real knowledge of Jesus Christ, to experience his love more profoundly, and then, to witness it to persons who are poor.

This mystery of infinite love immersed Saint Louise in the most profound adoration: *“The Incarnation of the Son of God is, in accord with His plan from all eternity, for the Redemption of the human race”*⁷⁷. By turning our regard toward the Lord who *“took upon himself our infirmi-*

⁷⁴SW, A, 7, p. 701.

⁷⁵ ...

⁷⁶SW, L, 441, p. 75.

⁷⁷ ...

ties and our burdens"⁷⁸. We become more attentive to the sufferings and needs of poor persons, and our desire to participate in His work of salvation by becoming servants is strengthened. Louise affirms her determination: "*To choose the life of Jesus crucified as model for our lives*"⁷⁹.

Jesus had a special love for those who were poor and identified with them

In the Gospel of the Last Judgment⁸⁰, Jesus expresses clearly that the poor person is himself. He gives himself to be known at the heart of His relationship with persons living in poverty. Louise recalls this frequently: "*We serve Our Lord in the person of those who are poor*"⁸¹ (To Sister Claude Brigide).

Louise invites her daughters to have, in a certain sense, the same experience that Thomas had after the Resurrection, that is, to hear the Risen Christ say to them, "*Put forth your finger and see my hands; put forth your hand, and place it in my side; and be not an unbeliever but a believer*"⁸². Like Thomas, we are called to recognize in every suffering person the wounds of the Risen Christ, His pierced hands, and His wounded heart. And as Thomas cried out, "*My Lord and my God*", before the wounds of the Crucified One, we, too, adopt a new way of "seeing" which is a look of faith, "*The poor are our Lords and masters*".

A look of faith is a gift of God to be welcomed, and a task to be fulfilled. In becoming poor among poor persons, we put ourselves in the disposition of welcoming the gift of faith and of seeing Christ in the person of those who suffer. "*Sisters, you see so much misery that you cannot relieve. God also sees it... Share their trials with them; do all you can to provide them with a little assistance and remain at peace... If you had plenty... your hearts would be troubled to use it while seeing our lords and masters suffering so much*"⁸³.

3. Burning flames

The ardent love of the Heart of Jesus desires greatly to inflame the earth and transform it into a burning bush. The burning flames, like tongues of fire, are one of the great symbols of the presence and action

⁷⁸ Mt. 8:17.

⁷⁹ SW, A. 21b, p. 732.

⁸⁰ Mt. 25.

⁸¹ SW, L. 276, p. 314.

⁸² Jn. 20:27.

⁸³ SW, L. 353, p. 396.

of God in human history. On the day of Pentecost, “*tongues that were said to be tongues of fire*” descended on each of the Apostles⁸⁴.

If fire symbolizes the Divine Presence, the tongues of fire settled above the heads of the Apostles signify the descent of the Spirit of God on them. They symbolize the gift given to each of them to make them capable of proclaiming, with a tongue of fire, the love of God for all persons: they are what must set charity afire in hearts.

How can we not think of that Pentecost Sunday of 1623, when the Spirit of God came to illuminate the dark night in which Louise had found herself for many long months. “*It was God who was teaching me*”, she wrote⁸⁵. Louise’s commitment of her life for persons living in poverty reveals to us that this teaching was, indeed, “*like a tongue that was said to be a tongue of fire*”.

Louise de Marillac was accustomed to make her spiritual retreat between the Ascension and Pentecost, in order to be in the same “*dispositions as the holy Apostles in preparing to receive the Holy Spirit*”⁸⁶, and to let herself be carried away by the splendor of this gift, the burning fire, and to proclaim the Good News to the poor by her words as well as by her actions. “*I entreat the goodness of Our Lord to dispose our souls for the reception of the Holy Spirit so that, burning with the fire of His holy love, you may be consumed in the perfection of that love...*”⁸⁷ (To Sister Anne Hardemont).

For Louise, it is charity that the divine fire enkindles in hearts. Once again, Louise is at the heart of the Gospel revelation: that God is love⁸⁸. He reveals the fullness of His love for humanity in His beloved Son, who gives His life for the salvation of the world and who will make of love – love of God and of the neighbor – the great Commandment entrusted to His disciples. “*It seemed to me that, in order to be faithful to God, we must live in great union with one another. Since the Holy Spirit is the union of the Father and the Son, the life we have freely undertaken must be lived in this great union of hearts... and enable us to bear with one another and to live together with cordiality and gentleness*”⁸⁹.

The Holy Spirit enkindles in us the fire of Divine Love. It is He who transforms our hearts into a furnace of love. “Tongues of fire” burn in the hearts of Daughters of Charity, uniting them in community to serve

⁸⁴ Acts 2:3.

⁸⁵ SW, A. 2, *Light*.

⁸⁶ SW, A. 10, p. 704.

⁸⁷ SW, L. 429, p. 353.

⁸⁸ 1 Jn. 4:8.

⁸⁹ SW, A. 68, p. 768.

poor persons in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity. The fire that burns in the heart of the Company wants to extend to the far corners of the world in order to witness everywhere to the love of Jesus Christ for all those living in poverty.

To conclude with these symbols

The symbols of the Heart of God, the Cross of Jesus, and the tongues of fire present us not only with the essential of the Christian message: the Incarnation, the Passion and Resurrection, and Pentecost, but also the spirituality of the daughters of Charity.

In Saint Louise, reflection on Mary always accompanies her reflection on Christ. In God's loving plan for humanity, she situates Mary fully oriented toward Christ the Redeemer, as His Mother and the Servant of the Lord. She sees Mary in Christ and Christ in Mary. Just as Jesus Crucified gave us Mary as our Mother, Saint Louise gives her Daughters Mary Immaculate as the "Only Mother of the Company"⁹⁰.

In the symbols of the coat of arms of the Company can be seen, as in the background, Mary, the Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church, and Mother of the Company. If the only Rule of the Company is Christ, the only Mother of the Company is Mary.

4. The motto

*"The charity of Jesus Christ crucified **urges us**"* is a powerful expression that indicates a dynamic life force.

It is the charity that urged Jesus to leave the bosom of the Father to manifest His love to us and to detach himself from self, to dispossess himself, to forget himself in order to become available to others. The charity of Jesus is a fire that stirs up the heart. Animated by His love, we are urged to reveal Him and to bear witness to Him.

*"The charity of Jesus Christ **crucified** urges us"* is a powerful expression that indicates a dynamic force of service. Jesus Christ crucified urges us to become, like Him, the last of all and the servant of all. We do not have to look for any way of service other than that of Christ the Servant giving His life for His friends. The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us to take upon ourselves the suffering of persons who are poor, to make their sufferings our sufferings, and to seek together to how to respond to their needs.

⁹⁰SW, *Spiritual Testament*, p. 835.

“The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us” indicates also the community aspect of mission.

Christ has called us and brought us together for the service of persons living in poverty. United in His name, His charity urges us to make of our communities places of sisterly communion for mission. The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us, as members of a community, to serve Christ in those who are poor. This means not only respecting them and responding to their needs, but also considering them as “lords and masters”, recognizing in them the seeds of the Word, and letting ourselves be evangelized by them.

BY WAY OF A FINAL CONCLUSION

I’m going to conclude with a quotation from Sister Evelyne to speak, who today, in the footsteps of Saint Louise, continues to exhort the Daughters of Charity with the same spiritual dynamism.

“We are truly called to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Spirit in order to put into practice in our Provinces and local communities the aspirations, ‘thirsts’, desires for truth and consistency that emerged so clearly and with such unanimity in the course of our General Assembly. Our world expects this of us, this world which is so complex, diversified, and technological. In his social encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI lists the following as conditions of the integral development of the human person: ‘Attention to the spiritual life, a serious consideration of the experiences of trust in God, spiritual fellowship in Christ, reliance upon God’s providence and mercy, love and forgiveness, self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace’ (No. 79)”⁹¹.

⁹¹ Sister Evelyne Franc, *letter of August 15, 2009*.

Animating the Daughters of Charity

A Role of the Director of the Daughters of Charity

Patrick J. Griffin, C.M.

“For his part, the Director has the mission of collaboration with the Visitatrix and her council in the animation, accompaniment and formation of the Sisters of the Province (cf. CDC 75a-b)” (DPD 16, p. 21).

The theme of our Meeting calls together the three roles which the Provincial Director can carry out in a Province of the Daughters of Charity: animation, accompaniment, and formation. When I think of these three elements, I confess that I group them in relation to the Trinity: formation being the work of the Father in creation and sustaining; accompaniment being the work of the Son in the incarnation and communication; and animation being the work of the Holy Spirit in enlivening and guiding. Clearly, one cannot separate these roles so absolutely, but it offers me categories which help to organize my thinking and my imagery. In my presentation, I am focusing upon “animation” and thus the action of the Holy Spirit. This action takes place in both our Christian and Vincentian orientation. I begin by making four introductory points.

Introduction

My first point, and a fundamental one, in carrying out our role as Directors of the Daughters is this: we need to love our Sisters. It is essential that we love those whom we serve. If we do not love them, then our service has no meaning and becomes simply a job for which we are responsible. Few Christians have felt the call to animate Christian communities with the force of St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians 13, he describes the Christian relationship as characterized by love in his powerful and compelling poetic analysis.

Secondly, most people approach these kinds of talks from the position of their strengths. If you had the opportunity to read the presentation of Augustín Martínez from the last international meeting of the Provincial Directors in 2001, you would see that he entitled his talk: “The Provincial Director: ‘Animator’ of the Daughters of Charity”.

His fine presentation focused on an historical Vincentian heritage approach to the question of animation. I recommend it highly. My strength is in the study and analysis of the Scriptures. From this point-of-view, I approach most topics and it will not be different this morning. I will speak about animation beginning from the imagery and perspective of the Scriptures. In this way, I will share with you how I see myself and us in relation to this important role of service which we provide to our Sisters.

A third point which I will make in relation to this role is this: the responsibility of Animation for a Director of the Daughters of Charity is carrying out the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I have suggested this in my opening words today as well as the recollection morning which began our time together. We are not the only ones who carry out this ministry in the Company. It is attributed to everyone from the (DC) Superior General through the Visitatrices to the Sister Servants. I, however, will focus on the responsibility of the Director. Clearly we recognize the presence of the word “anima” in the word “animation” and we know that this refers to the “soul” or the “spirit”. We hear it as not simply talking about the “spiritual life” of the Company or individual Sisters, but the enlivening of the presence of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of the person and Company-prayer, community and apostolate. It captures both the Christian and Vincentian aspects. (One can see the helpful way in which these points are developed for the Sister Servant in the significant article by Fr. Fernando Quintano: “The Sister Servant as Animator: What is she to animate and how can she do this?”, *Echoes*, Dec. 2000 #12, pp. 567-582).

And my final introductory point is this: both Louise and Vincent were excellent at animating their communities. That is no surprise; we only need to look at the various means of communication which they used to stay in touch to find regular examples of animation through their attention, illustrations, corrections, encouragements, and focus on that which is most important. We can ask ourselves: “How can I energize this Sister or this community of Sisters?”. Reading a letter of Louise or a conference of Vincent can offer inspired direction.

When I assumed the role of the Director General of the Daughters of Charity, I must tell you that my first thought was not how much I have to offer but how much I have to learn. That realization has taken deeper hold of me after more than eighteen months in this role. It has been something that I have seen little by little as I grow older, and I presume that it is one of the insights that would be put in the “wisdom” category. When I worked with seminarians and talked to them about becoming good priests, I learned to ask myself what it meant for me to be a good priest and how was I doing in the concrete. When I spoke about homiletics to priests and about the time and effort required to create a good homily, I asked myself how much time and

effort that I gave to this enterprise. When I dealt with University students, I focused on what they would need to know in order to live faithfully in a world of many competing values, and I asked myself how I was doing in that competition. When I was honest with myself, I grew a lot in my own priesthood and Christian response through my ministries.

That is clearly true as we consider our ministry with the Daughters of Charity. To take on this role of animation is to commit ourselves to a deeper involvement in our own spirituality, in our own understanding of the Vincentian charism, in our own dedication to the Congregation and its mission. The Daughters of Charity are committed to their own spirituality, to their charism, to their service of the poor, and to living together in love and respect. Sometimes, they are not perfect in realizing that purpose, but they have a goal. In order to work with them effectively, it has to be our goal as well. We are not outsiders who offer advice but companions on the journey. When we carry out our responsibility as Directors, we take our turn to listen as well as to speak. We learn to be better animators as we learn about ourselves and from one another.

Let me illustrate our responsibility to be animators with three points, each of which recognizes our role of mediating and channeling the Holy Spirit. First, using the imagery of prophecy, I will describe how we can breathe life in the Spirit into individuals and communities through dynamic proclamation; second, using the image of fire, I will describe how we can set hearts ablaze through the urgings to put love into practice; and third, using the imagery of indwelling, I will describe how we can make a home for the Spirit through reflection in the depths of our hearts. Thus, we will treat animation through living, animation through action, and animation through deepened spirituality.

I.

ANIMATING THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. **Breathing Life into the Company: Individuals, Community, Mission**

An exciting passage in the book of the prophet Ezekiel stands out in my mind as capturing the concept of animation. I have reflected on it several times in this regard during the past year. Perhaps it is important in this regard for you as well. It is the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones. I love this vibrant and colorful story:

“The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD and set me in the center of the broad valley. It was filled with bones. He made me walk among them in every direction.

So many lay on the surface of the valley! How dry they were! He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come back to life? 'Lord GOD', I answered, 'you alone know that'. Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Listen! I will make breath enter you so you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow over you, cover you with skin, and put breath into you so you may come to life. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I prophesied as I had been commanded. A sound started up, as I was prophesying, rattling like thunder. The bones came together, bone joining to bone. As I watched, sinews appeared on them, flesh grew over them, skin covered them on top, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me: Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man! Say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: From the four winds come, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life. I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath entered them; they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army. He said to me: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel! They are saying, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off'. Therefore, prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I have spoken; I will do it-oracle of the LORD" (Ezek 37:1-14).

Feel the evocative power of the passage! It is about the gathering of the people Israel after the Babylonian Captivity. From scattered bones comes forth bodies, and from the bodies comes forth a living community, and from the living community comes forth a people with a purpose. The Lord promises not only to gather them together once again, but to give them his spirit-his life. All this happens through the word of the prophet. It is the work of animation literally, and on so many levels.

Notice that the prophet is invited to prophesy three times: once to gather the bones together into bodies, once to fill these bodies with life as a vast army – a community –, and once to set them on a mission as God's people. And all this happens through the invocation of the Spirit!

Does this imagery help us – you and me – to imagine our responsibility of animation in the Company? We prophesy to integrate the individuals so as to help bring the pieces of life and meaning together. We prophesy to form living communities and to deepen the understanding and acceptance of the charism; this gives the direction.

We prophesy to send the community forth dynamically active; this is the mission in the practical order in the world. All this happens through the action of the Holy Spirit. We are called to animate the Vincentian – both spiritual and apostolic – dimension of our Sisters and the Company. We are called to breathe life into our communities by the Word of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is an exciting and powerful ministry, and it gives life to them as to us. It is the role of the Spirit-driven prophet. Our Directory offers some guidance in that regard and we will discuss some of those ways in the days ahead in terms of retreats, days of recollection, pastoral visits, support for Sisters dealing with different issues, and other possibilities.

To prophesy in this context means to speak a powerful and colorful Gospel message which captures the realities of our world and the needs of people. When done well, it lifts and challenges. This proclamation is directed towards those who are called to respond. The ability to speak these compelling words – to prophesy – arises from our careful reflection upon the Word of God and its meaning for our community in the modern world. It emerges from our ability to read the writings and guidance of our Holy Founders, and to hear the way in which they sensed the presence of the Spirit in their time and place. We then are challenged to speak that message with power and clarity to our time and place. It derives from our attention to the promptings of the Church which call us to respond in a particular way and with a certain emphasis. The call to prophesy – to speak powerfully – is in keeping with the ideas suggested in our opening conference as we feel the urging of the Spirit to proclaim the Gospel to those who are poor and for those who are poor. We do that with the animation of our Sisters.

Notice that the role of the prophet – our role – is not simply to bring life to the individual Sisters but to the community as a whole. The Spirit is at work in the community as well as in the individual. And this leads to mission. What no individual can do alone, a community of dedicated women open to the transforming Spirit can do together over time and over distance. We are part of that life-giving, that animating, force.

Vincent speaks to his Sisters about the need to understand their spirit:

“When God created the Company of the Daughters of Charity, He gave it a spirit of its own. It’s the spirit that animates the body. It’s important for Daughters of Charity to know in what this spirit consists, just as it’s important for a person setting out on a journey to know the route to the place where she wants to go. If Daughters of Charity didn’t know their spirit, to what could they devote themselves in a particular way” (VdP. CCD 9, #50 – The Spirit of the Company, February 2, 1653, p. 457).

The mention of the Spirit animating the body puts us in mind of the passage from Ezekiel. It is that Spirit which we are encouraged to animate in our Sisters and in their communities.

This breathing of the Spirit of life into the Company picks up the imagery of Creation where the breath of God calls all good things into being. It picks up the imagery of the Wisdom literature where God's spirit is poured out on the human community in learning how to choose and act wisely. It picks up the imagery of the Annunciation in which Mary's "yes" enables the power of the Spirit to be expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus. The first dimension of animation to which we contribute is a creative one which breathes life into a person and a community and a mission by powerful proclamation and witness. It is a role of animation in line with that of the spirit-filled prophet.

Setting the Company on Fire: Love for God, for the poor and for one another

At Pentecost, one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is portrayed is as tongues of fire. How easy is it to imagine the role of the Holy Spirit in animation using the imagery of fire which consumes and purifies as it enlightens and warms! It sounds like a description of the writings of both Louise and Vincent. Listen to the Pentecost story again:

"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim" (Acts 2:1-4).

The thrill of being filled with the Holy Spirit can figuratively set one on fire with the desire to proclaim the Gospel and the message of Jesus. Animated by the Spirit, the first Christian Community at Pentecost feels driven to make the Gospel known and to begin to offer public witness to the Christian life. From those who had been fearful to be identified with Jesus emerges a courageous and focused community of believers who will dare anything for the spread of the Gospel and its values. This is the message and the story of the Acts of the Apostles. The community was defined by their devotion to: *"The teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers"* (Acts 2:42) which sounds like our communities. The Spirit which animates this Church is most forcefully recognized in the care and concern which the community exercises on behalf of one another.

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need” (Acts 4:32-35).

And this community is zealous for the proclamation of the Christian message. Jesus speaks about this in the Gospel of Luke: *“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!”* (Lk 12:49). Vincent captures this sentiment in his familiar statement: *“If the love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame”*. The message of Jesus is not tame but exciting and meant to engage people in such a way that they want to grasp it and proclaim it and live it. This happens through the action of the Spirit and it brings animation and energy to a community.

Vincent speaks to the confreres passionately in these terms:

“So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love. What do we have to desire but that it may burn and consume everything. My dear confreres, let’s reflect on that, please. It’s true then, that I’m sent not only to love God but to make him loved. It’s not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love him...”

Now, if we’re really called to take the love of God far and near, if we must set nations on fire with it, if our vocation is to go throughout the world to spread this divine fire, if that’s the case, I say, if that’s the case, brothers, how I must burn with this divine fire! How I must be afire with loving those with whom I live and with edifying my own confreres by the exercise of love, and inspiring my dear confreres to practice the acts that proceed from it!” (VdP. CCD 12, #207 – Charity, May 30, 1650, p. 215).

It requires little imagination to see how these words which animate the Congregation of the Mission could have as easily been directed to the Company of the Daughters of Charity-and, in fact, they are in other words and presentations.

Vincent gives three consecutive conferences on the spirit of the Company on February 2, 9, and 24 in 1653 in which he reflects with the Sisters on the nature and exercise of their spirit. A counsel which he offers to the Sisters is that *“you take only the advice of persons capa-*

ble of giving it to you and to whom God has communicated your spirit” (VdP. CCD 9, #50 – The Spirit of the Company. February 2, 1653, p. 460). The clear reference is to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, to us. He tells the Sisters:

“Whoever sees the life of Jesus Christ would see far and away the similarity in the life of a Daughter of Charity... What is the spirit of the Daughters of Charity? It’s the love of Our Lord, Sisters... you should know that it operates in two different ways, one affective; the other effective. Affective love is the tender element of love. You must love Our Lord tenderly and affectionately... Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love” (VdP. CCD 9, #51 – The Spirit of the Company, February 9, 1653, p. 466).

Later in the same conference, he summarizes his ideas:

“I repeat once again, Sisters, that the spirit of the Company consists in the love of Our Lord, love of the persons who are poor, love of one another, humility and simplicity” (VdP. CCD 9, #51 – The Spirit of the Company, February 9, 1653, p. 468).

For Vincent, the spirit of the Company lies in this love which is practiced on so many different levels and spread in so many different ways. It is the life of the Sister:

“Where is the charity of a Sister who has no humility or simplicity, and who doesn’t serve the poor with kindness and love? She’s dead. But if she has these virtues, she’s alive, for that’s the life of her spirit” (VdP. CCD 9, #51 – The Spirit of the Company, February 9, 1653, p. 468).

Again we hear the echo of Ezekiel and the power to call forth life as one animates our Sisters to be filled with the Spirit in responding to their call. Our summons is to faithfulness.

Vincent really comes to eloquence when he speaks to the Sisters of their spirit consisting in this love, listen to him. It is hard to imagine the Sisters not being moved to tears and resolution as they listened:

“In serving person who are poor, we serve Christ. How true, Sisters! You are serving Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there... Go to visit a chain gang, you’ll find God there. Look after those little children, you’ll find God there. How delightful, Sisters! You go into poor homes, but you find God there. Again, Sisters, how delightful! He accepts the services you

do for those sick persons and, as you have said, considers them as done to himself..

God has promised an eternal reward to those who give a cup of water to a poor person; nothing is more true, we can't doubt it; and that's a great source of confidence, for you, Sisters, for if God confers a blessed eternity on those who have given them only a cup of water, what will He not give to a Daughter of Charity who has left everything and makes the gift of herself to serve them all the days of her life? What will He give to her? We can't even imagine! She has reasons to hope that she'll be among those to whom He'll say: 'Come, blessed of my Father, possess the Kingdom which has been prepared for you'".

"...the poor persons assisted by her will be her intercessors before God; they'll come in a crowd ahead of her and say to God: 'My God, this is the Sister who helped us for love of You; my God, this is the Sister who taught us to know You'... 'My God', they'll say, 'this is the Sister who taught me to hope that there was one God in three Persons; I didn't know that. My God, this is the Sister who taught me to hope in You; this is the Sister who taught me Your goodness through her own'. In short, Sisters, that's what the service of the poor will earn for you" (VdP. CCD 9, #24 – Love of Vocation and Assistance to the Poor, February 13, 1646, pp. 199-200).

The animation of this Spirit of love and the salvation of our Sisters is at the heart of our ministry as Provincial Directors. We can hardly hear these words without becoming excited ourselves and eager to get to work. It is that spirit which we communicate to our willing and eager Sisters.

We are invited to set and tend that fire in our responding to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Love is at the heart of the ministry which we exercise and we know how it is so often caught up with the imagery of fire. The motto of the Company draws our attention to the love of Christ which drives the Sisters to service and action. The seal of the Company brings these elements together in a very visual form as it portrays to us a heart which is consumed with fire. Paul, of course, offers the clearest expression of the meaning of love and how it gets played out in the Christian community. He speaks about it as the greatest of the spiritual gifts given by the Spirit:

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love

is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Cor 13:1-8).

Notice always that love is how the Christian life is lived in the practical order. It is the expression of a life which is lived faithfully in following Jesus. The Holy Spirit is that gift which is expressed in the midst of the community by love. In a Trinitarian theology, one can speak of the Holy Spirit as the love which unites Father and Son.

When we consider our role of animation, we can think of the way in which we promote the expression of love in the Company beginning with the call to love God, and then our Sisters, the poor whom we serve and ourselves. In all these ways, we animate and support the efforts in the Company.

2. Embracing the Indwelling Spirit: Seeking wisdom and spiritual depth

The Holy Spirit is often portrayed in the Old Testament as being the bearer of wisdom. In the New Testament, Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you... The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you” (Jn 14:16-17, 26).

The Spirit dwells within the Christian and remains with him and her. She gives support and wisdom to each person; part of our responsibility and privilege is to seek this wisdom and to promote it. This animation which we bring to a community adds depth to ministry and charism.

Our ministry of animation to our Sisters is not confined to encouraging them to active service of the poor – although that is central and their defining characteristic – nor to a lively participation in a personal and communal prayer experience – although this, too, is essential and the source of strengthening for mission. We are particularly invited to help them to seek the depths of their relationship with the Lord. This is achieved through meditation and contemplation. The effort is a significant challenge for us because it requires us to know the

depths ourselves. Abelly speaks about Vincent's encouragement in this regard:

"In this connection Monsieur Vincent said several times, 'The life of a Missionary ought to be the life of a Carthusian in the house, and an apostle in the countryside. The more he cares for his own interior development the more his labors for the spiritual good of others will prosper'" (Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, 2:24).

Last year at the Seminarium for the Sisters involved in formation, I spoke about this concept which connects the Holy Spirit and seeking the depth in spiritual formation. As a starting point, I used the Gospel of the great catch of fish which, obviously, was not an original connection (Pope John Paul II, for example, made the connection in his apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* [2000]). We read in Luke's Gospel:

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch" (Lk 5:1-4).

And the disciples do catch a great number of fish to the points of the nets bursting. This "putting out into the deep" is an invitation to examine our faith with greater intensity, to work on experiencing the Lord more profoundly and less on learning more. The Gospel says that after they put out into the deep and make the great catch, they leave everything to follow Jesus. What could be a better goal or achievement! We are invited to "put out into the deep", to move out of the shallow water where we can stay without effort or change, and move into the fertile but challenging depths. And we are called to help others to make that same transition. It is a journey which our Holy Founders made willingly and confidently. It is a journey which one makes with the help of the Holy Spirit. God has much to teach us; God asks us to recognize our own limitations and reluctance; God wants us to give everything in the service of our ministry for and to him.

The call to preach retreats and organize conferences in which we invite people to find that presence of God deep within them is a life-giving experience both for them and for us. Listen to the powerful way in which Vincent challenges his missionaries to this ministry to give life:

“If you say to a poor lax Missioner, ‘Monsieur, would you please guide this man during his retreat?’. that request will be a torture to him; and if he does not 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 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 a lot of energy. So, the Priests of the Mission, who would formerly 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” (SVdP, CCD 11, #9 – Retreat Ministry, p. 14).

Beneath the not-so-gentle correction, we can hear the ways in which we are invited to animate our Sisters – as ourselves – in the privilege of preaching retreats, recollection, and other homilies. Does the passage from Ezekiel come to mind once again?

In their *Constitutions*, the Daughters emphasize the significance of prayer and particularly meditation:

“The apostolic action of the Daughters of Charity draws its strength from contemplation, following the example of the Son of God who, while remaining intimately united with His Father, often went aside to pray” (C. 21a).

Vincent speaks to the Sisters of the importance of mental prayer. He writes:

“Mental prayer is made in two ways: one by understanding and the other by the will. Prayer of understanding occurs when, after hearing the reading, the mind is reawakened in the presence of God... This is ordinarily called meditation... The other type of prayer is called contemplation. In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing but receive what he gives... Now, in both these ways God imparts many excellent inspirations to His servants. In prayer He enlightens their understanding of many truths incomprehensible to everyone else but those who devote themselves to prayer; it’s there that He inflames the will; lastly, it’s in prayer that He takes possession of hearts and souls” (SVdP. CCD 9, #37 – Mental Prayer, May 31, 1648, p. 330).

When Vincent speaks to the confreres on this topic, he says: *“The interior life is essential; it has to be our aim; if we lack that, we lack everything” (VdP. CCD 12, #198 – “Seeking the Kingdom of God”,*

February 21, 1659. p. 111). The opportunity to collaborate in being forces of animation for the spiritual life of our Sisters is part of our calling. We accompany them as we “put out into the deep” and we are rewarded with the “great catch of fish” which the Lord provides. In drawing closer and closer to the Lord, we become better prepared to leave all and follow him.

II. CONTEXT FOR ANIMATION

Animation can be carried out at all levels. We can be attentive to individual Sisters and their need to respond to the promptings of the Spirit in their particular ministry. We can extend this invitation to the local community and recognize its creative ability to respond to the possibility of life and service together. Sometimes a summons to welcome the Spirit needs to be highlighted. A ministry of animation to the Sister Servants can multiply our efforts as we collaborate with them in carrying out their responsibilities. It can also encompass the Province with the Visitatrix and Council. Attention to the areas of initial and ongoing formation is a ripe concern for the animation of a Province. The summons to be open to the movement of the Spirit and the new ways of accepting those promptings are gifts and blessings.

We can animate our Sisters by our preaching as we take advantage of those privileged moments to share a reflection on God’s Word. This can be extended in our opportunities to preach Days of Recollection and Retreats. We can animate by our writings. Carefully crafted circular letters or conferences shared with our Sisters can offer invitations to respond to the Spirit in new and compelling ways. We can animate by our presence. Pastoral visits and just friendly visits to local communities offer opportunities for informal and formal sharing which makes way for the presence of the Spirit and the realization of animation.

Animation can take place in special ways as we are attentive to the liturgical seasons and the manner in which these times of the year offer special opportunities for hope, for rejoicing and for repentance. The feasts of the year, and particularly of our Vincentian Family, offer wondrous prospects for us to be open to the Spirit and to learn once again who we are and why we do what we do. The yearly retreats are blessed times for our Sisters and they offer the occasion to be renewed in the Spirit and once again energized – that is to say “animated” – for ministry.

We prepare ourselves for carrying out this role of animation by our reflection on the word of God, by our study of the writings of our Holy Founders, by our attention to the writings of the Church, but also by

our attentiveness in ministry towards those who are poor and whom we serve in various ways. What is clear – as has been repeatedly mentioned – is that the call to prepare ourselves for the animation of our Sisters flows from our own growth in the Spirit. In preparing ourselves to be useful to them, we are doing ourselves the most wonderful of favors. We should be grateful for the call to serve our Sisters because it summons us to be more faithful.

Conclusion

At the end of one of his conferences on the spirit of the Company, Vincent prayed for the Sisters, and himself, in this way:

“O Saviour of our souls, Light of the World... You who have formed for Yourself a Company of poor women who serve You in the manner You have taught them. Make them Your instruments, my God, and give them and me, wretched sinner that I am, the grace to carry out all our actions through charity, humility, and simplicity in the assistance of the neighbor” (VdP. CCD 9, #51 – The Spirit of the Company, February 9, 1653, pp. 469-470).

Moved by this sentiment and his conference, Louise asks Vincent:

“Father, I beg you to offer us to God so that we may enter fully into this spirit, and ask Him to forgive us the faults we’ve committed against this same spirit” (VdP. CCD 9, #51 – The Spirit of the Company, February 9, 1653, p. 470).

Both of these good people, whom the Church will recognize for their holiness, acknowledged the need to bring their situation to prayer. That points out to us one of the last items (but which should be first in our list of priorities) which I can mention in our call to animate our Sisters and that is our responsibility to pray for them. Just as we might be the way in which God chooses to answer some of their prayers, they are certainly an answer to some of ours. In praying, we ask that God might enable them (and us) to be filled with the Spirit and animated to live the charism with which we have been blessed.

The Ministry of the Provincial Directors to Elderly Daughters of Charity

Fernando Casado

I was asked by Fr. Patrick J. Griffin to speak on “Ministry with the Elderly Sisters”. The focus of the presentation is the way in which the Provincial Director carries out this ministry, especially with the elderly and sick Sisters of the Province. I was asked to reflect on what Provincial Directors need to know about relating to these Sisters; what would it be helpful for them; and how I approach this ministry?

I have tried to be faithful to what was asked of me, but I have also used some criteria from the Province of Madrid-Saint Vincent where I am Director.

1. Introduction

A human being is uniquely made in the image and likeness of God, with qualities that must constantly be developed, and a series of limitations which are part of human nature. Aging affects us all. Diminishment and decline are inevitable with the passage of time.

The quality of our old age will depend, above all, on our ability to appreciate the meaning and value of this stage of life, as a human person and as a believer. Our final years give us time to slowly review our lives so as to learn to live not only for doing – our activity, our work – but also for be-ing, for contemplation. The value of our lives is not only in our energy and endeavors, but also in our frailty and humility; it lies not only in external growth, but also in interior growth and deepening.

Daughters of Charity, who in Spain frequently live beyond 80, have certain needs which, although present throughout their lives, are felt more deeply and become more apparent in old age: need for security, need for affection and love, need to be valued and esteemed, need to continue to find meaning in their lives, need for hope and need for God.

This final stage of life has to be for us a time of salvation and abundant grace. God continues to accompany us: *“Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save”* (Is 46:4).

2. Presentation for sharing and dialogue

Pastoral care of a community of older Sisters should be creative and dynamic. It is an activity of the Province and of the Church, and it must include planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation. This ministry has to be directed toward the spiritual deepening which is specific to that stage of life, in other words, a spirituality of the “rebirth” about which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. We cannot allow ourselves to stagnate in our old age, but must be born again to a new life brimming over with hope: *“What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (Jn 3:6).

As a Council we must, together with the Sister Servant and domestic council of the local community formed by the elderly Sisters, help each one as she meets Christ every day and rediscovers her baptismal consecration in the Company, to find meaning in Jesus at this moment and in the future, even though she can no longer serve full-time.

As a Council, if we want the care that the elderly Sisters deserve, and which we desire to give them, to be holistic – both corporal and spiritual –, we must offer means that heighten awareness of the importance of attending to both the human and the spiritual dimensions of their lives. The charism of Saint Vincent, which has, from the beginning, moved us to love both affectively and effectively, causes us to care for the Sisters in a way that fully respects them as persons, and which is offered in the Company’s spirit of simplicity, humility, charity... trust, warmth and kindness. Ministering to a community of elderly Sisters cannot be limited to some liturgical celebrations or daily devotions and occasional prayer services. **Rather, it should aim to help them rediscover their vocation and the love they had when they began.**

The lay personnel and the Chaplain who minister in our retirement facilities, as well as Sisters who are physically well and mentally alert, bring strength, hope and the freshness of the Gospel to elderly Sisters, and also show them how to bear with difficulties, sickness and loneliness. They are present to the Sisters in this stage of life, and especially when Sisters are close to death, they help them to pass over into the loving arms of the Father.

In Sisters’ old age, when direct service is no longer possible (service that was sometimes erroneously identified with “being” a Daughter of Charity), the newness and hope of the Gospel must be deeply felt and lived, in order that those years do not become a time of “enforced Christian resignation”. This is the reason we sometimes see a kind of despair arise when Sisters haven’t known how to face this stage of their lives, and haven’t felt supported through **the transition from doing**

to being. We must help each Sister to live this part of her journey with serenity and joy.

- The **Pastoral Care Team** – the Sister Servant, other Sisters of the retirement community, the chaplain or the pastor, and several lay volunteers or staff – should oversee the quality of the liturgical and sacramental celebrations through planning meetings and song practices. It is important to encourage the participation of as many Sisters as possible.

- Explore the significance of the Liturgical Year and its different cycles:

- Pay particular attention to the Lent-Easter and Advent-Christmas seasons;
- Invite speakers and present programs suited to the Sisters’ ages, both in length and in terminology;
- Possibly hold communal celebrations of the sacraments of Penance and of the Anointing of the Sick during the most appropriate liturgical seasons;
- In addition to liturgical celebrations, plan a range of devotional prayers in which the Sisters can participate, such as the rosary, the advent wreath, prayers during the month of May...

- The publications of the Vincentian Family supply reading material which is a source of information, formation and prayer. In addition, Church documents, both diocesan and universal, should be made available to the Sisters. Everything the Pope writes related to the liturgical seasons, or, in increasing importance, his letters, exhortations or encyclicals, should have priority. These writings are usually lengthy and dense and, in using them with the Sisters, we should:

- Be sure that they are read clearly, slowly and for short periods;
- Adapt, summarize or prepare an outline of the material, including the writings of major superiors, if we think that this will help the older Sisters to absorb it;
- Try not to diminish the significance or importance of the original material when we decide not to read the entire text, but adapt it out of sensitivity to aged persons’ attention span and capacity for assimilation.

- In the Provinces of Spain (known in the Company as the “Saint Catherine Group of Belonging”), a special effort has been made over the last three years to involve the elderly Sisters in all steps. **Revitalization and Reorganization** process. These Sisters are made to feel like active participants in the process by means of simple and dynamic

presentations which defuse the anxiety that they can feel when faced with the unknown.

- Another task at this stage of life is to continue to daily discover the importance of human and Christian values in relationships in community, relationships which can have a particular character and intensity in a retirement setting due to the near absence of “active service”.

- Each Sister’s uniqueness and dignity must be respected; the temptation to treat them all the same must be avoided, and we should not fall into using approaches or having expectations suited for children;
- Allow for guidance or correction, done with sensitivity, in regard to certain ways of relating to others and to oneself (self-medication, personal hygiene, and respect for others’ vocational journeys which are different from one’s own);
- Make newspapers – in print or online –, short films, and cultural outings which are brief, relaxing and broadening available to the Sisters insofar as their age and health (physical and mental) permit.

The **Sister Servant** ensures that everyone who takes care of the Sisters has been trained to accept the limitations that are part of old age (in Spain, the Sisters often reach 90, and some 100). She must be empathetic and a good listener. The Sister Servant should help to dispel any doubts or negative attitudes about the human and Christian meaning of this stage of life, and should affirm and support the Sisters’ long years of faith and service. She helps to create an atmosphere of warmth and closeness in the community. In the Madrid-Saint Vincent Province there are six local communities with more than forty elderly Sisters each; this means that a great deal of collaboration and creativity is needed to achieve these aims.

All communities of older Sisters should have a strong sense of **belonging to the local parish** and the opportunity to participate in its life. This linkage should be established even when neither the pastor nor one of his vicars is the regular Chaplain to the Sisters, as is usually the case. The bonds are created through presence, information-sharing and mutual collaboration. Daily Mass in the Sisters’ house should be open to all parishioners who wish to attend, and Sisters who are able to do so should participate in special celebrations at the parish church.

Along with the elderly Sisters we look for ways to express the Vincentian dimension of the life of their local community through participating in charitable fund-raising, such as collecting cancelled stamps and holding bazaars where the handicrafts that the Sisters have done

over the course of a year are displayed. They invite family members, neighbors, parishioners and members of other religious congregations to attend, and the funds they raise both support and publicize the projects of the NGO of the Daughters of Charity and Vincentian confreres of the provinces of Spain (known by the acronym *COVIDEAMVE* in Spanish). They also take part in charitable campaigns sponsored by other groups in the Vincentian Family and by the Church in Spain, particularly two that support significant efforts to relieve poverty: *Manos Unidas* and *Cáritas*.

Lastly, in function of our “pastoral service... of animation and accompaniment, collaborating with the Visitatrix and her Council to promote the Vincentian spirit” (Directory p. 9), we arrange for the annual retreat, “communal and Vincentian in character” (C 21d), for the Sisters who are unable to go elsewhere. The annual retreat is a significant part of the spiritual animation of the Sisters. Our presence, either for the duration of the retreat or for part of it, depends on the collaboration of Vincentians and Daughters who are available and prepared for retreat ministry, and whom we find in each province. I believe, however, that as Provincial Directors we should always be available to give the retreat when there is no one else who is able to do so. In the Spanish provinces the Sisters in the retirement facilities make an annual retreat of five or six days.

Documents of the Church for Consecrated Life

Patrick J. Griffin, C.M.

One of the ways in which the role of the Provincial Director is described in the Statutes of the Daughters of Charity is that:

“The Director and the Formation Commission give special attention to Church documents and their appropriate application” (SDC 56f.).

This instruction is repeated in the “Directory of the Provincial Directors” (#24). The documents of the Church can be a rich source of material for us in our presentations and efforts of formation for our Sisters. There will, of course, be a wide variety of familiarity with these documents among us as well as among the Sisters, but everyone can profit from both an initial and a deeper treatment of these texts. I know that I have.

I will divide my presentation into two parts: first, a brief consideration of what might be treated as documents of the Church; and second, five themes around which one might categorize some of the most important documents.

I.

DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Dealing with formation documents of the Church and how they are useful to us in our Vincentian vocation can be both time-consuming and fascinating. I must tell you that I found reading these documents very interesting and often got caught up in some personal reflection on what they meant for my own formation. When I consider the breadth of the documents which could be placed under the heading of formation documents, I divide them into five groups about which I will speak in summary form.

The first and most important group which I identify is the Bible. Yes, I classify this as the primary and foundational formation document of the Church. It is from the Bible that all the rest of the formation documents get their authority. And the Bible is clearly the document of the Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it was

written in the Church by members of the Church. It is the Church which decides which books are included in the Bible and how passages are to be interpreted. Clearly, the Bible is the first and foremost formation document.

A second grouping of formation documents of the Church would be those texts which are provided for us by the Councils of the Church and the authoritative writings of the Holy Father. Two documents which are essential for our consideration emerge from the Second Vatican Council: the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* (LG, 1965) and the Decree *Perfectae caritatis* (PC, 1965). We will take a brief look at these two documents and what they have to teach us about formation. Regarding documents of the Pope, I will highlight one in particular: the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* by John Paul II (VC, 1996). The documents which I place in this group have a particular authority and place a significant obligation on our attention.

A third group which I would like to single out deals with the particular office in the Church which has responsibility for people like us: the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – although this office has changed its name several times. Many of the documents generated by this office speak directly to us and our formation needs. I highlight a number of these documents in chronological order: “The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life” (1980), “Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes” (1990), “Fraternal Life in Community” (1994), “Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium” (2002), and “The Service of Authority and Obedience” (2008). This last set of documents is the one to which I will give particular attention in the second section of my presentation.

A fourth group of documents which the Church offers us for formation emerges from our own writings. Keeping our eyes focused on the Daughters, we would identify first, their Constitutions and Statutes. This is the carefully written and studied material which most clearly reflects their charism and which captures the Church’s intent for the Company. I would add to this group, the writings of our Founders. Both Louise and Vincent reveal their vision of the Company in their writings and we read these documents profitably for capturing what is most important for particular formation. Lastly, I would include within this group, the particular texts which we have generated through reflection upon our community material and the needs of our time and place. Thus, the “Instruction on the Vows”, the Inter-Assemblies Document, the guides for the Visitatrix and the Provincial Council, on Initial Formation, for the Provincial Treasurer, for the Provincial Directors, and so on. We know that these documents are the product of a careful reflection on who the Daughters of Charity are and who they need to be in order to remain faithful to their charism.

And the last group of documents which I will identify includes those great works generated by members of the Church to help all of us know more clearly how we need to be formed in the image of Jesus. Thus, the “Introduction to the Devout Life”, the “Imitation of Christ”, the “Cloud of Unknowing”, the “Interior Castle”, and so on. Classic works which speak to each age about the need to be formed in Christ.

The point of this listing is to emphasize that the Church offers us numerous documents which contribute to our formation. Some of these are quite familiar to us, and some are less so. In my presentation, I am going to give particular emphasis to the documents generated by the Councils of the Church, the writings of the Pope, and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. These will direct us to some of the best of what the Church has to say about formation from its official stance.

II.

FIVE THEMES FOR CONTEMPORARY CHURCH DOCUMENTS

1. Formation Documents: “*Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*”

A 1990 document was issued by The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, which (as I said) is the Vatican congregation which deals with matters connected with our life. It is called: “Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes”; this topic relates to what we are doing today and these days. The Congregation states its mission and the purpose of this particular document early:

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life... [has the] mission of giving guidance to institutes. This can help them to elaborate their own programs of formation (*ratio*), as they are obliged to do by the general law of the Church. On the other hand, men and women religious have the right to know the position of the Holy See on the present problems of formation and the solutions which it suggests for resolving them... It reminds all of certain requirements of the law with respect to present circumstances and needs (DOFIRI 4).

And it describes those to whom this document is particularly addressed:

“Life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels” – of which religious life is a species – “is a stable form of living by

which faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that having dedicated themselves to his honor, the upbuilding of the Church, and the salvation of the world by a new and special title, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God and, having become an outstanding sign in the Church, they may foretell the heavenly glory” (DOFIRI 7).

This description is filled with many helpful and important distinctions and elements. You may find it interesting to study.

The two areas to which I want to draw attention and to direct your reflection in this document are these:

(1) REASONS FOR ON-GOING FORMATION

67. There are three basic motivations for permanent formation:

- the first arises from the very function of the religious life within the Church. There it plays a very significant charismatic and eschatological role that presumes on the part of religious men and women a special attention to the life of the Spirit, both in the personal history of each one and in the hopes and anxieties of others;
- the second comes from the challenges which arise from the future of the Christian faith in a world that is changing with increased rapidity;
- the third concerns the very life of religious institutes, and especially their future, which depends in part upon the permanent formation of their members.

These points all lead to the observation: “To follow Christ” means that one is always “on the road” – always journeying towards him.

(2) ITS CONTENT

68. Continued formation is a global process of renewal which extends to all aspects of the religious person and to the whole institute itself. It should be carried out, taking into account the fact that its different aspects are inseparable from, and mutually influential in, the life of each religious and every community. The following aspects should be kept in mind:

- life according to the Spirit, or spirituality: this must have primacy;
- participation in the life of the Church;

- doctrinal and professional updating;
- fidelity to the charism of one's institute.

It is helpful to note here the clear and succinct way in which the content of formation in our lives is presented: spirituality, apostolate, training, and the charism. Each of these elements deserves a place in a community's planning for formation.

2. Documents Highlighting the Meaning of Consecrated Life: *Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, and *Vita Consecrata*

There are a number of documents which highlight the meaning and character of consecrated life. Two of the most important come from the Second Vatican Council; one is an excellent document from more recent times. Any reflection which we offer on the type of life to which we are given in the Company and the Congregation can profit from a study of these documents.

a) *Lumen Gentium* (1965)

In Chapter Six of the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (1965), the Second Vatican Council spoke to the nature of consecrated life and reminds its members of their place among the people of God and their particular role in the Church:

Religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him (LG 46).

Note what is being said here. We are reminded of the particular way in which *we model the life of Christ to others in all our ministries and way of living*. We also make the Kingdom of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit known:

The religious state clearly manifests that the Kingdom of God and its needs, in a very special way, are raised above all earthly considerations... it clearly shows all men... the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvelously working in the Church (LG 44).

This sets the stage for many later references in other documents.

b) *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965)

Perfectae caritatis (1965), the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, from Vatican II, built upon the direction set in the related chapter of *Lumen Gentium*. It presented five general principles which were intended to guide the renewal of consecrated life “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church”:

1. Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule. (*Vincent and Louise willingly maintained that Christ is our foundational and guiding rule – Vincent’s “what now, Christ?” expresses this attitude; and both future saints also insisted that we come to know Jesus most fully in our reading of the Scripture*).

2. It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions—all of which make up the patrimony of each institute—be faithfully held in honor. (*Respecting our charism and the particular way in which we follow Christ in his service of the poor is essential to our ministry and community life. It is a wealth which we strive to invite others to share in*).

3. All institutes should share in the life of the Church, adapting as their own and implementing in accordance with their own characteristics the Church’s undertakings and aims in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social. (*Being guided by the needs of the Church and participating in the life of the Church through our prayer and obedience is part of our life. We continue to allow this to guide our liturgy and thinking*).

4. Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men more effectively. (*Responding to the particular needs of our time and adapting our ministries so as to be available and effective in serving the most poor and abandoned continues to enliven our decision-making and assignments. Vincent and Louise were nothing if not clearly attuned to the needs of their times. As inspired by them, we follow this mode of acting*).

5. The purpose of the religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels. It should be constantly kept in mind, therefore, that even the best adjustments made in accordance with the needs of our age will be ineffectual unless they are animated by a renewal of spirit. This must take precedence over even the active

ministry. (*Attempting to understand and live the evangelical counsels in their fullness is a continued goal and effort. Allowing the apostolate to so dominate one's efforts that community and prayer are compromised is contrary to our spirit and source of strength. "Leaving God for God" is a dynamic which works both ways in our life and practice*) (PC 2).

These general principles which were developed in the document guided the renewal of religious life in the past half-century and still must be taken into account as we consider the continued evolution of the Company. They are repeatedly quoted in later Church documents.

c) *Vita Consecrata* (1996)

In the most recent years, the Church document which has had the greatest influence on all thinking on consecrated life, and which is heir to the Vatican II documents cited above, is the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* – the “Consecrated Life”. It is addressed to: “The Bishops and Clergy, Religious Orders and Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, and all the Faithful on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World”. This address really says it all. *Vita Consecrata* is directed to us and is intended to help us reflect on our life and ministry, thus on our formation. It is a very readable document with many helpful insights for us.

There is much in this document that takes on the characteristic of spiritual reading as it attempts to speak to our hearts about who we are as consecrated women and men. It tells us of the importance of our way of life:

The consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it “manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling” and... it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission (VC 3).

Pope John Paul II states:

In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an “undivided” heart (cf. *1 Cor* 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters (VC 1).

Each line of this statement has a powerful invitation for us.

- First of all, the call to follow Christ with an “undivided heart”. The ability to follow Christ completely without looking back, without reservation and without distraction with other concerns is an extraordinary calling. It is to make Christ our “all” and allow him to be the center of our life and action. What a responsibility and gift it is to be able to follow him in this way! And our life choice demands it of us.
- Secondly, the call flows from obedience; we respond in freedom through our obedience to the way in which we have been summoned by the Father and guided by the Spirit. Thus, our vocation is more than simply personal generosity on our part; it is an obedient response to the grace of God alive in our lives and will.
- And thirdly, this call is to serve as Jesus served by leaving everything else behind and placing oneself at the disposal of the Lord and others. The freedom to follow Jesus in this way flows from the unburdening of self from all which would hold us back from genuine service.

Right from the very beginning, and with repeated emphasis on the evangelical counsels and the grace of the Holy Spirit, this document sets a direction for and gives direction to the consecrated life. One is well-rewarded from a careful reading of this text.

Pope John Paul II offers a fervent wish: “I hope that reflection will continue and lead to a deeper understanding of the great gift of the consecrated life in its three aspects of consecration, communion and mission” (VC 13). These three elements focus our attention on dedication of self, communal life, and humble service in the apostolate. Each of these elements is, of course, central to our life and ministry.

3. Documents on the Spiritual Life: *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life (1980)* and *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (2002)*

My intent is to highlight some of the essentials of these documents and to whet your appetite for the manner in which these documents can be profitably read by those and for those in ongoing formation.

a) *The Contemplative Dimension Of Religious Life (1980)*

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life desired to draw up some practical and formative guidelines to encourage the integration of the interior life and activity in institutes of so-called active life. In doing this, it saw the need and the urgency to stress the absolute primacy of life in the Holy Spirit for the contemplative dimension of religious life. The Sacred Congregation describes the contemplative dimension fundamentally as the theological response of faith, hope, and charity, by which the believer opens up to the revelation and communication of the living God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The contemplative dimension is expressed by listening to and meditating on the Word of God; by participating in the divine life transmitted to us in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; by liturgical and personal prayer, by the constant desire for God and the search for his will in events and people; by the conscious participation in his salvific mission; by self-giving to others for the coming of the Kingdom (CDRL 1).

The Sacred Congregation offered some guidelines for Institutes of Active Life.

First among these was the need for the integration of activity and contemplation. Closeness to Christ is essential and prayer was described as the indispensable breath of every contemplative dimension (CDRL 5). Thus, the community could not survive without regular and extended contact with the Lord through prepared prayer.

A second guideline involved renewed attention to life in the Holy Spirit. And this gets expressed in many ways (CDRL 8-14):

- *The Word of God*
- *Centrality of the Eucharist*
- *Renewal in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation*
- *Spiritual direction*
- *The liturgy of the hours*
- *Devotion to the Virgin Mary*
- *An Indispensable personal and community asceticism*

In all of these ways, the role of the Holy Spirit is evident and celebrated in the contemplative efforts of a community.

A third guideline involves community animation. It notes that the religious community is itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation (CDRL 15). Religious need a “place for prayer” in their own

houses, a place where the daily search for an encounter with God, the source of unity in charity, finds constant reminders and support.

A fourth guideline is the need for the contemplative dimension to be developed in ongoing formation (CDRL 17-19).

The document concludes: The more open religious are to the contemplative dimension, the more attentive they will be to the demands of the Kingdom, intensely developing their theological depth (CDRL 30).

b) *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (2002)*

The 2002 document from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "*Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*", comes some five years after *Vita Consecrata* (which we considered earlier) and follows in its footsteps. At the beginning of the current document we read:

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* clearly and profoundly expressed *the Christological and ecclesial dimensions of consecrated life in a Trinitarian theological perspective...* This programmatic document remains the most significant and necessary point of reference guiding the path of fidelity and renewal of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (SAFC 3).

"Starting Afresh with Christ" intended to focus primarily on the spirituality developed in the earlier document from a pastoral point of view.

Listening to the invitation given to the whole Church by John Paul II, consecrated life must clearly start afresh from Christ, contemplating his face, giving preference to the ways of spirituality as life, teaching and pastoral practice (SAFC 19).

Clearly the example of Jesus and his ministry is the starting point for any spirituality of the consecrated life. We can hear the echo of Vincent and Louise which reminds us that Christ is our Rule.

4. Documents on Community Life: "*Fraternal Life in Community*" (1994) and "*The Service of Authority and Obedience*" (2008)

Treating the Consecrated Life necessarily involves one in the issues and values around life in community and how the principles of authority and obedience enter into play. There are two documents to which we can direct our attention in a particular way.

a) *Fraternal Life In Community (1994)*

This document recognizes that many changes have come about in the Church, in society, and in cultures which have influenced the way in which community life has been lived and can be lived. The actual experience and situations of communities today must be taken into account in order to determine the ways in which community life can be adapted and valued. The document begins with a powerful statement:

Born not “of the will of the flesh”, nor from personal attraction, nor from human motives, but “from God” (Jn. 1:13), from a divine vocation and a divine attraction, religious communities are a living sign of the primacy of the love of God who works wonders, and of the love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters as manifested and practiced by Jesus Christ (FLIC 1).

The document sets as its purpose the support of the efforts made by many communities of religious, both men and women, to improve the quality of their community life. It structures its presentation in this fashion (FLIC 7):

- a) *Religious community as gift*
- b) *Religious community as place where we become brothers and sisters*
- c) *Religious community as place and subject of mission*

Using the three images of the Trinity, Jesus with his disciples, and the church at Pentecost, this document emphasizes the love and unity which binds a community together. It recognizes that, at heart, a religious community is the gift of the Spirit.

Within a truly fraternal community, each member has a sense of co-responsibility for the faithfulness of the others; each one contributes to a serene climate of sharing life, of understanding, and of mutual help; each is attentive to the moments of fatigue, suffering, isolation or lack of motivation in others; each offers support to those who are saddened by difficulties and trials (FLIC 57).

Jesus insisted that the greatest sign of his remaining present among us would be the living in fraternal community in mutual love and support. We are recognizable as disciples of Jesus when we live community well.

b) *The Service of Authority and Obedience (2008)*

In this Instruction, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, identifies its intent in the first paragraph:

The consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will, and for this chooses to use every means available that helps one to know it and sustain it while bringing it to fulfillment... *some* are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority (SAO 1).

Placing the values of “authority” and “obedience” within the task of seeking and accomplishing the divine will gives them an attractive and desirable context. This document also places these values within the context of speaking about Jesus as the obedient servant of the Father. The purpose of the document is accomplished in three parts which define authority in its triple service: to the individual persons called to live his/her own consecration (*first part*); to construct fraternal communities (*second part*); and to participate in the common mission (*third part*) (SAO 3). From the beginning, we should note the title of the document which immediately characterizes the exercise of authority and obedience as “service”.

In the presentation of this document, three elements are repeated often. One is listening as a key to authority and obedience. A person needs to be open to the Lord’s direction “when sensing in some way his presence in human intermediaries, such as in the Rule, the superiors, the community, the signs of the times, the expectations of others and, above all, the poor” (SAO 11). Secondly, the role of the Holy Spirit as guide and source of strength is acknowledged; the community is gathered and sustained by the presence of this Spirit. And thirdly, the filial character of obedience in imitation of the life and ministry of Jesus is emphasized. Christ’s entire life was centered around obedience to the will of the Father and accepting his will in all things.

5. Liturgy and Living Documents: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia (2003)*, *Verbum Domini (2010)*, *Porta Fidei (2011)*

These are documents which I identify as focusing our attention particularly on the Eucharist, the Word of God, and daily life.

a) *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003)

Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter on the Eucharist *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) begins with the statement that "the Church draws her life from the Eucharist" (#1) and proceeds to reflect upon the importance of the sacrament of the altar for the Christian Community. It has much to say for us and for our Sisters who maintain that "*The Sisters are conscious of the vital importance of the Eucharist, center of their life and mission and an indispensable meeting each day with Christ and their brothers and sisters... They offer themselves with the Lord Jesus in the memorial of his Pascal Mystery*" (C. 19b-c)

b) *Verbum Domini* (2010)

Pope Benedict's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010) is a recent document, as we know, which invites a study of the Bible. Using the Prologue of John's Gospel as a centering point, Pope Benedict writes in this document on the importance of the Word of God in dialogue with the Church and with us, in the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), in prayer and reflection, and in mission. It is a good document for studying the importance of the Scripture with our Sisters since the Bible is such an important part of our charism. "*In reading and meditating Holy Scripture, the living and efficacious Word, they [the Daughters of Charity] deepen their knowledge of the person of Christ and His attitude toward those who are lowly and oppressed*" (C. 22a).

c) *Porta Fidei* (2011)

Pope Benedict's apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* (2011) proclaims the "year of faith" for October 2012 - November 2013 and invites all believers to a deepening of the great gift of faith. This document quotes the Pauline verse which inspired the motto of the Company ("*Caritas Christi urget nos*" [2 Cor 5:14] in #7) as the Holy Father proclaims that "The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity" (#14). Clearly, we have the encouragement to express faith in action. He invites the Church to be attentive to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" as a tool for providing real support for the faith which we profess; Catholics are encouraged to study and make use of it in this "year of faith". In this regard, he also encourages the study of the documents of Vatican II. Finally, we should note that "Religious communities as well as parish communities, and all ecclesial bodies old and new, are to find a way, during this Year, to make a public profession of the *Credo*" (#8). The clarity of that summons is

compelling for us. Thus, in this document we find numerous encouragements and directions to guide our reflections with the Sisters in the coming year.

Conclusion

It would be easy enough to take all these documents and place them within the divisions of accompaniment, animation, and formation – which are the categories which we are highlighting as the responsibility of a Provincial Director in relation to our Sisters. We know that documents of the Church are generally not easy to read and require some time and interpretation, but they offer a rich resource for Gospel-driven presentations and teaching. In order to do this, we need to be nourished ourselves at the table of wisdom which is provided by the Church.

The Joys and Blessings of Being a Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity

Fergus Kelly, C.M.

It is a privilege to speak to you today. I have been Director of the Daughters of Charity in Britain for eleven years and am very happy, to say a few words to you at this international gathering of Directors. In the year 2001 there was a similar gathering here in the Rue du Bac. Directors from all over the world gathered to share thoughts, prayers and experiences. The Director General, Fr. Quintano and the Mother General, Sister Juana D.C., were here. Father Bob Maloney, our Superior General at that time, addressed us.

My predecessor as Director Fr. Michael McCullagh, gave a talk at that gathering and said in part:

“In Britain we have a constitutional monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. Her husband and consort is Prince Philip. He has no power under the unwritten constitution of Great Britain. He accompanies the Queen on her visits both at home and abroad. Those of us who live, or have lived in Britain, will remember the televised State Opening of Parliament when the Queen, in the full regalia of a monarch – robes, rings, tiara and so forth, gives a speech outlining the plans for legislation for the coming session of the current government. She sits on the throne; on a somewhat smaller and lower throne sits her husband – her consort – Prince Philip. He says nothing – he does nothing – he is present. It is said that sometimes he gives a discreet cough or on other occasions discreetly directs the Queen – with a little elbow pressure – away from pitfalls. He is not a ‘pussycat’ i.e. a wimp – a cipher – a nothing! Media reporters who assume he is a ‘nobody’ have found to their cost, how wrong they were. He can be very forthright. But he is not the monarch. He accepts that that is the position. Maybe the analogy of the Director vis-a-vis the Visitatrice and that of Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth is not entirely inappropriate... maybe a little helpful”.

Paul the apostle does not whine about the job that God asks him to do. This is it! This is it! I did not ask God to make me a Director of the Daughters of Charity. This is what I am now. I have accepted and

enjoyed the “powerless” position for the past eleven years. I have grown to like being Prince Phillip!

In the old Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission – written presumably by St. Vincent – we are told that our first obligation in life is to save our souls. It is not to be a priest or a Vincentian or an Irishman, but to save our souls – personal perfection is No. 1. During our lives, we forget this, as we strive to be a really good teacher/preacher/administrator/director or bursar. However, No. 1 is to save our souls – to be on the inward journey to the centre of our being where Christ is. This is a great challenge but one that can bring me great joy.

In preparing these few words I turned first of all to the current edition of the Constitutions & Statues of the Daughters of Charity. May I remind you: (page 147 Constitution 75a, b) state:

The Provincial Director is a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, who provides for a Province of the Daughters of Charity a service of Vincentian animation and accompaniment in collaboration with the Visitatrice and her Council.

He is appointed by the Superior General and represents him in the exercise of the functions that the proper law of the Company recognises, in particular:

- to promote in the Province, with the Visitatrice and her Council, the Vincentian spirit;
- to be attentive to the formation of the Sisters, most especially of the Sister Servants;
- to participate in the Provincial Council and the Provincial Assembly;
- to visit the local communities;
- to be available to the Sisters who have full liberty to speak with him;
- to grant poverty permissions related to personal goods of the Sisters. As you know,

Statute 56 a, b, and c state:

- a) “The Superior General appoints the Provincial Director for six years after consulting the Visitatrice and her Council and, if necessary, the Sisters of the Province. The Provincial Director may be reappointed, but his term of office may not exceed twelve years – other than in exceptional circumstances”.
- b) “If the needs of the Province require it, the Superior General may, in agreement with the Provincial Director, the Visitatrice and her Council, appoint a Sub-Director”.

- c) "During Council meetings, the Director gives his opinion. This opinion is required for:
- acceptance of a candidate to Postulancy;
 - admission of a postulant to the Seminary;
 - sending on mission of a Seminary Sister;
 - acceptance of a Sister for Vows for the first time;
 - delay for the renewal of vows, whether requested or imposed, and authorisation to renew them after a delay;
 - authorisation for a Sister to live outside a house of the Company;
 - dismissal or readmission of a Sister;
 - use of goods of the Province in important matters".
- d) "The visitations of the Director to the local communities focus specifically on the spiritual and Vincentian aspects of the Sisters' lives. After the visit he makes a report to the Visitatrice and her Council, while safeguarding confidentiality. These visitations are made at least every five years".
- e) "He encourages the Sisters' participation in the pastoral mission of the Church, according to their proper identity".
- f) "The Director and the formation Commission give special attention to Church documents and their appropriate application".

The Provincial Director is in attendance at Provincial Council meetings. He does not vote – even though he participates in discussions. He is passive but not inactive – he is diplomatic but not inert. He coughs occasionally to warn of a perceived danger and he candidly points out possible pitfalls to the Visitatrice and her Council.

That is how I have tried to act over the past eleven years. I am not the Chief Executive Office (C.E.O.) of the British Province of the Daughters of Charity. I am an adviser. I am in a long tradition of Directors which may go back to the 17th century and the time of those three remarkable people – Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac and Anton Portail.

Is it true or is it just part of our received oral tradition? It is said that in the 1620's Vincent sent word that he was seeking priestly volunteers to help him preach parish missions to the poor country people. The response was a resounding zero – ZERO – nothing! How depressed and downhearted he must have felt – no one wanted to join him in a work, he considered important.

And then one evening there was a knock on Vincent's door and outside was a little priest. Vincent already knew Anton Portail and invited him into his house. Anton said he wanted to join Vincent in this project but the problem was that he, Anton, was pathologically shy

and could not preach – he could not climb into a pulpit without perspiring, shivering and shaking. Now if I were Vincent de Paul I think I would have said: “Thank you, Fr. Anton – I will be in touch with you. Don’t call us. We will call you”. And in my mind that would be that.

But as we know, that is not what happened. Vincent told Anton that he had another project with Mademoiselle de Gras – to form poor country girls into servants of the sick poor and he – Vincent – thought that Fr. Anton Portail would be ideal to help Louise. And that is what happened. Anton Portail became the first Director of what was to become the Daughters of Charity. God can use the least obvious characters. He can use Anton, He can use Fergus, He can use you and He does use us. I find that a very consoling thought when I feel inadequate.

It was mid winter in Britain as I prepared this talk, and I decided to do something different. My emphasis will not be on what I say but on your reaction and reflection and prayer today, tonight, or tomorrow. It is often said that we live our lives forward – but understand them backwards! I would like to do a little backward looking and hopefully help each of us to find meaning, healing and a possible way forward.

I have lived all my life in Northern Europe. It is a part of the world where one becomes conscious of the seasons and particularly of the season of winter. For a few minutes I want to pretend that it is in winter in Scotland where I spent some years working with deaf people. But I am not just thinking of the physical winter, but also the personal winter experience – the emotional winter – the spiritual winter.

Winter is not the end as it is often presented, but a part of the cycle of life and an important one at that. Winter is not something that is chosen – it happens to us. Holidays, sabbatical breaks, are all part of our planning – Winter is not. It can vary greatly from year to year, but we still have to live through it. Generally it is a negative experience, and one that we like to pass over. Sometimes the winter will be mild, or very long, very cold, wet and windy and from a vegetative point of view – in the short term it is a full stop – life seems to stop, growth is arrested. Trees shed their leaves, branches dry out, and the life and energy of the tree is drawn down into the heart of the tree and when the tree is felled we can see the dark winter rings and the pale soft summer rings. The tree just stands there and waits for the winter to come and pass. The same holds true for the animals and the birds and even humans.

It is said of a Dutch Communist imprisoned in the Soviet Union Gulags in the 1950's that he was bitter, resentful and constantly angry. He could not understand why he – a model communist – was imprisoned. His fellow prisoners, the Russians, by and large accepted their fate – it was like winter – it happens – ranting and raving would change nothing – don’t argue with the weather. Winter is not the end – it is

part of the cycle of life. It is as essential as summer, but less pleasant, and generally more difficult. But the place where the sun always shines is in the desert!

The Gospel variety of all this may be said to be the Vine dresser pruning the Vine

The Word became Flesh in order to lead us into communion with God – to bridge the gap which separates us, weak and sinful humans, from God. He came to dwell in the womb of Mary, and to dwell in each one of us, and also to act through us and so to give life to others. We are called to participate in the creative and loving activity of God. We have to grow into one another – us and Christ. *“I am the vine; you are the branches...”*. Jesus is one with us. All life flows from Him and through Him, and then to us as the sap gives life to the branches. *“Those who abide in me bear much fruit, because cut off from me you can do nothing...”*. The fruit is the life we are called upon to give to others.

But it is not just we who give life, nor is it just Jesus: it is we and Jesus; Jesus in us and us in Jesus. We cannot distinguish what is of God and what is of us. It is the life of the Spirit flowing through each of us, coloured by our own particular gifts, by who we are and our particular mission. Although working side by side, and in the same ministry, no two of us will leave the same footprints. No two directors of the Daughters of Charity are the same. The munificence of God is giving life in and through us. We give the life of God to each other, and we receive this life from one another. The dwelling of God in us is living and active, as Jesus said to the Samaritan women: *“Whoever drinks from the water of life which Jesus gives will become a source, a spring of living water – of divine life – for others”* (John 4:14).

To be this source of life for others, we need to be cleaned and/or pruned. Our words and gestures must come no longer from our compulsions and our personal needs. We can no longer just live out *our* agenda. We must not allow our lives to be directed by our fears – our need for false praise. Instead our thoughts and actions must flow from the Trinity dwelling in us. Jesus speaks to us of a need for a deep cleansing – a winter experience (?). If we embrace this ‘winter’ the Father will prune all the branches that bear fruit so that they become even more fruitful.

Frequently, it is only when those who are powerful, experience failure, sickness, weakness or loneliness that they discover they are not self-sufficient and all powerful, but learn that they need God and others. Out of their poverty and weakness they then can cry out to God in a new way, and come to discover and know God in a new way – as the God of love and tenderness, full of compassion and goodness.

So much of our work with the poor, the sick, disabled, is not just about “doing good” for them – it is about being healed and changed; perhaps even “**saved**” by those we are serving. They call us to love, to be compassionate, and to learn to trust in God, not in ourselves. Can we communicate that message to the Daughters of Charity whom we serve? It was when Vincent de Paul realised and accepted his own inner poverty that he came to be a really effective servant of the poor. If we will not/cannot take the risk of being poor then I believe we will never be able to walk with those who serve the poor, the Daughters of Charity whom we are called to serve. We will give them *things* but not ourselves.

Accidents, sickness, failures, loss – the death of someone we greatly loved and needed – all sorts of unexpected events – winter – can hurt and wound us and leave us in a state of grief and desolation. We feel empty. Life no longer flows through us – we have lost our energy and enthusiasm, sometimes even all our desires. Like the wounded vine whose branches have been cut off – we have to wait for the new life to flow in us. We are pruned for something new. Before the pruning we were perhaps too taken up with “things to be done” – maybe good things – but we were too busy and had no time for God. Maybe we were like the people in Luke Chapter 14; i.e. they refused the invitation to the wedding feast because they were too occupied.

When we are pruned in this way, we may have feelings of anguish and emptiness. This emptiness can bring forth anger and depression. Sometimes this anger is directed against ourselves rather than at others.

As an aside, may I say that I have in my ministry, come across great anger among religious people, some even wishing to end their lives. For some, life has no meaning or value any more. The pruning is sometimes sudden and unexpected – sometimes it is slow as we get older, less mobile, more forgetful, less busy, the telephone does not ring as often and emails are not as frequent. “I may as well take the bus to Switzerland and finish it all in some euthanasia clinic”.

But Jesus talks also of a more violent pruning – the cutting off of the branches that produce no fruit – they are cut off, gathered up and thrown on to the fire. All that is in me which refuses to follow Jesus and his command of love, and which is all locked up in my selfishness will be cut off and burned. This final burning takes place after our death – and only then are we transformed into God. “*Whoever does not abide in me*”, says Jesus, “*is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned*” (Jn. 15:6).

Of course the important thing is not to wait until our death, but to walk with God today. Walking with God I will try to accept the loss, the grief and the pruning. I will try to live through my winters, so that I can begin to abide with God today. Jesus says: “*If you abide in me,*

and my words abide in you, ask My Father whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn. 15:7-8).

The glory of human beings, of Vincentians and of Daughters of Charity is not to go on doing and producing things; not to build churches or hospitals, or write beautiful books, or create new ideas or give interesting talks – all of which will pass. It is to communicate life – to bring compassion to the suffering – and with Jesus, to transform others – to help them move from inner death and darkness to inner peace, joy and fullness of life.

St. Vincent de Paul had a great love for the blessed apostle – Saul of Tarsus. Paul/Saul spoke of the winter in his Apostleship. In 2 Corinthians 11:24 he speaks of all he had suffered in the name of Jesus. Comparing himself with the false prophets he has met, Paul insists that he is:

“...Better than they with my numerous labours. Better than they in the time spent in prison. The beatings I have received are beyond comparison. How many times have I found myself in danger of death. Five times the Jews sentenced me to thirty nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with a rod, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked and once I spent a night and a day adrift on the high seas. I have been continually in hazard when travelling, because of rivers, because of bandits, because of my fellow Jews, or because of the Pagans; in danger in the city, in the open country, at sea, in danger from false brothers. I have worked and often laboured without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty and starving, cold and without shelter.

Lest I become proud, after so many extraordinary revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a true messenger of Satan, to slap me in the face. Three times I prayed to the Lord that it leave me, but he answered me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness’. Most gladly then would I glory in my infirmities, humiliations, want, persecution: all for Christ. For when I am weak than I am strong” (2 Cor. 11:22-31.)

We must pay attention to the story of Paul when in Galatians 6:14 he says: *“For me I do not wish to take pride in anything, except the cross of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Through him the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”.*

The Irish poet Brendan Kennelly wrote:

*“Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
That always seems about to give in,
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion
Insists that we forever begin”.*

In some degree, we can all relate to some of the feelings and trials described by Paul – but none of us in total. But I like to think that this is not just describing an individual experience, but also something collective – as a religious congregation, or even as a local church.

I hope that in our time here in Paris – while we will consider our personal “winter experiences”, we will be able also to consider that which has been collective as Directors of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul from all over the world.

Winter is a part of life – part of our life cycle – a part of being fruitful, just as the pruning which Jesus alludes to is essential to the eventual production of a harvest to good fruit and sweet wine.

What is your personal winter?

- Failure in a ministry?
- A serious debilitating illness?
- Bouts of depression?
- A feeling of having been betrayed?
- A memory of unfinished business?
- A sadness because of the death of a loved one?
- A feeling of having been misunderstood?
- Sadness/shame of academic failure or not having been given academic opportunity?
- Sexual problems?
- Family problems – addiction, suicide, marriage breakdown, rejection?
- A crisis of faith – doing “holy things” but struggling sometimes to believe in the truth of what I am doing?

What is your sense of a Community winter?

- Houses closed?
- Ministries abandoned?
- Feelings of being used to plug gaps?
- Lack of emotional support – no one to really listen to me at a deep level?
- Feelings of being labelled – previous history?

What is your sense of a winter in the Daughters of Charity?

- There are fewer and fewer D.Cs. in Northern Europe?
- The mean average age grows each year?
- Vocations are few if at all?
- Our sense of direction is sometimes unclear?
- Do we have a future in Britain?

- How can we live with the scandals in the community?
- Lack of voice in our secular society – are we irrelevant?
- As members of the Church we have fewer and fewer young people?

I have been blessed in my years as Director of the DC's. I have laughed and cried. I have sat at the bedside of a ninety eight year old DC. She was in a coma. I said the rosary and when I finished I said "Goodbye Sister keep the faith!". Suddenly she opened her eyes looked directly at me and said "**You** keep the faith..." and then she died. I have sung at jubilees and danced at provincial assemblies. It has been a great eleven years. I am so grateful to God for these years.

We are Vincentians. Vincent lived at a time of great confusion both in church and state. Vincent went into and embraced the winter in the Catholic Church in 17 century France. He did not build sand castles in the air – he lived in the reality of life. He embraced his own personal winter. If we do the same we can see something of how we can be His and how through us He may produce the new Life He wishes to give to all.

If we do that, we will be true Vincentians and good Directors of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked by one of her sisters who had been appointed a superior of a local community what she, the new superior, should do in the new position she was in. Mother Teresa is said to have replied "enjoy it... that is all". That is what I intend to do as Director of the Daughters of Charity in Britain for whatever time I have left – "to enjoy it".

Thank you for listening and as Fr. Michael McCullagh, C.M., would say... "keep it country"!

Closing Mass for Directors of the Daughters of Charity

14 July 2012

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

My brothers In Christ and St. Vincent:

I am grateful to celebrate this final Eucharist with you as our time of prayer, reflection, listening, and learning about your ministry as Directors to the Daughters of Charity. It has been a full two weeks, with a valuable information imparted, and an excellent exchange of ideas. Both have occurred formally and informally. Formally, we have been blessed with well-prepared and insightful presentations by confreres and Daughters of Charity. Informally, we have all gained from the rich experience of sharing experiences and ideas with one another.

As the word Eucharist means “thanksgiving” I offer my thanks to Sister Evelyn Franc, D.C. for her support and assistance, and for the use of the facilities at rue du Bac. Fr. Pat Griffin, Director General, has done outstanding work in planning and organizing this successful meeting. I thank the presenters for their time and effort and for joining us. And I must also thank the many people who made this meeting possible by their work “behind the scenes”, especially the Sisters and staff at rue du Bac for their outstanding service which contributed to this successful meeting.

Today’s readings highlight what it means to embrace our Vincentian charism: a love for God’s poor that is unconditional, and a model of service whose origin and fulfillment is in Jesus Christ. If one read the first reading from Sirach without that frame of reference, one would think these sacred words issued from our Holy Founders: “Do not keep needy eyes waiting... do not aggravate a heart already angry, nor delay in giving to the needy”. The spiritual treasure and common sense wisdom of Vincent and Louise in care for poor are reflected in the Old Testament reading from Sirach: “Give a hearing to the poor, and return their greeting with deference”.

Sirach shows us that from the beginning, God’s lot was with the poor, the “*aniwim*” who were powerless and in need of mercy.

This theme was central to Vincent's vision as he told the first Daughters of Charity "*you have a vocation obliging you to help, without discrimination, all sorts of persons, including women, children, and in general every poor person who needs you*" (St. Vincent, 6 January, 1658, X, Conf. 92). Vincent and Louise knew the secret of sanctity; namely, that God is present in poor and marginalized people. Lack of concern or action on behalf of the poor not only violated their human dignity; it was an offense against God, their creator.

In the Gospel, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is the lesson par excellence in what it means to be a his follower and a bearer of the Vincentian charism. It was central to our founders' spirituality, and it must always be our inspiration and standard for ministry. It is interesting how quickly Peter is repelled by the prospect of Jesus washing his feet, as he sees it as humiliating and degrading. Peter's attitude is representative of the disciples' feelings and symbolic of the human condition. That which requires humbling of oneself is discomfoting. But Jesus stands firm: "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me". And then he explains why: "I have given you a model to follow, so as I have done, you also should do".

As directors of the Daughters of Charity, you must strive to model Jesus and Vincent by your words and actions. Your 'job description' comes from the minds of Vincent and Louise, and is concretized in the Daughters' Constitutions. You are to "promote in the province the Vincentian spirit; to be attentive to sisters' formation; to participate in the provincial council and assembly; and to visit local communities and be available to the Sisters" (C. 77b). These take time, energy, and require a willingness to model the servant leadership of Jesus.

In these weeks, you have learned a more about our founders, gained insight into the identity of the Company, explored canonical questions, and participated in open forums on various relevant topics. All this has occurred in the backdrop of our over-arching theme: "Animating, Accompanying, and Forming Daughters of Charity". As you know, that theme comes from what the Constitutions (C. 77a) charge you to do as the director. So the question now remains: what will you take away from this meeting to help you in your ministry as director?

As you recall, in our opening Eucharist, I asked you to engage in the three "R's": reflect, react, and re-integrate, and to make a resolution in each theme of animation, accompaniment, and formation to improve life for the Daughters of Charity you serve. Now, I ask you to focus on the third "R": re-integrate. To guide you, let me offer a saying attributed to Vincent from the play "Vincent in Heaven" written by a confrere in my home province: In the play, Vincent tells his first followers that "When called to serve, always do that which is practical and possible".

So that is my challenge to each of you today: Do something practical and possible in each area to improve the quality of apostolic and communal life for the Daughters entrusted to your care. Be an animator of unity and good humor; be supportive in accompanying the sisters in all phases of their life journey; and help form Daughters in your care – including those in leadership – in the image and likeness of Jesus, Vincent and Louise in the apostolate and in community.

May this Eucharist unite us with Jesus and with our confreres and Daughters – both living and deceased – who have animated us by their example; accompanied us by their presence; and who by their exemplary lives have formed us to live out the charism Vincent and Louise have bequeathed to us. “I have given you a model to follow, so as I have done, you also should do”.

List of Participants

NAME	DC PROVINCE
1. ADO TELLECHEA, Gregorio	Canarias + Pamplona
2. AMINE, Weldeghebriel Andu	Mozambique
3. ASFAW, Feleke	Ethiopie
4. BELITA, Jimmy Aguilar	Philippines
5. BELLISARIO, Andrew	Los Altos Hills - U.S.A.
6. BONFIM, Manoel Soares da Silva	Fortaleza
7. BOUCHET, Yves	France Nord + Suisse Turquie
8. CAAMAÑO DOMÍNGUEZ, José Ignacio	Barcelona
9. CABALLERO, Amado	Japon
10. CASADO, Fernando	Madrid San Vicente
11. D'AMICO, Roberto	Naples
12. DUARTE ALONSO, Pedro Juan	Argentine + Paraguay
13. EDEM, Michael Imediedu	Nigéria
14. FERREIRA, Luciano da Costa	Portugal
15. GAJŠEK, Rok	Slovènie
16. GAMERO TORRES, Javier Walter	Pérou
17. GARAJ, Jozef	Slovaquie
18. GARCIA ORTIZ, Francisco Javier	Mexique
19. GOMES, Francisco Ermelindo	Belo Horizonte
20. GOMEZ, Néstor	Afrique Centrale
21. GONÇALVES, Carlos César	Recife
22. GONZALEZ LOPEZ, Antonio	Venezuela
23. GUTIERREZ AMARO, Miguel-Jesús	Madagascar
24. GUTIERREZ NAVA, Aarón	Amérique Centrale

NAME	DC PROVINCE
25. HARDJODIRONO, Franciscus	Indonésie
26. JAMIL, Semaan	Proche-Orient + Suisse Turquie
27. JERNEJ, Alexander	Graz-Europe Centrale
28. KELLY, Fergus	Grande Bretagne
29. KOTTIRY, Thomas	Inde du Nord
30. LOPEZ LOPEZ, Francisco Javier	San Sebastián
31. LÓPEZ MASIDE, José María	Sevilla
32. ŁUCYSZYN, Józef	Cracovie
33. MACIAS, L. Fernando	Chili
34. MAŁŻEŃSKI, Kazimierz Grzegorz	Varsovie
35. MANGULU MOBONDA, Jean-Pierre	Haïti
36. MARTÍN ESTEBAN, Teodoro	Granada
37. MAUVAIS, Christian	Afrique du Nord
38. McKENNA, Tom	Sainte Louise - U.S.A.
39. MOKOLO, Désiré	Congo
40. MOLINA SALMERON, Antonio	Madrid Sta. Luisa
41. NOONAN, Mark John	Irlande
42. PACHECO, Victor	Thaïlande
43. PACITTI, Vittorio	Région d'Albanie
44. PASSERINI, Giancarlo	Rome + Sienne
45. PAULINO, Alejandro	Santo Domingo
46. PHAN THAI, Joseph Hoa	Viet Nam
47. PRADO, Manuel	Porto Rico
48. PRAGER, John	Équateur
49. PUDUSSERY, Devasia	Inde du Sud
50. QUERUBÍN MARÍN, Ricardo Antonio	Cali
51. SANTIA, Michelangelo	Turin

NAME	DC PROVINCE
52. SILVA, Raimundo Nonato Cândido	Amazonie
53. ŚLIWIŃSKI, Paweł	Chelmno
54. SPISLA, Euzébio	Curitiba
55. STASIOWSKI, Marcin Marek	Cracovie
56. STERLING, Luis Alfonso	Bogota
57. TYPAMM, Emmanuel	Cameroun
58. VAN AERT, Jan	Province Chinoise
59. VASQUEZ DUQUE, Joel	Bolivie
60. VELASCO, Juan	Gijón
61. VENUTO, Paulo Eustáquio	Rio de Janeiro
62. WALKER, Gilberto	Cuba
63. WILLIAMS, Tim	Australie
64. WITZEL, Georg	Cologne - Pays Bas
65. ZEDDE, Italo	Sardaigne
66. GAY, G. Gregory	Superior General, Rome
67. GRIFFIN, Patrick J.	Director General, Paris

