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SUPERIORE GENERALE

Rome, 22 October 2017
World Mission Sunday

Mission Appeal 2017 “400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism – A call to renew the zeal, passion, and fire for the Missions *Ad Gentes*”

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear brothers,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

My heart is full of joy, enthusiasm, and hope as I write this letter of Mission Appeal to all the confreres around the world on the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism. Providence brought us to this point of history. Providence will lead us into the future.

Let me first express my heartfelt thankfulness for the tremendous witness of love of the members of the Congregation of the Mission toward the missions *Ad Gentes*. This love, commitment, dedication are expressed in different ways:

- by going personally to the missions *Ad Gentes*;
- by deeply committed prayer to accompany the confreres serving in the missions;
- by the openness of the provinces, vice-provinces, and regions to allow confreres to serve in the Missions *Ad Gentes*;
- by a willingness to support financially the foundation of new missions around the world, as well as to help develop and accompany the already existing International Missions in their process toward self-sufficiency.

“If a person dreams alone, a dream remains a dream. If we dream together, the dream becomes a reality”! My dear confreres, in this year 2017, the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, I would like to launch a concrete mission appeal to all the confreres around the world as

a tangible sign and fruit of this “year of grace” for the entire Congregation of the Mission, for the entire Vincentian Family.

My concrete call, appeal, invitation is, as a sign of deep thankfulness for all graces received in the 400-year history of our charism, to send 1% of the members of the Congregation of the Mission to the missions *Ad Gentes*. One percent of the total number of missionaries in the Congregation of the Mission today involves around 30 missionaries. To respond to this call, appeal, invitation, we need a positive response from 30 confreres who would be willing to go to an already existing International Mission or to a new International Mission.

We constantly receive invitations from bishops of different mission countries around the world, expressing pressing needs in the various fields of service that our charism embraces: direct service to the poor, formation, etc. Depending on the number of responses, we will be able to answer some requests and respond to tremendous needs in so many corners of the world. By receiving 30 positive answers in this 400th Anniversary Year, we will be able to:

- reinforce the existing International Missions and
- open new International Missions.

Although the response may come this year, the actual realization of going to one of the missions *Ad Gentes* will materialize in one, two, or maybe three years. This will allow the confrere to have sufficient time to prepare for his new mission and to pass on his present assignment to the confrere replacing him. It also will give provincial, vice-provincial, and regional leadership time to plan and adjust for any changes that need to be made.

- After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer for the missions *Ad Gentes*, please send your letter or email to Rome by 30 November 2017 or again by 20 February 2018, so that we can review requests at our *Tempo Forte* meetings in December 2017 and March 2018.
- Confreres who volunteer should inform their Visitor that they have done so. Later the Superior General will dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
- Your letter should give some background knowledge about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your formation. It should also express any particular interests you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
- Even if you have already written in the past, please make contact again.

Having in mind our present International Missions, as well as future new International Missions, we would like to ask the confrere about his availability:

- immediately in 2018;
- in 2018, later in the year (please specify from what month); or
- in 2019 (please specify from what month).

Providence brought us to this point in history. Providence will lead us into the future.

Presentation of our current International Missions

At this point, I would like to present our current International Missions, two of which, by the tremendous generosity of specific provinces now come under their direct accompaniment. These two are the International Missions in Benin and the Solomon Islands. The Province of Poland will accompany Benin. The Provinces of Oceania and Indonesia will accompany the Solomon Islands. The other International Missions are: Alaska-USA, El Alto-Bolivia, Cochabamba-Bolivia, Beni-Bolivia, Punta Arenas-Chile, Tefé-Brazil, Angola, Chad, Tunisia, and Papua New Guinea.

Angola

The International Mission of Angola in Lombe is part of the Archdiocese of Malanje, which has only ten diocesan priests. Of its 24 parishes and missions, only 10 have a priest. In the others, there is a religious community, or just some laity. The mission is in a very poor location (90% of the population live in rural areas). Illiteracy is almost 90% in the adult population. There is little participation of men and young people in the life of communities and very little perseverance. There is a high rate of pregnancy among young girls. Diseases, such as malaria, claim many lives annually, especially those of children.

We collaborate in different ways. Our main concern is to include and form the laity and the religious who reside in our mission. Our ministry involves visits to the communities, formation of the laity, pastoral work with children, collaboration on the Archdiocesan Biblical Commission, spiritual direction in the Archdiocesan Seminary, retreats to religious, classes for aspirants to different women's congregations, classes for the Missionary Sisters of Saint John the Baptist, accompaniment of the Branches of the Vincentian Family (especially the Daughters of Charity, SSVP, MISEVI, AMM, VMY).

The present superior is returning to his province in January and the other confrere will remain alone. Therefore, there is an urgent need for one or two more missionaries. There are vocations, but work needs to be done on Vincentian vocations, so the third missionary could accompany vocations and support other works.

Benin

The International Mission was established in 2012 as a joint mission of the General Council and the Province of Poland. It began in a very remote and rural area of Benin, almost at the center of the country. Until recently, there were three missionaries, but now there are only two, so they

urgently are awaiting at least one more missionary. Their main ministry is pastoral work, formation of the clergy, and assisting all the branches of the Vincentian Family.

Besides the tremendous growth of the pastoral work of this mission, the confreres were able to establish a number of Basic Christian Communities. Most of these include educational infrastructure, schools, and dispensaries. Some of the Vincentian Family's branches are growing in Benin and there are also some religious congregations who share our spiritual heritage and are part of our Family. The confreres are doing their best to strengthen the already existing branches of our Family and to found those not currently present. There is a need for more missionaries. The Benin Mission will pass to the Polish Province in January 2018.

Chad

Chad is one of the poorest countries in Africa and the world. Our mission there started in 2011, as a joint venture between the Curia and COVIAM. It began in a very remote area of Chad, in the parish church at Bebalem, where celebrations were held under a very big tree. Thanks to the efforts made by the confreres, a big new church has been built. At Bebalem, the Daughters of Charity work closely with our confreres for the good of the poor. Last year, the Chad Mission started to expand and grow with a new missionary presence in Moundou.

We are ministering to extremely poor people at Bebalem, a very big parish with around 38 outstations. At Moundou, we are engaged in the ministry of formation of young people, the minor seminary.

There is a great need for more missionaries in Chad. Recently, two other dioceses, N'Djaména and Doba, have asked for our presence, mainly for the formation of their clergy.

Tunisia

The Tunisia International Mission officially began in September 2012. The mission started at "La Goullette," very close to Tunis. This mission has known many missionaries. Some did not last long for this mission is quite different. Tunisia is an Islamic country. Christians are very few and hidden.

In La Goullette, as well as in Sousse, we have parishes entrusted to us, but our parishioners are principally foreigners, more than 98% are either students coming from the rest of Africa, workers for different agencies, or tourists. There are some other ministries like the direct service to the poor through Caritas or chaplaincy to the Christian prisoners, always foreigners. Therefore, the Tunisia mission's ministries are parish, prison chaplaincy, coordination of the Diocesan Caritas, chaplaincy to various female religious congregations.

The Tunisia Mission is one International Mission in two places, La Goullette and Sousse, with two missionaries in each. There is one canonical house with a single superior.

Bolivia

The Missions of El Alto: Italaque and Moco-moco.

In 2018, we will celebrate 25 years of work among the Aymara indigenous peoples and some Quechua communities. The mission is located in arid and cold mountainous terrain, serving 56 communities in Moco-Moco, and 31 in Italaque. All of them are scattered and difficult to access. In many of these communities, the young leave and the elderly remain. Only the population of Moco-moco and some of its communities is experiencing a rebound thanks to the trade that reaches them.

Building communities of faith has always been the main pastoral challenge with visits to the communities and work with catechists. It is imperative to celebrate the Eucharist and form people for the sacraments. Pastoral work is very diversified: biblical circles, pre-sacramental courses, formation of catechists, pastoral work with families, preparation for feasts, formation of children and young people in groups. There are also programs promoting education, nutrition, health, and social welfare.

What will happen in the future? The two missionaries have been working there for almost ten years. No one has volunteered for this mission, perhaps for fear of height and geographical conditions. Good health and physical stamina are required, but, above all, a strong missionary spirit whose moral and spiritual witness commits them to continuity to everything already undertaken. The diocese does not have enough priests to take over this area.

The Mission of Cochabamba

In 2009, the diocese entrusted us with a parish on the fringes of the city of Cochabamba. The current pastor and superior has been there from the foundation. Almost all the missionaries who served there were from the Province of Chile, for it had been entrusted with the care of this mission. The community needs at least one more missionary.

The parish was in an unfortunate state. Constant and dedicated work has transformed the face of this mission. It has two distinct areas. One is rural highlands with populations at the same level as the Moco-Moco and Italaque Missions. The priests visit and evangelize 22 communities. In many of these, a small Christian community is just beginning to be established. The work is arduous. The population of 5000 to 6000 people is of the Quechua ethnic group. Many already understand Spanish, but it is still necessary to know and speak Quechua in order to nourish the faith of the people. The other is a “marginal city.” These are settlements or colonies of workers, who moved to the area because they were provided land or housing by the company for which they work or by

the government. There are seven chapels and more are needed to care for the 8000 to 8500 inhabitants who speak Quechua and Castilian.

Some existing associations are being promoted, and some of the Vincentian Family. It is typical pastoral ministry in a missionary parish. The priests think that it can be turned over to the bishop for some diocesan priest, but the bishop believes that what has been achieved would be lost with the danger of the parish becoming a sacramental market. The people are very poor and in great need of religious formation, but it is unknown where the intense population growth will lead. It could be used as a vocation center and host the priests of the other two missions in Bolivia.

The Mission of Beni

The Daughters of Charity had been in this mission for 68 years. The Province of Peru sent a missionary to study its possibilities and conditions. There are now two Vincentian missionaries, who await one or two more missionaries to establish this community fully. The bishop asked the priests to take care of "Kateri," part of a larger project, EPARU (Rural Pastoral Team), run for some 30 years by the Daughters of Charity. Today it is headed by a "Teachers' Council" trained to form Christian leaders to serve the indigenous communities throughout the diocese.

Kateri is a "semi-boarding school" for middle school children. It is an educational center in the middle of the selva. The climate is hot and humid, typically tropical. The mission will be to visit the communities bordering the rivers, all of which are navigable. The trip from the episcopal seat to Kateri takes three days on the boat acquired by the Daughters of Charity for pastoral ministry. Speedboat can shorten the trip to eight or nine hours. Most of the indigenous groups are semi-nomadic. This is a difficult mission, even though all the communities speak and understand Spanish. The missionaries also collaborate with the diocese and in the formation and pastoral ministry of EPARU in harmony with the Lay Team and the Daughters of Charity.

This mission is beginning and much is expected of it. The two area bishops and some of the priests express their hope that the missionaries will encourage not only the native peoples, but also the priests themselves, with their spirituality and missionary strength so necessary to help the incipient Diocese of Beni grow.

Brazil

The Prelature of Tefé is located in the heart of the Amazon rainforest with 264,669 square kilometers and 197,000 inhabitants. The seat of the Prelature is 36 hours from the state capital by ship. It is an immense region with many locomotion and communication challenges.

We are responsible for a parish on the outskirts of Tefé that has three communities. One of them is already the result of our presence. It is an area of urban invasion with approximately 930 families. This new community was named Saint Vincent to mark the 400th anniversary of his

charism. Soon the bishop will hand over to our care a new mission area with 30 riverside communities and three indigenous villages. The headquarters of the mission does not have a priestly presence. A community of sisters have lived there for nine years, but they will leave in January 2018. There are many evangelical churches. Our people live almost abandoned ecclesiastically.

Our dreams and desires are: leadership training, implantation of new branches of the Vincentian Family (VMY, SSVP, AIC), development of new ecclesial communities, promotion of emerging vocational groups, pastoral ministry for the indigenous peoples, and prioritizing youth.

Chile

Punta Arenas was established in 2013 as an International Mission entrusted to the care of the Province of Chile. It is made up of two centers: the parish of San Miguel, which has three missionaries and is hoping for a fourth; and the distant “Isla Porvenir” with two parishes that are large in area, but small in population. The difficult thing about this mission is the weather. The cold and the wind mean that in the “severe months,” normal pastoral action is almost impossible, leaving only three or four months available. Pastoral work is slow, from person to person, reduced to collaborating on various issues with the diocese: care of the sick, vocation ministry, associations and movements in the parish, and helping elderly pastors.

Work on the island is arduous, not only because of its precariousness, but also because of the need to travel to very remote places (some 400 kilometers away). Some scandals in the local Church have created a strong distrust for priests. Therefore, much care is required, especially in dealing with children and young people. The Mission is young and difficult. It needs strengthening and consolidation.

United States

The Alaska mission ministers to Spanish-speakers in the Archdiocese of Anchorage and, as resources allow, outreach to those who speak Spanish in the Dioceses of Fairbanks and Juneau. The mission is rooted in the parish of the Co-Cathedral in Anchorage, where the confreres are pastor and vicar, serving both English and Spanish populations. The mission needs bilingual men (Spanish and English) who have driver's licenses, robust health, good professional and personal boundaries, and are willing to suffer in a harsh climate to serve the poor.

The Co-Cathedral is the home church of the largest Hispanic community in Alaska. Outside of Anchorage, one confrere travels every month to Kodiak Island to attend to the spiritual needs of the Hispanic faithful. In the Diocese of Fairbanks, the mission outreach supplies a priest for 12 consecutive days. This priest works in collaboration with the Cathedral's pastor to meet the Hispanic community's needs. Father Andrew Bellisario's appointment as Bishop of Juneau reduces us to two confreres. This makes it difficult to run all the outreach ministries we already

have begun. The Mission in Fairbanks is 400 miles away from the community and in winter is accessible only by airplane. Kodiak Island is accessible only by airplane and often the weather disrupts travel plans.

As more confreres who speak English and Spanish come to the mission, the outreach will extend to Hispanic communities in places like Dutch Harbor and Juneau, both of which are accessible only by airplane.

Papua New Guinea

The International Mission in Papua New Guinea began in 2001. The population of PNG is around eight million. Considered a Christian nation, its Catholics number around two million. The Church in PNG is comparatively young, facing many challenges. It needs the help of the missionaries to grow and develop.

The Vincentians are engaged in two important ministries: the spiritual formation of the diocesan seminarians at Holy Spirit Seminary to which we have contributed substantially since 2001 and pastoral care of the faithful at Saint Michel's Parish since 2006. Both are located in Bomana. We also will be taking up responsibility for parishes/missions in other dioceses.

The confreres working in PNG would like to have more members. There are many possibilities for evangelization and social development. Anybody with full commitment and willing to face challenges is most welcome to join our efforts in PNG.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands' mission began in 1992. The population is around 700,000. A predominantly Christian country, the Catholic population constitutes around 23% of it. The Solomon Islands' church is comparatively young, facing many challenges. It needs the help of the missionaries to grow and develop.

The Vincentians are engaged in two important ministries in the Solomon Islands: spiritual and intellectual formation of the diocesan seminarians in Holy Name of Mary Seminary at Tenaru, Honiara, and pastoral care of the faithful at the Red Beach parish. For many years, the Vincentians have contributed substantially to the formation of good priests for the three dioceses of the Solomon Islands. Besides staffing and administering the seminary, which caters to diocesan seminarians, we also started a formation program for candidates to the Congregation. We already have four priests ordained as Vincentians from the Solomon Islands for the Province of Oceania.

The mission is celebrating its silver jubilee of foundation this year. The General Council has decided to put in place a new administrative arrangement. It reached an agreement with the Provinces of Indonesia and Oceania, which will be operative by the end of this year. The Province

of Indonesia will staff Holy Name of Mary Seminary and, in partnership with the Province of Oceania, the Parish of the Good Shepherd. However, the mission will remain open to confreres from other provinces who volunteer their services.

When we speak of the International Missions, we know so well the tremendous challenges that the missions *Ad Gentes* present in the area of material needs too. Over the years, the VSO (Vincentian Solidarity Office) has received contributions from individual confreres, community houses, and provinces. Many provinces contribute monies for micro projects, as well as matching funds for other projects, all of which go into the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. There is an urgency to help new and struggling missions to obtain infrastructure, that is, community and formation houses, vehicles, and equipment needed to carry out their ministries.

Let me share one project on this subject that has been evolving for the past 20 years and recently came to its final stage: building a common Theologate of the Congregation of the Mission for Africa in Enugu, Nigeria. COVIAM, accompanied by the General Curia, decided to build the new Theology Seminary by the month of July 2019. The present seminary house is already overcrowded, and too small to accommodate all the students that the provinces and missions want to send to the program. The provinces and missions plan to construct another residence alongside the seminary house in Enugu. The new residence will have four floors and include 50 bedrooms, a large multi-purpose hall, three study rooms, four community rooms, and a laundry.

The cost of the entire building is 630,000 USD. So far, we have collected 200,000 USD, but still need another 430,000 USD. Can this project become a reality in July 2019 as tangible fruit of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism?

With all simplicity, even as I express my deepest gratitude for the material and financial help individual confreres, community houses, and provinces are showing in such concrete ways, I would like to encourage you to increase your previous contributions. In addition, I hope that those who, in the past, might not have helped could consider a contribution. Please do so at this time for the new Theology Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission in Enugu, Nigeria. As the donations arrive, we will keep updating you. God willing it will become a reality in July 2019.

How to contribute to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund

Contributions from individuals and provincial houses

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

The bank will not accept checks with any other name.

Checks should be sent to:

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

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

In every case:

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

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the rest of the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family intercede for us!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General