

JMV in the Third Millennium An Experience of and for Young People

by Gladys Abi-Saïd
International President of JMV
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JMV, a divine wish becomes an everyday reality...

An experience of young people... An evolution...

It was in 1830, on the rue du Bac, where a story,
a journey began... (the apparitions of the Virgin)
A glance from heaven... (Jesus and Mary)
A listener on earth... (Catherine)
Meditation on the ever-present and living word... (Magnificat)
Acceptance of a mission... (the poor, incarnation of Jesus)
This is what changed the life of many people...
(meetings of committed young people)

1. What is our history? What characterizes us?

“The Children of Mary,” “Marian Youth,” “Vincentian Marian Youth” are three names for the same International Association. The **Vincentian Marian Youth** was born after the apparitions of Mary, in order to create a place where youth in difficulty live, share and are educated. The Association of the Sons and Daughters of Mary is known internationally by the name **Vincentian Marian Youth**. This Association was born thanks to Mary’s desire that was transmitted to St. Catherine Labouré: *I want an Association for the young to be founded ... where I will pour out many graces.*

Catherine Labouré and Jean-Marie Aladel played the role of founders and distributors of the message (like you do today). The first steps were taken by a group in Beaune, in the Diocese of Dijon, after the approbation of the movement by Pope Pius XI allowed the message to be spread throughout the world. By 1999 the Association already existed in 49 countries and the International Statutes* had been approved by Pope John Paul II.

Today, after the first Assembly in Rome in 2000, we have a President and an International Council as well as an International Secretariat in Madrid. Rue du Bac continues to be our place of pilgrimage.

* In *Vincentiana* 43 (1999) 89-97.

JMV affirms its **being** and **doing** within four distinctive characteristics (International Statutes, article 5):

* **Ecclesial:** because the members, from baptism, are to follow Christ and become part of his people, the Church, to commit themselves to live and work, actively and responsibly, in communion with other apostolic forces in the Church, with their pastors, in the dioceses and parishes where they are established.

* **Lay:** because it is an Association mainly composed of young lay people. It is registered with the Pontifical Council for the Laity within the framework of Associations of the Faithful (cf. Canons 298-329). This lay characteristic guides the members to be an active and transforming presence in the midst of the world, particularly among the poor, a setting where building the Kingdom takes place.

* **Marian:** The members of the Association discover Mary in the gospel, as a model for all believers, accepting in faith the presence of God in her Son Jesus and listening to and acting on his word. Likewise, they see in Mary the inspiration that helps them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk through life in faith and with an effective charity that generates justice.

* **Vincentian:** Through its birth in the Family of St. Vincent de Paul, JMV is inspired by the Vincentian charism and makes evangelization and service of the poor distinctive characteristics of its presence in the Church. Its members commit themselves to be missionaries, as a requirement of its own charism, witnessing to the love of Christ by word and work, always ready to exercise their apostolic work among young men and women and among the poorest.

2. What is the present reality of JMV?

We are a young International Association committed to youth, the world, the Church and the poor. Currently there are 150,000 members on four continents:

√ **Europe:** birthplace of the Association, where it first took root. Here the Association has more tradition and experience and also has the challenge of continuing to give life to the Association. It was in Europe that the “post-conciliar renewal” of JMV began and it is present in 10 countries with about 33,000 members.

√ **Africa:** Here the Association is still taking its first steps with very young groups filled with vitality in spite of the situation of poverty and lack of resources. We are in 18 countries with some 6000 members. JMV will soon begin in Chad and Angola.

√ **Asia:** Numerous young communities are full of life. Even though they are limited, they have great devotion to Mary. They are the hope of our Association being present in nine countries having about 16,000 members.

√ **Americas:** Not only a hope for the Church but also for our Association. Here JMV has developed a very interesting common pathway. The members have a Council and their own continental bulletin. They get together once every three years for a meeting-mission. JMV is present in 26 countries with some 20,000 members.

√ **Oceania:** The Association is not yet present on this continent. We are counting on you to establish it, for even if there are other branches of our family present there working effectively, we feel that each branch has its own richness to offer.

So therefore... the things of God emerge: this sprouted, grew, became strong and today some **63 countries** have received the message and plan of Mary. JMV continues to transmit a message that guides, strengthens and makes our baptismal commitment more solid, a commitment that calls us to grow and strengthen our roots.

3. How do we work? What are our hopes? ... (our mission)

The **group or local center** is the basic element that gives life to the charism and spirit of JMV. It is here that we are enlivened, thanks to weekly meetings, and where we invite the youth to follow a process of formation and maturation in the faith, to experience living Christian community, to have a spiritual experience and gradually commit to an apostolic task according to the Vincentian Charism. We live all of this by means of social interaction, retreats and meetings at the diocesan, provincial, regional, national and international levels.

Each group is guided by an adult advisor (normally a Vincentian priest, Daughter of Charity, adult JMV member, or another religious or secular priest). The Advisor is a person that neither walks ahead nor behind, but walks along side the youth, who learns from them and with them, offering them tools and experiences that allow them to be agents of their own history thereby becoming responsible adult Christians.

Each Center has its own **Local Council**, responsible for creatively achieving the four fundamental **goals** of the Association (International Statutes, Article 9):

- Offer a Christian and holistic **formation**, particularly to adolescents and youth — according to the Blessed Virgin's request — so they will

come to live a solid faith in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor.

- Promote holistic formation sessions, catechetical classes, congresses, assemblies, publications and other means allowing the young person to grow as a person and as a Christian.
- Living and praying, like Mary, in simplicity and humility taking on the **spirituality of the Magnificat**.

JMV spirituality is characterized by happiness, prayer and **joyfilled celebrations of faith**. Inspired by Mary's song:

- Joyfully living and thanking God for the marvels of his salvation;
- Making a clear option for God, as the only Absolute;
- Placing oneself among the poor and most impoverished, as the means through which we make effective our commitment to God;
- Taking on a lifestyle proper to a member of JMV, expressed through the four characteristic virtues of our Association: humility or a spirit of collaboration, obedience or seeking the will of God, charity or solidarity with the poor, and purity or transparency of life.

Consecration to Christ through Mary as a means to explain our baptismal consecration and to make our lives a total gift to Christ, through service and evangelizing the poor, in choosing Mary as model... occupies a very important place in our spirituality:

- Creating, animating and maintaining the **missionary spirit** within the Association, especially by means of mission experiences, particularly among the poorest and the youth. JMV offers youth the possibility of serving the poor and other young people in their own countries and being in solidarity with them on the continental and international levels. Some most interesting experiences are those of the four permanent missionary communities that JMV Spain has in Bolivia, Honduras, Mozambique and La Linea (Spain) as well as the **popular missions**.
- Forming Association members on the personal as well as community levels so as to **work apostolically** with other pastoral agents, according to the directives of the universal and local Church.

We try to:

- Be a living presence in our parishes and dioceses,
- Work in union with other branches of the Vincentian Family (especially the CM and DC, but also, more and more, with the AIC, AMM, MISEVI. and the SSVdP) on service projects. Currently we

have a common project: *The Globalization of Charity: the Fight Against Hunger*.

- Sowing the seeds of our presence in other areas: youth councils, accompanying youth in difficulty, leisure activities, summer camps, and socio-political projects, etc.

4. How are we organized? What is our administration like?

In order to assure its dynamism and make decisions, the JMV Association works with **Councils** within different organizational lines (center, diocesan, provincial or regional, national and international).

4.1. International Level

- The Director General of the Association is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. He exercises this function through the intermediary of a Subdirector General named from the Congregation of the Mission.
- **The General Assembly** is convoked at least every five years and is the highest decision-making organization in JMV. One of its objectives is to elect the International President and the lay members of the International Council from among the young representatives of the different countries. It must also suggest revisions to the Statutes, review the financial status of the Association and promote the spiritual vitality and ministry of the Association.
- The life of the Association is animated at the international level by the **International Council**. This Council is composed of the Director General, the Subdirector General, a General Councillor of the Daughters of Charity, the Lay President and four lay members of the Association elected by the General Assembly. These are the “Major Superiors” (cf. Canon 318) of the Association. The International Council meets several times a year. It is convoked and presided over by the Lay President or, in exceptional cases, the Director General. It meets in order to:
 1. Suggest reflection themes on important aspects of the life and activities of the Association.
 2. Assure communication with and among the National Associations through letters, visits and other means.
 3. Evaluate the carrying out of projects that were approved by the previous General Assembly and prepare for the following General Assembly.

4. Study and approve the preliminary budget and the annual financial balance sheet presented by the International Secretariat.

- Since 1 September 1999, there has been a **International Secretariat** that is located in Madrid (Spain). It is composed of five members whose principal commitment is to form the executive staff of the International Council. Its specific functions consist of: promoting the vitality of the Association, being a link, an avenue of sharing and information between the different National Associations, a means of deepening its own identity, facilitating the means that allow the Association to succeed in its objectives in the different countries. At this time, the members of the International Secretariat are Ana Maria Escaño (Philippines), Gloria Santillán (Mexico), Ivanildo Dantas (Brazil), Fr. Pedro Castillo (Venezuela) and Sr. Asunción García (Spain). They efficiently direct other administrative functions:
 - Communications and maintaining the general archives;
 - Administration and maintaining relations with the Vincentian Family;
 - Follow-up on the commitments from the 1st General Assembly;
 - Animation, formation and expansion of the Association;
 - Develop a monthly international bulletin;
 - Oversee the web site, which serves as a place for all our members to meet, share and receive formation information, and which we invite them to use frequently: www.secretariadojmv.org

4.2. National level

- In each country there is a National Council, composed of a Priest Advisor and a Sister Delegate (normally a Vincentian Priest and a Daughter of Charity), a National President and several lay members.
- The major leadership and decision-making body is the National Assembly that elects the National President and the lay members of the Council. It establishes work models and makes the most important decisions.
- In each country there must be a National Secretariat, or at least a person principally dedicated to the leadership of the Association.
- There are also smaller Councils: Regional or Provincial, Diocesan and Local.

5. What do we seek in the JMV?

- To cultivate interior attitudes, appreciation of silence, creative prayer and in this way integrate Faith-Life;
- To live centered on the Word of God, thanks to personal and community prayer, the Eucharist and the other sacraments;
- To value and promote discernment and spiritual accompaniment;
- To be “contemplatives in action”;
- To live attitudes of simplicity, humility, closeness, respect and listening toward others;
- To undertake the defense of the rights of the most disadvantaged and move forward in fostering justice;
- To involve young people in concrete projects of **service** and **evangelization** that respond to human, social and spiritual attention and development for the least fortunate:
 - Being a presence and support, in collaboration with the different branches of the Vincentian Family, especially the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity;
 - Trying to create Permanent Service Communities, where young people move forward a project in favor of a neglected community, living together for specific periods;
 - Nourishing the adult groups of the Vincentian Family with young people who at their culmination opt to live the Vincentian charism through them: in the consecrated life (as missionaries or sisters) or in the lay option (MISEVI, AIC, SSVdP, or AMM).

There are many service choices in every country:

- a) Catechesis, liturgical animation, visiting the sick, and other lay ministries...
- b) Workshops for disadvantaged groups: women, immigrants, youth with social problems, street children...
- c) Homes for the elderly, help to psychiatric patients, people with drug addiction, prisoners, and school tutors;
- d) Working in marginalized neighborhoods;
- e) Providing support in rural areas.

6. How do we manage financially?

- With monthly, quarterly or annual dues;
- With the constant seeking of funding to help offset the costs of the secretariats, meetings, travel, and formation courses;
- With the financial support of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity on the local, national and international levels;

- With the voluntary help of the young people in the centers and the secretariats.

7. What do we dream?

During the first JMV International Assembly, the young people and the Advisors together dreamed about the future for JMV. In this way we suggested the **challenges** that we assumed as a project and commitment, as a **dream** to realize for each member of the Association and for each JMV **community**. In this third millennium, we would like to:

1. Have youth groups in every country where the Vincentian Family is present;
2. Work together, with other branches of the Vincentian Family in the world, at concrete projects of **evangelization** and the integral human **development** of the poor;
3. Enrich our formation programs more and more so as to respond to the needs and interests of today's young people;
4. Use modern means of communication creatively for the service of the poor and channel our energies in favor of solving the problems of justice and peace;
5. Become an Association that prays with strength and beauty;
6. Be witnesses of love and hope.

We have many dreams in order to cultivate the land that God has confided to us:

1. That we count on the young people who commit themselves to ongoing formation throughout their lives and that each National Council develop a **holistic formation process** that fosters the JMV identity and the importance of young people;
2. That, more and more, the members of JMV exercise an **apostolate with other young people** and that the Association grows through the creation of new groups so that JMV is present in all countries where the Vincentian Family is established;
3. That the members of JMV have a global perspective and that its vision of the world is evermore international. This will allow us to open ourselves to other realities that would enrich us, to share experiences and materials, and to create a single family living globalization in a positive way;
4. That the missionary dimension be encouraged and strengthened in the countries so that we can take on the mission *ad gentes* more readily and rely on available young people who are mobile and willing to offer their services as volunteers where God and the poor have need of them;

5. That, along with other branches of our Vincentian Family, we work on **concrete projects for evangelization** and the integral human **promotion** of the poor in order to be a transforming force;
6. That the members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity become more and more aware of their role as **advisors**, **accompaniers** and **formators** of young people and that they open their communities to share the richness of the charism with the new generations.

In order to succeed in achieving these dreams, we ourselves must begin to live in truth and identify more and more with Jesus and his mission.

We must make the Message of Rue du Bac a message for today and tomorrow, not of the past. Today the Virgin confides the responsibility of accompanying young people to each Daughter of Charity as she did to Catherine, and to each Vincentian Missionary as she did to Fr. Aladel.

(Translation: TRANSLATION CENTER – DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, Paris)