

Lay Vincentian Missionariess (MISEVI)

*by Eva Villar
International President of MISEVI
and Felipe Nieto, C.M.
International Team MISEVI
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MISEVI is the youngest member of the Vincentian Family. It is the most recent, but also the smallest and is still taking its first steps. We all have our eyes fixed on it because we are hoping for great things for the poor of this world. It is a little overwhelming to try and present it before this assembly as the International Coordinating Team is well aware of its successes and failures. They know that it is affectionately protected by all the other branches of the Vincentian Family, but is lacking in experience. They know its origins, identity, goals, and its structure and that it strives to accomplish its tasks and address the challenges that the General Assembly confided to it. It is from this beginning that I speak to you now.

1. A Little History

At the dawn of the Millennium there was the first International Assembly of MISEVI at Los Molinos (Madrid); an event for the JMV who saw their dream become reality: international level coordination of an Association born out of the missionary interest of some young people who were very concerned with missionary experience. Let us not go too fast. We are going to try to present MISEVI to you.

It all began in 1984. The JMV had such a strong missionary desire that a group of Spanish youth had some missionary experiences *ad gentes* during vacation months. Since then we have tried to send an average of 30 young people temporarily. Three years later, in 1987, some of these young people began to stay on the missions for several years as laity, with their commitments renewable every two years, and devote themselves to various pastoral works with the Vincentian Family. Beginning in 1992, some of the young people expressed their desire to seek an alternative that would help them continue to follow their option for the mission as laity with some stability and bonds with the Vincentian Family.

From that moment on the idea that the experience of missionary life could not be reduced to a phase of youth, but rather, could be a stable form of living the lay vocation was affirmed. This discovery had to find ways of being sustained and continuing into the future. There were many consultations, dialogues and

meetings and, little by little, the idea came: create an association in the Vincentian Family that would sustain, help, support and provide coordination of the presence and work of the laity in the missions *ad gentes*.

MISEVI truly began to function during a missionary session in El Cisne on 18 October 1997. There, young people committed themselves to work for the Association so that it could take charge of coordinating the laity that were already on the missions for two years — to support them on the human, spiritual and economic levels. During this meeting, we named an Administration Committee that immediately began working on the first task: preparing the First General Assembly of MISEVI.

It is also necessary to speak about the first steps of MISEVI in new countries: the Dominican Republic, Italy, Honduras ... all of this, thanks to the Spanish-American JMV meetings every three years, and making the first points of contact and collaboration with MISEVI International.

The first General Assembly was an important moment in the life of the Association. We clarified identity, set up some lines of action for the future, appointed a Coordinating Team, developed a Final Document and contacted the various entities that were already functioning. All of this bore fruit in a truly international MISEVI.

For this entire process, we want to stress the valuable help and unconditional support of Fr. Robert Maloney, successor to Vincent de Paul. His presence, welcome, encouragement and advice have succeeded in setting up a juridical structure for the Association so as to extend the Vincentian Family in the world.

2. Identity

MISEVI is an international association, canonically erected as a public association of the faithful, as an entirely autonomous juridical person, seeking to develop an organized presence of laity in missionary works *ad gentes*, especially within the missions of the Vincentian Family.

We can find its principal identifying characteristics in its documents, but also in the formation process and the little “struggles” with the process of expansion in which we find ourselves. To that effect, the following identifying characteristics are clear and well defined:

- It is a lay association: by baptism we were chosen by God and invited to accept salvation. Each one of us has the opportunity to assess (cf., Lk 1:34-35) and choose this call from God who lives in us (1 Pt 1:23) in

establishing an intimate communion with Christ so as to be filled with him and commit ourselves to the building of the Kingdom.

- Its primary goal is to animate the “missionary” and to develop, by encouraging, supporting and coordinating, the presence and missionary work of the laity in the missions *ad gentes*.
- It is united to the Vincentian Family, to its charism and its spirituality. At each moment it seeks contact and collaboration on the local as well as on the international level.
- It is a “second” membership: the members of MISEVI continue to belong to their Vincentian associations of origin, and they are the ones who send them to the missions.
- It has its own spirituality: centered on Jesus Christ, we make the choice of the mission among the poorest, beginning with insertion in the community and with a specific personal plan.

3. Goal

Among all the documents, presentations, commentaries and suggestions along the way, the best way of expressing the true goal of MISEVI is to say: we want to encourage, facilitate, sustain and help coordinate the presence of the missionary work of Vincentian laity and their reinsertion into their place of origin after the missionary work. In accomplishing the actions indicated in the second paragraph of our Statutes, we propose these means to attain our objective, the presence and work of lay Vincentians in the missionary field:

3.1. To encourage:

- a) the participation of the members of MISEVI in the missionary activities carried out by the various Vincentian and Church associations, especially those at the local level, both at the place of origin of those sent to the missions and the places of their missionary service;
- b) the creation of activities that seek to awaken or develop a lay missionary vocation in the various Vincentian associations.

3.2. To facilitate development of the missionary dimension

- a) By being a channel for the meeting between lay Vincentians who have a missionary vocation and the missions *ad gentes* confided to or animated by the Vincentian Family;

- b) By collaborating with Vincentian Associations in the formation of lay Vincentians preparing to go to the mission *ad gentes*;
- c) By seeking to establish contacts between persons or small groups who are beginning to develop their missionary life with Vincentian Associations having more experience;
- c) By bringing together all programs and means of formation in order to diffuse them among all the associations of the Vincentian Family in the different countries, trying to foster a spirit of welcome, collaboration and mutual support at the concrete moment of planning this formation

3.3. To sustain: Our desire is to sustain each of the members, who, according to different life choices, are part of the association; to sustain the communities where they are inserted, the associations of origin that sent them, as well as other Vincentian associations. It is always necessary to look for new ways of support and to be creative in this, but in the least, we would like to offer:

- Human support
- Moral support
- Spiritual support
- Economic support

3.4. To coordinate:

- a) By being a means of coordination of all the lay missionaries, contacting them, inviting them, and welcoming those who desire to participate in the Association and offering support to those who are part of the Vincentian Family but decide not to participate in the Association;
- b) By sending information to the members of the various ongoing missionary communities about the projects and activities of other communities where members of the Association work;
- c) By sustaining the active participation of its members within the coordinating structures of the Vincentian Family that is present in the mission places or by encouraging them to create them where they do not exist.

4. Structure

4.1. Members:

MISEVI is a Vincentian Association of **secondary membership**. This means that it is open to all lay Vincentians in order to deeply live out the specific nature of a missionary from within his or her own charism while

wanting to grow in the missionary dimension without severing membership to the Vincentian Association of origin.

Taking into account this special characteristic, MISEVI has established four types of membership:

- **Members with full rights:** lay Vincentians who have spent two or more years in the mission and renew their commitment to the association every three years;
- **Honorary members:** ex-members with full rights with more than five years of not being reincorporated in the mission and who support MISEVI from within their current situation;
- **Members in formation:** youth or adults from various Vincentian Associations preparing to be sent or are in their period of mission presence and want to learn about MISEVI in view of becoming part of it;
- **Collaborative members:** all who wish to cooperate with MISEVI through commitments of prayer, service, economic contributions, etc.

4.2. The Coordinating Team

The Coordinating Team has the management responsibility of the Association. They are the “Senior Officials” of the Association on the international level (cf. Canon 318). They act in accord with the Statutes, the internal law, the Spirituality Document and the directives from the General Assemblies. In a particular way, the team must take care of pastoral and community plan of the missionary communities. The team is composed of the President, three lay members, a Daughter of Charity, a Priest of the Congregation of the Mission and two representatives from lay associations of the Vincentian Family having members in MISEVI. At least three of them must reside in a place close to the permanent Secretariat.

The President is chosen by the General Assembly by secret vote of the members with full rights. There must be an absolute majority on the first two ballots; if no person wins, there is a third ballot for the two who have obtained the most votes. The one to be elected is the one obtaining the most votes (cf. Canon 119). The election of the President is confirmed by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The role of the President includes:

- Animate and coordinate the life of the Association;
- Represent the Association in civil and ecclesiastical situations;
- Convoke meetings of the Coordinating team and prepare the agenda;

- Determine the distribution of tasks of the secretary, treasurer and council within the Coordinating Team after consulting the members of the team;
- Maintain contacts with and accompany missionary communities;
- Maintain relationships with other branches of the Vincentian Family and other missionary movements;
- Seek contact with close family members of those who are sent;
- Follow up the reintegration of members returning from the missions.

The Coordinating Team takes on the functions of secretary, treasurer and councilors, according to the decision of the President.

The Coordinating Team generally meets at least three times a year. The President convokes the meetings and sets the agenda. There must be two-thirds of the members present at the first meeting and half at the second.

After having presented the chosen candidates, the General Assembly names, by three successive votes, three lay members for the Coordinating Team. All members with full rights in the Association or any member of the General Assembly can be elected.

The Priest of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughter of Charity are named by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The two representatives of the Vincentian Associations are named by their own members according to the indications of the Coordinating Team.

All members of the Coordinating Team are elected or named for four years and their terms can be renewed for a maximum of two other terms. The time dedicated to this service will not be counted toward losing the condition of a member with full rights. The duration of terms of the Daughter of Charity and the Priest of the Congregation of the Mission will be flexible. They will be adapted to the times fixed for other coordination roles that they might hold in the Vincentian Family, with a maximum of 12 consecutive years.

4.3. The General Assembly

The organization of MISEVI is established around the General Assembly, as the supreme authority in participation and governance of the Association. This takes place every four years to revise the workings of the association, give direction on the plan of action for the future and study the balance sheets and budgets.

The Coordinating Team convokes the General Assembly and the following assist at it:

- Ex-officio: the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Coordinating Team;
- Elected: a missionary with full rights who represents those working in each missionary region or diocese;
- Elected: once the results of the previous elections are known, five members with full rights are chosen among those from a single college composed of all members with full rights who have not been previously elected;
- Elected: a representative of honorary members, another of the collaborative members and another of the members in formation.

5. Projects

All MISEVI's projects for 2002 are small steps to achieve the general objective of this Association that was created to sustain, help, support and provide coordination of the lay presence and work in the missions *ad gentes* confided to or animated by the Vincentian Family.

The MISEVI Coordinating Team, elected at the First MISEVI General Assembly in January 2001, suggested that during the period 2001-2004, they work to convert the challenges of the Final Document from the First Assembly into reality. The plan of this year, 2002, is a stage of this journey.

5.1. To deepen, apply and make known the important documents of MISEVI

- We believe that the Spirituality Document is a basic tool for announcing, living and celebrating the gospel on the personal and community levels. For this, a simple edition of the Spirituality Document is coming out and soon we will have a wide distribution among the members of the Association, as well as others interested in the missionary theme.
- We are in the process of revising the Internal Law. We already have edited the 5th text that includes the latest consultations and it will be sent soon to the participants of the First International Assembly to be

voted upon and definitively approved. We hope to be able to publish and distribute it at the beginning of November 2002.

- We have decided that the rich contents of the First Assembly presentations could be deepened. We want to reflect on them in order to concretize them, accept them and diffuse them as catechesis. With this in mind, we are in the process of working on a methodology and of looking for collaborators who can work in making them more catechetical.

5.2. To be creative and spread the spirit of MISEVI, to foster the necessary drive so that, in tune internationally, we will open doors to new realities and facilitate the incorporation of new members.

- Little by little we are going to make contact with leaders of National and International branches of the Vincentian Family. Sometimes, despite these means, this communication is slow and responses are slow in coming, but we do not lose contact.
- We know that communication between countries is important and necessary so we have also created a web site. This includes a section on formation that we try to update frequently and we are hoping to present it in several languages. For this reason, we created a forum section, but it is used little. Sometimes it is faster and more convenient to send the information directly by e-mail to those who are interested.
- We maintain regular e-mail correspondence with the various countries where MISEVI is emerging in order to accompany their progress: Ireland, Taiwan, USA, Italy, Mexico, Columbia, Chili, Santo Domingo, Argentina, Mozambique, and the Philippines. We are in the process of doing all we can to enter into communication with South Africa and Indonesia.
- We want to reinforce the presence of MISEVI through communication, especially with Vincentians.

5.3. To seek to create a solid, stable structure that promotes sustaining the social funds that are required for the retirement and cases of illness of our missionaries.

- On this point, we are only working with the missionaries who belong to MISEVI Spain and with offers from a national plan. We have studied several possibilities for this and have chosen to create an

individual savings plan for each missionary with more than five years of service on the mission. We are looking for different possibilities to supply this fund, beginning with commitments from relatives, friends and interested parties.

5.4. To facilitate and channel means of formation

- A commission of the Team was charged with creating a draft copy that has already been presented. During this year we want to do a broad consultation of members with full rights for some corrections and additions and to approve the definitive Plan of Formation. It remains to resolve the study of how to diffuse it and implement it.
- We have also put various articles on our web site that can be used for formation, reflection and dialogue. One can give an opinion of these in the forum section on the MISEVI web site.

6. Conclusion

MISEVI was born small but it has been called to become great. On the table of each team meeting, but especially in our hearts, there are three words that are the hope and dream for all of us: **formation, expansion and consolidation**. There are two and a half years ahead of us to get there.

This is like the mustard seed. It requires a lot of care, time, devotion, work and effort for it to grow. May it become a little tree where all lay Vincentian missionaries, those past and future, those now and always, can find good branches where they can build their nests and feel that they have roots and protection. There is need of support at all levels along the way as well as the generous dedication of some to accompany all with much enthusiasm, as if it were a dream that we all believe will some day come true.

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