



# Vincentian Solidarity Office

## November 2016 Bulletin



### School Improvement in India

Our North and South Indian Provinces are taking to heart St. Vincent's concept of the "poor being our masters," in a new project involving almost all of their schools. Between them, the two provinces have started and operate 32 schools with almost 24,000 students (K through secondary school age) in numerous states in India.

The schools mostly serve children from deeply impoverished tribal families and villages. Most of the schools teach students in English (instead of local dialects), offering them and their villages the best opportunity to escape poverty and prosper in India's modern economy.



*Our confreres discussing their schools at a meeting in Bangalore*



*Secondary school students at a Vincentian school in Brahmapur*

Our Indian confreres run their schools well, but the dignity of the children they serve has compelled them to make their schools even better. And so they are collaborating in evaluating all 10 schools of the South Indian Province and 15 of the 22 schools of the North Indian Province. They aim to identify and

carry out ways to enhance student achievement and school administration, and better instill Vincentian values in students.



*Primary school students at a Vincentian school in Kethepally*



*Members of our two Indian Provinces and the VSO meet in Bangalore to launch the school improvement project*

advocate for a more just government investment in schooling for tribal and "low caste" peoples.

The VSO is working with a foundation (which requests to remain anonymous), and using monies from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund, to finance the school improvement project for our two Indian Provinces.

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## Farewell and Thanks to Fr. Miles



It is with some sadness but also deep gratitude, that the VSO says goodbye to its Executive Director, Fr. Miles Heinen, C.M. Fr. Miles led the VSO from March of 2009 until September of 2016, when he departed for Rome to begin his new work as an Assistant General of our Congregation.

We know Fr. Miles as a man untiring in his service to the poor, and one who never misses Community prayer, has a simple lifestyle, maintains a gentle and kind disposition, generously applies his many talents and administrative acumen to promote the Gospel, and finds true joy in being a member of St. Vincent's "little company." We wish Fr. Miles well in his new assignment! We anticipate announcing the confrere who will replace him at the VSO in our next bulletin.

## Lay Formation in Sangrelaya

One of the challenges in doing missionary work, is to protect indigenous cultures while evangelizing peoples and promoting their socioeconomic development. Cultural values and practices are essential to personal identity and communal ties.

Confreres in the Honduran Mission of our Slovakian Province, have made preservation of culture central to their evangelization work with the Garífuna people. Our confreres serve the Garífuna in the San Pedro y San Pablo Parish in the town of Sangrelaya in northeastern Honduras. There are twelve remote Garífuna communities in the parish. These communities suffer from extensive poverty, inadequate schooling, and a prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse. Family dysfunction, depression, and crime are common. Our confreres determined that centuries of hegemonic catechesis imposing European customs and traditions have led to a cultural tension and misidentification of the Garífuna. This has weakened their family and communal bonds, and made them vulnerable to social problems.

Responding to this assessment, our confreres designed and implemented a multiyear formation project for the Garífuna called *Wabawagon* ("Always Forward"). The project integrates religious formation and recovery of indigenous culture. The project has included workshops on self-development,

psychology, spirituality, and exploration of healthy ethnic cultural values, customs, and traditions.



*Garífuna pastoral agents participating in a workshop*

The project has provided this integrated formation for 43 pastoral agents and community leaders of the Garífuna and a few other indigenous communities located within the local diocese. The project will continue to provide accompaniment for these leaders as they work to build healthier and more just communities, and promote faith practice among their peoples.

The VSO has assisted with the project by obtaining grants from the Koch Foundation and the Office for the Church in Latin America of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and also providing funding from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund.

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**Our goal:** To assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelization and service of the poor.

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