

January 1, 1995

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear confreres,

May the peace of the Lord be with you in this new year!

I write to you today to share with you some good news.

As you know, the General Assembly of 1992, in its sixth commitment (New Evangelization, N_ 6) stated: "Our Congregation commits itself in Eastern Europe to at least one missionary project as a concrete sign of our Community's participation in new evangelization." In response to this directive of the Assembly, we began a new mission in Albania in 1993. There are now five confreres working there along with three communities of Daughters of Charity. At Christmas I heard from both the confreres and the sisters. They express great joy in their new life and mission. At the same time, confreres from the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia have begun to work in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Lithuania.

Meanwhile, with the gradual opening of Eastern Europe, we have received a number of other appeals. After examining these and reflecting on them for almost two years, I decided, with the members of the General Council, to hold a meeting here in Rome on December 5 and 6 with Frs. Karol Ho_ubicki (Visitor of Poland), Anton Stres (Visitor of Slovenia), and Augustín Slaninka (Visitor of Slovakia), Milan Šášik (Secretary to the Nuncio in the Ukraine), and Kazimierz Stelmach, who served as translator.

Two reasons in particular moved me to assemble this group to examine the appeals that we have received from Eastern Europe. First, God has blessed the Congregation with numerous vocations in the East, particularly in Poland. Secondly, a knowledge of one of the Eastern European languages is a huge advantage for a missionary going to one of these countries.

At our meeting, I was deeply moved by the generosity of the Visitors in deciding to respond to the appeals that we have received. With much joy, therefore, I announce to you today the following decisions made at this meeting:

1. In September 1995, the Congregation will open a new mission at Charkib, in the Ukraine.

2. We intend to open, in 1996, after further investigation and negotiations, a new mission in Siberia.

3. In 1996 or 1997, depending on negotiations for the reacquisition of our property, the former mission of the Province of Poland in Lithuania will be reopened.

When in Advent the prophet Isaiah said to us (43:19-20), "See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light: can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness," these decisions had not yet been made. They were possible only because of the generosity and missionary zeal of the Visitors. The Province of Poland will bear the heaviest burden in sending missionaries. I see this as a courageous response, on the province's part, to the Lord's gift of so many vocations. The Provinces of Slovenia and Slovakia are also eagerly offering their assistance, so that these teams will be international in their membership. Other volunteers, of course, will always be welcome. Because of the difficulties involved in learning the languages, however, it may be best that confreres from other parts of the world focus, for the most part, on our other international missions, while volunteers from Eastern Europe focus on these.

Actually, the three Visitors also pledged their assistance in several other places in Eastern Europe, on a more modest basis, but further conversations will be necessary with the bishops involved, before such commitments can be finalized and announced publicly.

The financial support for these missions will fall largely on the General Curia, which has relatively meager resources, so we will be attempting to create a fund, with the help of the provinces and individual confreres, to give the new missions a sound economic base.

In speaking about our missionary vocation near the end of his life, St. Vincent told the confreres: "Great reason have we, my brothers, to praise God and to thank him unceasingly for this grace!" (SV XII, 80). I join with you today, my brothers, in thanking God for the grace of calling us to Eastern Europe, through the cries of the poor there, through the voice of the General Assembly, through the invitations of bishops, and through the faith-filled response of the Visitors and the confreres. I trust that God who is beginning this new work among us will bring it to fruitful growth.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

P.S. Would the Visitors please make a copy of this letter available to each of the confreres.