

February 20, 1996

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Last June I wrote to you describing the meeting we had in Paris of those responsible for the four principal branches of our Vincentian Family. The goal of that meeting was "to look for means by which, while preserving the particular identity of each branch, we might cooperate more effectively with each other throughout the world in serving the poor better." Since that time I have received many enthusiastic comments from members of our family. It is quite striking to see how much collaboration among the various branches already exists and how eager our members are to network further in the service of the poor.

Since last June's meeting a small booklet has been printed in Spanish, French, and English providing information about the Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the International Association of Charity. Each group is making it available to its members through its own usual organ of communication. At present the booklet is being translated into many other languages.

On February 2 - 3, 1996, we met again, this time in Rome. Present were the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Juana Elizondo; the President of the International Association of Charity, Mrs. Patricia Palacios de Nava; the International President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Mr. César Nunes Viana; and I. Also taking part were: representing the Vincentians, Fr. Emeric Amyot d'Inville, Secretary General; for the Daughters of Charity, their Assistant General, Sr. Therezinha Remonato; for the A.I.C., Mrs. Mauricette Borloo, Vice-President; and for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Mr. Gerry Martin, International Vice-President, and Mr. Francesco de Barberis, Coordinator for Europe Group 3. The gathering was a wonderful occasion, with lots of sharing, mutual encouragement and planning for the future.

The acts of the meeting are lengthy. Below I offer just a few of the main points we touched on.

1. After much exchange of information, we judged that the level of cooperation among the branches of our family is, in general, quite high. The instances where there are tensions are few; these usually occur where someone fails to respect the autonomy of a particular group. We decided to do a formal evaluation, to be presented at our next meeting, about the level of cooperation

that exists in the countries where we labor, with a view toward fostering further common service of the poor.

2. Since the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups are a growing and vibrant branch of our family, we are asking them to send two delegates to our next meeting.
3. We decided to prepare five common projects, one on each continent, for the year 2000. Each branch will come to the next meeting with detailed proposals about where these projects might be undertaken and what they might involve. We hope that such projects will be helpful as models for stimulating further collaboration within our family in all countries where we serve.
4. We discussed formation at length. Each of the groups has its own formation program. The members of the AIC and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul expressed much gratitude to the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity for the help that they offer in formation. I want to take this occasion to encourage all of you, my brothers, to continue to respond generously to appeals for help in such formation programs. This is clearly one of the ways in which our Constitutions envision that we fulfill the purpose of the Congregation: "The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively: ... 3\_ help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor" (C 1). Moreover, with the support of the presidents of the two lay branches, I ask Vincentians and Daughters of Charity not to hesitate to call upon the members of the AIC and the Vincent de Paul Society to join with them in collaborative ministries, as is already happening in many countries (e.g., in giving popular missions, in serving the sick poor, in working with refugees, etc.).
5. We agreed that each branch will strive to be well-informed about the other branches, disseminate information about them, and promote vocations to them.
6. We spoke about inculturation of the Vincentian charism in various countries. This is a question that will need further discussion, in greater depth, on a future agenda.
7. We agreed to join, on September 27, 1996, in a common day of prayer. I will write to you at a later date with further details about organizing this day.

On the second day of our meeting we had a private audience with Pope John Paul II. The Pope greeted us very warmly and we chatted, quite informally, about the activities of the various branches of the Vincentian Family. He reminded us that he had been a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a college student!

One evening we responded to an invitation from the Community of Sant'Egidio to visit the soup kitchen where it offers a full Italian meal to about 1500 street people. We then joined the Community for evening prayer and a supper at which much mutual information was exchanged about the service of the poor in various countries.

Since our meeting occurred just after the announcement of the date for the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre, we talked often about that event, with much enthusiasm. Delegations from the four branches will be taking part in the canonization. The Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, moreover, have just informed me that they are changing the site and date for their European Meeting so that it will coincide with the canonization.

I want to express publicly how happy I am at the renewed impetus toward collaboration that is growing within our Vincentian Family. The needs of the poor are enormous. The Lord calls us to respond to them together. St. Vincent was deeply conscious of the communal dimension of gospel service. He knew that by channeling our energies we can be a more vibrant sign of the Church as communion and a more effective instrument in meeting the concrete needs of the poor. "To this end," he wrote to Hugues Perraud on October 15, 1651, "we should help and support one another and strive for peace and union among ourselves. This is the wine that cheers and strengthens travelers along this narrow path of Jesus Christ. I recommend this to you with all the tenderness of my heart" (SV IV, 262).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General