

October 19, 1997
Mission Sunday

To Vincentians throughout the world

My very dear Brothers,

The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Each year, in October, I have written to you about our new international missions, providing some news and seeking volunteers. The response has been very encouraging. Many confreres, of very varying ages, have offered their services. Among these were older confreres, some of whom served long ago in China and still yearn to return to the missions. Others were very young; even students from our apostolic schools have written to me volunteering to follow Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor in distant lands. The age of most volunteers, of course, lies somewhere in between.

I am delighted, however, not only at the response of individuals. Several provinces too, as I mentioned in previous letters, have offered to take on new missions. Most recently, for example, the Province of Madrid in its Assembly expressed interest in starting a new mission even while continuing to supply help generously to other missions. At times, several provinces have combined to meet an urgent missionary need. This was the case recently, for example, when Barcelona, Saragossa, and Colombia joined forces to serve in La Moskitia, Honduras. Some provinces also serve strikingly missionary areas right within their own territory, like Tierradentro in Colombia, Nueva Cajamarca in Peru, and Cametá in Fortaleza, Brazil. Other provinces have longstanding large missions which they continue to staff and support as the region grows toward autonomy, like the Province of Philadelphia's extensive mission in Panama. And speaking of autonomy, the many Irish confreres who labored so generously in Nigeria must surely be rejoicing these days as they witness the creation of a vice-province there. Likewise, confreres in Spain must be very happy as they see the Province of India being divided in two!

This year I visited a very large number of provinces. During these trips people often asked me about our missions. In fact, in Lebanon, last March, I received an invitation to address a large gathering of many of the groups in our Vincentian Family to talk about our new missions. At the end of this letter, you will find news flashes about the most recent developments there. Most of the news, as you will see, is very positive, though in some places the confreres find themselves in life-threatening situations.

I appeal to you in two ways this year, both somewhat different from in the past.

FIRST APPEAL

One of the most frequent "calls" that I receive here in Rome is a cry for help in forming the diocesan clergy. To me it is striking that the Congregation today is experiencing precisely what occurred in St. Vincent's lifetime. His own personal experience drew him to the conviction that the work of the mission and the work of the formation of the clergy were intimately intertwined. In fact, in the Common Rules (CR XI, 12) he describes these two works as "almost equal" and at other times he speaks of them as being "equal" (SV V, 489; VII, 561). So fundamental was the formation of the diocesan clergy in St. Vincent's mind that he made it a part of the purpose of the Congregation when he composed the Common Rules (CR I, 1). Our contemporary Constitutions carefully follow St. Vincent in this regard, while expanding formation work to include the laity: "The purpose of the Congregation is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:... 3E help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor" (C 1, 3E).

Today, the Congregation continues to sponsor a number of seminary programs where diocesan priests are formed: at Piacenza and Genoa in Italy; at All Hallows in Ireland; at Gdańsk in Poland; at Popayán, Garzón, Ibagué, Inzá, Betel, San Vicente del Caguán, and Restrepo in Colombia; at Cebu in the Philippines; at Chongoene in Mozambique; at Adelaide in Australia; at Curitiba in Brazil; at Malang in Indonesia and in the Solomon Islands. Confreres in various countries also participate in seminary programs that are run by others for training diocesan priests (e.g., in the United States, Fiji, Nigeria, Kenya, Bolivia, Poland, Byelorussia, France and many other countries). Likewise, they serve in universities that offer programs for priestly formation (e.g., at St. John's University in the United States, at Belo Horizonte in Brazil).

In this same context, let me say that I am delighted that there are more than 25 priest-student confreres studying here in Rome this year. A great many of them will surely be involved in formation work, mostly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. I know too of many others who are preparing for this ministry in other countries. I want to encourage the Visitors and their councils, as they plan for the future, to continue to prepare confreres for the ministry of formation.

My first appeal, therefore, focuses on the need for formators. Let me give you a number of examples (the concrete realities are surely more eloquent than my words!):

1. The new seminary in the Solomon Islands has now been completed. The Visitor of the Philippines, Serafín Peralta, just went there to represent me at the opening. I will be going next February for a visit, along with Victor Bieler, the Assistant General for the Missions. But we still have a rather pressing need for English-speaking confreres who might be able to teach basic courses in theology.

2. The confreres in El Alto, Bolivia, have candidates and are planning to open a seminary residence, but they need a formator. In August I met with the superior of the mission, Jorge Homero, and with the local bishop, Msgr. Jesús Juárez. They are very happy with the growth of the mission. To work there, a confrere must know Spanish and, eventually, Aymara. He must also be able to sustain high altitudes.
3. The confreres in Tanzania have candidates too, but need someone with experience in formation ministry to accompany them. To work effectively in Tanzania one must know English and Swahili. There is a very good language-inculturation course available, in Morogoro, for entering missionaries.
4. As I write, one of the unanswered letters on my desk is a stirring appeal from the Bishop of Tete in Mozambique (who is one of my most persevering correspondents!). He writes: "Imagine, Fr. General, that a diocese like Tete with an area of 100,715 km², 1,000,200 inhabitants, 25 parishes and missions, and 35 full years of existence has only 5 diocesan priests! In this context, I count very much – not to say exclusively – on the involvement of the Congregation of the Mission to resolve the problem of the Minor Seminary of St. João de Brito (St. John Brito)." As you know, the Province of Mexico has already taken on a minor seminary in the Diocese of Xai-Xai, Mozambique.
5. Several of our own provinces in Africa (e.g., Mozambique) and Latin America (e.g., in Ecuador and in Haiti) have appealed for temporary help (3-5 years) in staffing their formation programs, while they send confreres to be trained in formation work.

That is my first focus of this year's appeal. The number of priestly vocations in some parts of the world is very large. The Church in those places turns to us spontaneously as sons of St. Vincent and says, "Come!" Can we respond to that call? I trust that the answer is affirmative. If you are interested, I ask you to write, even if you have written before. Please follow the instructions on the attached sheet.

Of course, our missions have many other needs. They are so numerous that I cannot possibly mention them all. My heart goes out in a special way to Mozambique, a country that has suffered so long from devastating war with resultant poverty. I think too of Cuba, which I visited this year, where the harvest is very great but the laborers are very few. As you can imagine, I am also eager to continue to bolster the new missions that have already begun. As you read the news at the end of this letter you may find yourself interested in one of these.

SECOND APPEAL

I know that many of you who are reading this letter cannot possibly volunteer for the missions I have described. The reasons are many. Your present work, also very missionary, may demand your ongoing presence. The condition of your health, or age, may make going off to a distant land unthinkable. Other factors, like background, training, or one's own personal psychological make-up may make the possibility of adjusting to a new culture, a new language, a new lifestyle, and a new way of serving seem very unlikely. Many have written to me over the years explaining their deep interest in our new missions but their recognition, in simplicity and humility, that they could not at this time volunteer. They have consistently assured me of their prayers and moral support. I can tell you honestly that, in difficult moments, I count on the many confreres (plus Daughters of Charity and other members of our Vincentian family!) who promise their prayers.

Today, however, let me suggest to you a very different form of solidarity with our missions: financial help. As you can imagine, our missions cost money! I am proud to say that our missionaries live quite frugally. For that reason, their demands are usually quite modest. But still, they need a home, food, means of transportation. Often they need a center, a school, a church. They themselves need formation and the means to offer formation to others. We encourage all of our missionaries to find ways of raising money locally. We also ask them to submit projects to various charitable fund-raising agencies like Misereor, Adveniat, and Kirche in Not. But even with all that, we ourselves distribute a substantial sum to a very large number of missions each year. This past year that sum reached more than \$800,000.

Here in the General Curia we examine numerous appeals for funds carefully each year and require an accounting of how these funds are used. The monies that we distribute come, for the most part, from three sources: 1) the generosity of provinces that send us money for the poor and for the formation of the clergy; 2) large and small gifts that I receive, which total up to a very significant sum; 3) revenues from some funds that have existed here at the General Curia for a number of years.

As you recall, two years ago I announced the creation of a new fund named "International Mission Fund: 2000." That fund is building up nicely and will, after the year 2000, guarantee our being able to help in an even more significant way in our mission and formation works.

So here is the appeal: Can you contribute to the Fund?

I make the appeal first to the provinces and then to individuals. With this letter, I am attaching a sheet that explains how contributions might be made.

First, the provinces. Several provinces already contribute very generously each year to this fund. They should feel free to ignore the enclosed sheet or, if they judge they can contribute more, to increase their donation. I recognize too that many other

provinces already make large contributions to the foreign missions, without sending the money through the General Curia. That is a completely acceptable procedure. Those provinces too could ignore the enclosed sheet or, if they should wish, could consider making a contribution to the fund here. But I ask *all* provinces, large or small, young or old, of ample means or meager, to *consider* a contribution to IMF: 2000, since this fund will play such a significant role in the third millennium for the development of our missions. This fund will be especially helpful for financing the formation of our candidates, whose number is large precisely in countries where revenues are small. I request, therefore, that each Visitor make the enclosed sheet an agenda item for discussion in the next meeting of his provincial council and that you would come to a decision corresponding to your means and to the needs of the worldwide Congregation. A province might consider, for example, setting aside a fixed amount in its budget as a contribution every year for three or five years. Some provinces might be able to give very little. Even the widow's mite will be significant.

Secondly, individuals. I have always hesitated to ask for money from the individual members of the Congregation. I do so now because others have encouraged me to ask, because I have seen the spontaneous generosity of so many, and because the Congregation's Fundamental Statute on Poverty calls us to use our own personal revenues on "pious works." Our missions and formation works, especially in very poor countries, are surely high among these. Many often think of our missions and our seminarians there and send me contributions each year. Some remember them in their wills. Recently I received a check for \$50,000 from the will of a confrere who had died. A second confrere indicated that he would make a significant contribution upon his death.

So, with some embarrassment, but with as much simplicity as I can summon up, I ask each confrere: Reflect on whether you can make a contribution to the IMF: 2000. If so, the attached sheet will provide you with instructions as to how this can be done.

Those are my appeals. Forgive me for the length of this letter. My concern for our mission to the poor and the clergy sometimes makes me ramble on!

I thank all of you for your most generous service within the Congregation and ask the Lord to give you his blessings in abundance.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

SOME NEWS

- ! **China** – Fr. Joseph Loftus is still studying in Beijing. Fr. Richard Preuss is also on the mainland teaching English, as are two Daughters of Charity: Srs. Kathleen Grimley and Frances Bath. Another confrere, Fr. Mathew Thundiyl (India) has joined the China preparation team in Taiwan.
- ! **Rwanda** – The possibility of the Province of Colombia staffing a new mission there is still being studied. We expect a decision on this in November.
- ! **Siberia** – The first two missionaries, Frs. Toma Mavrič (Slovenia) and Maciej Kuczak (Poland), arrived on August 9 in Nasnij Tagil. Fr. Krzysztof Waryan (Poland), now taking a course in German, will arrive shortly. The missionaries are settled in an apartment near a small wooden chapel where the Catholics gather. They are now making improvements on the site.
- ! **Albania** – The confreres in Albania, as well as the Daughters, experienced considerable anxiety and suffering during the "revolution" there last spring. The situation still is rather unstable.
- ! **Kharkiv, Ukraine** – The confreres write that the situation there is improving both spiritually and materially. Construction has begun on a pastoral and social center.
- ! **Mozambique** – Fr. Jorge Manríquez from Chile, Fr. Tutarba Iboso from Zaire and Fr. Manuel Henriques Silva and seminarian Carlos César Gonçalves Mendes from Portugal have arrived to offer additional manpower to the confreres there. Fr. Raúl Castro, from Argentina, has just been assigned there. The confreres at the seminary in Xai-Xai continue to be very well.
- ! **Cuba** – Fr. José María Mondéjar from the Province of Madrid has just been assigned there. There are several other volunteers, but approval of visas has been slow. Much preparation is taking place for the visit of Pope John Paul II.
- ! **Tanzania** – We have accepted a new parish in Mbangamao. Fr. James Thiekanath has returned to the Province of India after serving very generously in Tanzania for three years. He has been replaced by Fr. José Manjaly, also from India, who is presently studying Swahili.
- ! **Bolivia** – One of the pioneers of this mission, Fr. Bogusław Sroka, has returned to the Province of Poland after three years of most generous service. He has been replaced by Fr. Krzysztof Wrzeźniak, also from Poland.

IMF: 2000

METHODS FOR MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

Provincial Contributions

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back. These should be sent to:

Patrick J. Griffin, C.M.
Econome General
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Roma
Italy

2. Direct bank transfers in US dollars to Northern Trust in Chicago:

The Northern Trust Company-Chicago
ABA No: 071000152
Credit Account No. 5186061000
Further credit trust account No. 26-79629
NAME OF ACCOUNT: Congregation of the

Mission

3. For Italy and France, the CCP account can be used following exactly the information in the Catalogue, page 1.
4. Other possibilities for transfers can be discussed with the Econome General.

Individual Contributions

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back, sent to the address above.
2. Bank transfers (as above) are possible.
3. Other arrangements can be made via the Provincial Econome, who will be acquainted with various methods of transfer.

In every case:

1. The Econome General will acknowledge all gifts received.

2. If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification.
3. Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money, as described above.

SOME INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. If you should wish to volunteer, please send your letter in time to arrive in Rome by December 15, 1997.

2. So that I might read the letters all at once and so that they might be carefully organized, would you please address the envelopes as follows:

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
MISSIONS
Congregazione della Missione
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA
ITALY

3. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries. Details will vary according to the particular place to which a confrere is sent.

4. While we have decided that no automatic age cut-off would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.

5. Confreres who volunteer, by sending a letter to the Superior General, should inform the Visitor that they have done so. I will always dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.

6. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as what mission you would like to take part in.

7. Even if you have already written in the past, please contact me again. Experience has demonstrated that confreres who are available at one moment might not be available at another, and vice-versa.