

December 24, 1997

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear Confreres,

Several months have now passed since last summer's Vincentian Month, on the Popular Missions, in Paris. It was a very rich experience which I hope will bear much fruit in many of the provinces of the Congregation.

This Vincentian Month brought together participants from many countries on all the continents. For the first time not only members of the Congregation of the Mission participated, but also sisters and lay people who work with us in our missions. Their presence was very enriching for everyone and reflects our growing missionary collaboration with sisters, especially the Daughters of Charity, and with lay men and women. In spite of differences in the way of envisioning and carrying out the mission, all felt united in the same Vincentian charism and the same passion for the evangelization of the poor in today's world.

The Month concluded with the publication of a "Final Document" which was presented to me. In it are ten propositions which the participants approved and which aim at promoting and developing the popular missions. This document was published in a special issue of *Vincentiana* (1997/4-5) which also reproduced all the Month's conferences. We studied these propositions at a recent General Council meeting. I write to inform you about our reflection on them.

Of the ten propositions, only the tenth one is addressed directly to me. It requests the creation of an International Secretariat for the Popular Missions, in order to assure better collaboration and more facile exchange of information among missionaries. This objective is important and is promising for the future, so I want to encourage it.

At present, we are reflecting in council on the possibility of naming a delegate of the Superior General to focus on and coordinate activities among the various branches of the Vincentian Family. He could also be asked to promote, on the international level, coordination in regard to the popular missions, given that these often take place with the participation of members of the different branches of our family. This would not be exactly an International Secretariat for the Popular Missions, which could be rather difficult to organize and manage, but an international

center of unity and communication. However, I do not envision that this will be realized in the months immediately ahead.

I would like therefore to suggest another complementary formula, which I hope will also be an effective means of attaining the desired objective and can begin at once. I propose starting at the base and gradually moving toward the summit. That is, I want to encourage the formation of coordination committees among the missionary teams on the provincial, interprovincial, and regional levels in order to arrive little by little at the formation of an international network linking these committees. Modern means of communication make the creation of such a network relatively easy. This would permit a broad exchange of information, experiences, and documents, as well as requests for help in personnel or materials. I encourage the Visitors, the Conferences of Visitors, and the missionaries themselves, to see how this might be put into practice.

We also studied the other propositions and concluded that the fifth one, addressed to the General Assembly, should be passed to the Preparatory Commission for the Assembly in order to determine how it should be treated.

The other propositions fall under the competence of the Visitors or the Conferences of Visitors. So, I transmit them to you and invite you to examine them attentively in order to see what follow-up you can give them. Behind the various propositions there lies a fundamental idea which is closely related to the theme of our next General Assembly: that collaboration among confreres of different provinces and countries, as well as with the sisters and lay men and women is a source of renewal and apostolic energy for the mission.

If confreres, sisters or lay people went from your province to the Vincentian Month, will you please give each of them a copy of this letter, so that they might be aware of the reply that I am giving to the propositions they addressed to me.

On this Christmas Eve, I ask the Lord to bless you, and all the confreres of your province, and to fill each of you with a deep sense of his presence and his love.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General