

Meeting of Directors of the Association of the Miraculous Medal

Rome - December 15-20, 1997

Called together by the Superior General, six directors of the Association of the Miraculous Medal from around the world gathered as a commission. We met December 15 - 20 at the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission. We shared information of mutual interest, reached common conclusions, and made recommendations. We believe our meeting will benefit the Association, the Congregation, and the Church we serve.

Those present at the meeting were:

Rev. Joseph Benoit, C.M., from Paris, France
Rev. William O'Brien, C.M., from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Rev. Jesús Rodríguez Rico, C.M., from Madrid, Spain
Rev. Benjamín Romo, C.M., from México City, Mexico
Rev. Charles Shelby, C.M., from Perryville, Missouri, USA
Rev. Francisco Vargas, C.M., from Manila, Philippines

Description of Apostolates

We shared with each other the structure and activities of our various apostolates. We discovered that there is often a close relationship between the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth, formerly known as the Children of Mary. We found we have much in common, yet we all have made adaptations suitable to our respective regions.

As described in the statutes, general membership in the Association of the Miraculous Medal is open to all the faithful and serves as an opportunity for them to benefit from the graces and blessings that flow through the intercession of our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. In addition, each of us leads activities for the particular members of the Association under our pastoral care. These activities, though not mentioned in the existing statutes, serve to promote the gospel and serve the poor.

Based in parishes, schools, and other institutions, our particular members join in small groups for their personal sanctification, Christian formation, and works of charity toward the most abandoned. One work of these groups is propagation of the Miraculous Medal. Another is the devotion attached to the statue of Mary (urna) which moves from home to home, popularly called a home visit. Here people are evangelized and led to practice Christian charity. These groups serve to strengthen the

family in a society where it is threatened on all sides. They are the source of a nucleus of Catholics committed to their faith, to catechesis, and to serving the poor.

- * In Mexico, for example, over the last three years the number of members committed to the service of the poor has doubled each year. Participation in the annual convention for the formation of members began with 250 in 1995 and is projected to be 2,000 in 1998. The Association itself is publishing and distributing a series of pamphlets confronting questions raised by the missionaries of evangelical sects.

- * In the Philippines, the home visits have taken place in virtually all dioceses since 1917. They have become the setting for the foundation of basic ecclesiastical communities in many parts of the country.

- * In Spain, more than 500,000 families receive the home visit each month. In 1994, 687 people attended the second National Marian Congress specifically for registered members of the Association. In 1997 there were 19 full day “encounters” for the leaders of the Association in Spain, attended by a total of 2,127 leaders. The Association sponsors 227 catechetical teams for adults who minister in homes. They have inaugurated weekend retreats for married couples who are members. Since 1993 the Association has developed its own pastoral plans, integrated with diocesan and parish plans.

- * In France, the Association sponsors the home visits in Madagascar, where there are special adaptations to the culture.

On a national basis, we engage in spiritual ministries, giving pastoral care to our members and uniting them through prayer and action for the intentions suggested by our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Members receive materials instructing them in the truths of the faith, encouraging them to live the Christian life, and enabling them to participate in the work of the Congregation through their financial support.

- * In the United States, for example, over 50,000 personal letters of encouragement are sent to people recently bereaved, facing serious illness personally or in their families, or experiencing other pastoral problems. Contributions from members of the two particular groups in the United States together contribute over US\$3,000,000 per year directly to the works of the Congregation, including the worldwide missions.

- * In the Philippines for the last six years, the gathering of Promoters of the Miraculous Medal Apostolate draws 500-600 people to the Shrine for prayer and instruction. This gathering is offered at no cost to those attending, even for transportation and food. And contributions to this apostolate help support the

province's seminarians, most of whom do not have the resources to support themselves.

The Association in Paris publishes the attractive magazine *Message et Messagers* to report on the evangelical and spiritual celebrations at the rue du Bac and to report on the missionary works of the province. The Association in Paris also assists the Daughters of Charity in the pastoral activities at the Chapel of the Apparitions, where 5,000 to 7,000 pilgrims come each day. And on feast days as many as 20,000 may come to the chapel. Over 400 confessions in various languages are heard there each day.

Convictions

As we reflected on our different works, we recognized six convictions, or principles, which unite us. They direct the ongoing life and renewal of our apostolates.

1. We are convinced of the important role and mission of the laity in the Church and in the future of evangelization. As it has been said, "The third millennium will be the age of the laity." We are especially aware of the importance of the laity in Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality and in his mission of evangelization and charity.
2. Mary's apparitions to Saint Catherine Labouré are a message of love and of salvation for our Vincentian Family. Through us they can become a message of salvation especially for the poor. The message of the rue du Bac is a prophetic, Christocentric, and truly evangelical message. In the apparitions we find a manifestation of God's fatherly love and a revelation of Mary's motherly concern. And they challenge us with a mission to serve and evangelize all, especially the poor.
3. Today we continue to meet the conditions faced by Saint Vincent. The poor continue to grow in number, and they do not know where to turn. Day in and day out we see new poor and new forms of poverty. The message of the Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine, together with the Vincentian charism, represent a liberating force, a saving word for the poor of today, and a challenging response to the new forms of poverty.
4. We recognize the family as the "domestic Church." Yet all around us we see it facing lack of love, infidelities, loss of gospel values, disintegration, hopelessness, economic crises, consumerism.... The presence of Mary in the midst of the family is a saving presence. She offers an abundance of peace and unity, love and hope. Through its apostolates the Association of the Miraculous Medal comes face to face with these realities. It reaches out to isolated communities, simple people, needy families. It brings Mary into our midst, interceding with her Son as once again she says, "They have no wine."

5. We are convinced that the Vincentian Family is a powerful force for contemporary evangelization. The world of today longs for our charism, a charism we should share with the laity, especially with youth. God asks us, as we serve and evangelize the poor, to collaborate with the Vincentian Family and to work in unity.
6. We have discovered great wealth and dynamism alive in the Association of the Miraculous Medal. It is more imperative than ever to continue our serious and systematic reflection on our Association. What we have accomplished during these six days has only begun to expand our horizons and to reveal many new opportunities for serving the gospel and the poor. As we reevaluate and renew our Association, we continue to grow in appreciation of this gift of God to the Vincentian Community for the service of the whole Church.

Requests to the General Curia

We examined the International Statutes of the Association and the Rite of Blessing and Imposition of the Miraculous Medal. We drafted revisions which express our mission better and bring our norms and rites more into conformity with Vatican Council II and the new Code of Canon Law. The revisions of the Statutes and of the Rite were proposed to the General Curia for the process of official approval.

We came to realize that the role of Director General of the Association has been exercised very little since the Association was entrusted to the pastoral care of the Superior General in 1909. For this reason we have recommended to the General Curia that a secretariat be established for the Association as a means of assisting the Superior General in his role as Director General. The first project we proposed for the secretariat is to conduct a survey on the existence and leadership of the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth in the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Ongoing tasks for the secretariat would include facilitating communication between the Director General and the Association, as well as among the leaders of the Association worldwide. The secretariat would also be available to help inaugurate the Association in regions where it is beginning.

Finally, we asked the General Curia to submit a postulatum to the General Assembly of 1998 urging the promotion or establishment of the Association and of Vincentian Marian Youth in each province, and encouraging responses to the questionnaire from the secretariat. It is the tradition of the Association in each area where it is established, that it be free to adapt to the local needs, circumstances, and culture. In that spirit the postulatum urges the visitors to help the members of the provinces to support the ministries of the Association and Vincentian Marian Youth and to encourage the spread of our distinctive Vincentian charism as we involve the laity in the mission of the Church.

Conclusion

In solidarity with the worldwide Congregation, our brothers in Saint Vincent, we offer our encouragement to each confrere and all the provinces. Together let us search creatively for ways to establish and strengthen the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth in each of our regions as means of evangelizing the poor.

As sinners, we have fallen short of what the Blessed Virgin Mary has entrusted to us through her apparitions of the Miraculous Medal. And as stewards of her special gift to the Congregation, we are convinced that it is well worth the time and resources we invest in it.

Through this meeting we have come to realize that the apostolates of the Miraculous Medal and Vincentian Marian Youth offer to the whole Church a great new opportunity for evangelization of the poor. Gathered in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus, we ask her intercession for a new Pentecost in each confrere and province. We especially request your prayers for the success of our apostolates.