

The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul

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I am here as a Daughter of Charity, a Sister among many others; together we form the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

It is my responsibility at this time, as a representative of Mother Elizondo, to participate in this panel, but all of my Companions are prepared to assist with possible clarifications should they arise.

I thank Father Maloney for his kindness in inviting us to participate in this Assembly.

According to the general directions for this meeting, the first point will deal with our *identity*.

1. Identity of the Daughters of Charity

Every well-established family feels a sense of satisfaction and need to tell about its origins, its roots, and to cherish the memory of its ancestors, not as nostalgia, but to keep its own identity present and alive.

We are third in the order of foundation; we came after the Priests of the Mission. We have the same Father, very greatly loved, which I may add, Saint Vincent de Paul, and we, Daughters of Charity, also have a Mother, Saint Louise de Marillac. This is a privilege! A responsibility!

The Company of the Daughters of Charity, founded November 29, 1633 by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, is a Society of Apostolic Life, approved by Pope Clement IX on June 8, 1668.

The Daughter of Charity, integral member of this Company, is the servant of the Poor, always ready to respond to the call of the Lord, no matter what time or moment. She has no preference for place or works to be accomplished. From there comes the characteristic:

“The Company is Missionary by nature.” (C.2.10)

Its motto: ***“The Charity of Jesus Christ crucified impels us.”***

Its spirit: ***“The virtues of Humility, Simplicity, and Charity”***

The Constitutions precisely state our identity and the universal nature of our service: “*given to God, in a Community of fraternal life, for the service of the poor.*” “*Every poor person.*” “*In every place.*”

How can the Company today reflect the face and heart of the Founders?

Dispersed throughout the five continents, present in 86 countries with 82 Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Regions, in 2,793 Houses, the Company keeps the flame of charity alive by living in unity of spirit within a diversity of works.

In the service of the Poor, the 25,533 Daughters of Charity seek the meaning and the *raison d'être* of their life and their vocation. This fidelity has a price: continuous search for conversion and a return to their sources, conscious of inculturation of the charism in the world of today.

The general government of the Company consists of the Superior General, the Superioress General, the Director General, ten Councillors representative of various cultures and countries. The Superioress General and her Council reside in Paris.

2. Collaboration with other groups of the Vincentian Family

Since its foundation, there has been collaboration of the Daughters of Charity, especially with the Ladies of Charity, as they were called in those days, in the direct service of the sick Poor.

Today, more concretely, the Daughters of Charity collaborate with the divers groups of the Vincentian Family:

*** With Vincentian Marian Youth:**

- through the structuring and organisation of Vincentian Marian Youth groups which at the present time are springing up in many different countries;
- through the accompaniment and formation of the youth in the “V.M.Y.” which are numerous in many countries, especially in Europe;
- through developing topics related to Mariology, as well as other topics;
 - through presence at encounters, symposiums, forums, and leadership meetings;
- through financial assistance, as well as other services to promote the gatherings of the youth.

***With other branches of the Vincentian Family:**

- through formation, spiritual direction and reflection to deepen knowledge of the Vincentian Charism at many local group levels;
 - through preparation of the “Day of Prayer and Reflection” for the Vincentian Family;

- through translation and publication of information, articles, Vincentian bibliographic materials, as a means of formation and information;
 - through participation and effective collaboration in long or short-term courses, seminars, encounters, assemblies, in the Vincentian Study group of Central Europe, meetings, etc...
- through the administration of the Works, of which the Society of St. Vincent dePaul or the A.I.C. are participants, and which respond to many types of poverty
 - for the promotion of concrete action plans for Evangelisation with the Poor. Especially at this time on the eve of the third millennium, and the next celebration of the Year of Charity, many organisations are developing, with the participation of the Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family;
- through participation in “Vacation Missions,” collaborating with the Priests of the Mission and Seminarians;
 - through welcoming and sharing the Marian message of 1830, and information about the Founders, to Vincentian groups - rue du Bac, Paris.

3. Hopes and Challenges

To nurture the flame of the “New Fire,” the Company is conscious of the urgent need to quicken the pace and to be more attentive to the cries of the Poor today in this multicultural and constantly changing world.

To do this:

* We desire that the Company become more and more aware of its internationality, and we hope to help accomplish this. We will be able to respond to the calls of the Poor by sending Sisters to countries where the Company is not present, as well as to Provinces in difficulty.

* Convinced that we are serving Christ in the Poor and the Poor in Christ, we wish to regularly examine our life and our service in view of the poorest of the poor, especially, children, youth, and women.

* As the General Council, we encourage Provincial Councils so they can energise local communities to be more and more Communities of Faith, fraternal, missionary, open, welcoming.

*** For us, Daughters of Charity, here are the most stimulating signs of the future:**

The Church, the Company, and especially the Assemblies, invite us to open horizons on the path which leads to sanctity. However, the Daughter of Charity needs help in this process of personal and community search. Today, more than yesterday, the Daughter of Charity is asking for help in the area of spiritual formation and consequently would like to obtain help from priests who are prepared for this.

- In our modern world, with signs of the times which are so ambiguous, with its values and counter-values, on the eve of the third millennium, what are the signs of God for us?

- At this time where we are discovering the protagonist role of woman, with her great desire to assume a constructive place in society and in the building of the reign of God, the Daughter of Charity, as a consecrated woman, wants to be considered and respected with all her feminine potential.

- We are what we communicate and witness to. How can we be signs of the tenderness and goodness of God in a world of efficiency, technology, and information systems?

- How do we help the poor of the third millennium see that the cost of the service which we offer is a love which is Gratuitous, Disinterested, Respectful, and Humble

- In preparation for the General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity, over the course of three years, we studied, reflected on, prayed about, and researched the theme of "INCULTURATION OF THE CHARISM IN A CHANGING WORLD." This same Assembly, for the following six years, has offered us a document entitled, "A NEW FIRE," which contains some convictions and commitments. It is up to us to give new responses to the new challenges of our day.

In conclusion: to be faithful to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, we, Daughters of Charity, must be:

- Women of faith and prayer, who live radically our gift to God in the service of the Poor.

- Women who know how to share the experience of God, who live a communion of dialogue and listening.

- Women who are creative, who live in solidarity, who are open and welcoming.

- Women who sow signs of life and of Hope.

We want to express our *Identity* in the world and in the Church, through the witness of our lives and our humble, simple service, so we can be messengers of God among the poor.