

VINCENTIANA

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JULY-OCTOBER 1998



39th
General Assembly
of the
Congregation of the Mission

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

SECRETARIAT OF STATE

N. 438.046
1998

From the Vatican, July 15,

Dear Father Maloney,

The Holy Father was pleased to learn of the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, taking place in Rome in these days. He very much appreciates your expression of prayerful support for his ministry, and he asks you to convey to all present his greetings in the Lord and the assurance of his prayers.

Looking back to the great figure of the Founder, His Holiness gives thanks to God for the many graces brought to the Church and the world through the mission of the sons of Saint Vincent de Paul. In his time - *le grand siècle* - Saint Vincent understood that true grandeur lay in service of those who seem the least, "rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious" (1 Pet 2:4). His vision of the dignity of every human person and his courage in acting upon what he saw made him a luminous witness to the glory of God's love in Christ. At a time when human dignity is threatened in new ways, His Holiness prays that the Congregation of the Mission will live ever more deeply the charism of the Founder and be a prime agent of the new evangelization to which the Church is called. This will ensure that the future of the Congregation is as illustrious as its past and that the sons of Saint Vincent will play their part in ushering in the new springtime which the Holy Spirit is preparing for the Church (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18).

Commending the General Assembly to the loving care of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, His Holiness cordially imparts to all his Apostolic Blessing.

With personal best wishes for the Assembly's deliberations, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(signed) + Angelo Card. Sodano

Secretary of State

The Very Reverend Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General
Congregation of the Mission
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA

Lists of the participants at the 1998 General Assembly

Members - Guests - Various Services

I. Members of the General Assembly

General Curi Maloney Robert P., *sup gen*
Fernández de Mendoza Ignacio, *vic gen*
Bieler Victor, *asst gen*
Palú Lauro, *asst gen*
Zedde Italo, *asst gen*
Amyot d'Inville Emeric, *secr gen*
Delagoza Rolando, *proc gen*
Griffin Patrick J., *oec gen*
Ubillús José Antonio, *asst gen elected*

Africa

Elli Luigi, *vis, Mad*
Michelangelo Santia, *delegate, Mad*

Girmay Abraha, *vis, Aet*
Hagos Hayish, *delegate, Aet*

Weldemariam Zera/J., *vis, SJJ*
Zeracristos Yosief, *delegate, SJJ*

Costa Ferreira Luciano, *vis, Moz*
Balói Armindo, *delegate, Moz*
Miguelo Licínio L., *invited, Moz*

Zwolinski Janusz, *vis, Cng*
Iyolo Iyombe Dominique, *delegate, Cng*

Osuji Urban, *vis, Nig*
Edem Michael, *delegate, Nig*

Martínez S. Gonzalo, *vis, Aeq*
Chiliquinga Federico, *delegate, Aeq*

America

Bastiaensen Adrián, *vis, AmC*
Mux Méndez Raúl, *delegate, AmC*

Masciná José, *vis, Arg*
Bokalic Vicente, *delegate, Arg*

Chaves dos Santos Eli, *vis, Flu*
Barbosa Geraldo, *delegate, Flu*

Klidzio Pedro, *vis, Cur*
Camargo Gílson, *delegate, Cur*

Pereira Costa Aluizio, *vis, For*
Silva Antonio Assis, *delegate, For*

Sampedro Francisco, *vis, Chi*
Romero Eloy, *delegate, Chi*

Naranjo Gabriel, *vis, Col*
Campuzano Guillermo, *delegate, Col*
Mesa Alfonso, *delegate, Col*

Pérez Flores Miguel, *vis, Cos*
Browne Egbert, *delegate, Cos*

Moro Justo, *substitute for vis, Cub*
Niño Arturo, *delegate, Cub*

González Manuel J., *vis, Mex*
Calderón Silviano, *delegate, Mex*

Berrade Alfonso, *vis, Per*
Guillén Pedro, *delegate, Per*

Alegría Gregorio, *vis, Por*
Cordero Tulio, *delegate, Por*

Estévez Conde Antonio, *vis, Ven*
Rodríguez Francisco, *delegate, Ven*

Hartenbach William, *vis, OcC*
Rybolt John, *delegate, OcC*
Joyce Michael, *delegate, OcC*

Levesque Joseph, *vis, Orl*
Freund John, *delegate, Orl*
Gay Gregory, *delegate, Orl*
McKenna Thomas, *delegate, Orl*

Sledziona John, *vis, NAN*
Gorowski Roman, *delegate, NAN*

Weber George, *vis, Mer*
Borlik Daniel, *delegate, Mer*

Quinn Bernard, *vis, Occ*
Villarroya Pedro, *delegate, Occ*

Asia

Ranasingh John, *vis, InS*
Kaipuram Simon, *delegate, InS*

Thozhuthumparambil Sebastian, *vis, InM*
Chellan Wilson, *delegate, InM*

Hardjodirono Franciscus, *vis, Ids*
Handoko Petrus, *delegate, Ids*

Bou Jaoudé Georges, *vis, Ori*
Douaihy Antoine, *delegate, Ori*

Ginete Manuel, *vis, Phi*
Belita Jimmy, *delegate, Phi*

O'Donnell Hugh, *vis, Sin*
Pan Charles, *delegate, Sin*

Europe

Kangler Franz, *vis, Aus*
Jernej Alexander, *delegate, Aus*

Corneé Pierre, *vis, Par*
Delplace Elie, *delegate, Par*
Holzer Vincent, *delegate, Par*

Sens Christian, *vis, Tol*
Leboeuf Jean-Yves, *delegate, Tol*

Haasbach Norbert, *vis, Ger*
Tix Norbert, *delegate, Ger*

Rafferty Kevin, *vis, Hib*
Roche Paul, *delegate, Hib*

García Miguel, *vis, Bar*
Solé Luis, *delegate, Bar*

Azcárate Santiago, *vis, Cae*
Corera Jaime, *delegate, Cae*
Delgado Corpus Juan, *delegate, Cae*

Álvarez Félix, *vis, Mat*
Nieto José María, *delegate, Mat*
Quintano Fernando, *delegate, Mat*

López Maside J. María, *vis, Sal*
Sánchez Mallo J. M., *delegate, Sal*
López García J. Eugenio, *delegate, Sal*

Groetelaars Victor, *vis, Hol*
Bellemakers Wiel, *delegate, Hol*

Dusik Tibor, *Vis, Hun*

Guerra Giuseppe, *vis, Nea*
Falco Biagio, *delegate, Nea*

Di Carlo Mario, *vis, Rom*
Testa Giuseppe, *delegate, Rom*

Gonella Bruno, *vis, Tau*
Turati Giuseppe, *delegate, Tau*

Nóbrega Manuel, *vis, Lus*
Gonçalves José Carlos, *delegate, Lus*

Sie_czak Bronis_aw, *vis, Pol*
Banko Kryspin, *delegate, Pol*
Bomba W_adis_aw, *delegate, Pol*
Kapu_ciak Józef, *delegate, asst gen élu, Pol*
Stelmach Kasimierz, *delegate, Pol*

Slaninka Augustín, *vis, Slo*
Zonták Stanislav, *delegate, Slo*

Pogorelc Zdravko, *vis, Sla*
_akelj Peter, *delegate, Sla*

Oceania

Sullivan Maurice, *vis, Aul*
Williams Timothy, *delegate, Aul*

II. Guests from the Vincentian Family

Sr. Juana Elizondo, *sup gen DC*
Sr. Therezinha Remonatto, *asst gen DC*
Sr. Rufina Leitenbauer, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Margaret Barrett, *cons gen DC*
Sr. María Teresa Svarcas, *cons gen DC*
Sr. María Luisa Morante, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Marie-Bernard Giffard, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Giovanna Beltrando, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Cecilia Rode, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Wiwine Kisu, *cons gen DC*
Sr. Julma Neo, *cons gen DC*

Mrs. Patricia de Navas, *president AIC*
Mrs. Marina Costa, *vice-president AIC*
Mrs. Andrée Thomanek, *vice-president AIC*
Mrs. Marianne Chevalier, *sec gen AIC*
Mrs. Beatriz G. Philimeno Gomes, *AIC Brazil*

Mr. Cesar Nunes Viana, *president SSVp*
Mr. Amin de Tarrazi, *vice-president SSVp*
Mr. Gerry Martin, *vice-president SSVp*
Mr. Francesco De Barberis, *Vincentian Family coordinator, SSVp*
Mr. Erick Schmitz, *coordinator for Europe Group 2, SSVp*

Miss Edurne Urdampilleta, *president JMV Spain*
Miss Anna Salis, *president Marian Association Italy*
Miss Virginia Alfaro, *MISEVI*

Mrs. Maureen Treanor, *popular missions, Ireland*
Miss Ubaldina Morales, *popular missions, Panama*
Miss Maria Otilia de Lima, *popular missions, Portugal*

Fr. Yvon Laroche, *sup gen Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul*
Sr. Denise Baumann, *sup gen Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg*
Sr. Marie-Antoine Henriot, *sup gen Sisters of Saint Jeanne-Antide Thouret*
Sr. Theresa Capria, *Sister of Charity of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*

Fr. Charles Shelby, C.M., *dir Association of the Miraculous Medal of St. Louis (USA)*
Fr. Andrés Pato, C.M., *dir Association of the Miraculous Medal of Spain*

Fr. Jean Chen, C.M., *Continental China (invited for the entire Assembly)*

III. Various Services

Facilitators

Peralta Serafín, *Phi*
Sr. Price Germaine, *DC*

Chronicler

Quevedo Alvaro, *Col*

Video reporter

Mika Lourenço, *Cur*

Assistants in the secretariat

Fajardo Gerardo, *General Curia*
Guené Thierry, *Par*
Pura Raul, *Phi*
Vásquez Diego Luis, *Col*
Sr Ann Mary Dougherty, *DC*

Sr Alicia Muñoz, *DC*

Translators

Barquín Teodoro, *Mat*
Carnio Adriano, *Tol*
Curran Eugene, *Hib*
Díaz Catalán J. Julián, *Cae*
Fernandes da Silva Joaquim, *Moz*
García Bernardo, *Tol*
Kennedy John, *Orl*
Kieken Noël, *Par*
Marmilicz André, *Cur*
Martínez Augustín, *Mat*
Pereira José Gil, *Flu*
Santangelo Claudio, *Rom*
Sevivas João, *Lus*
Stone Robert, *Orl*

The 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville, C.M.
Secrétaire Générale*

The 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission was held from July 6-31 in the house of the Daughters of Charity on the Via Ezio in Rome. The theme was "The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium." There were 119 participants, including 7 members of the General Curia, 49 Visitors (that of Cuba was absent for health reasons), and 63 delegates from the provinces.

Organization and services of the Assembly. Some of the participants stayed at the Via Ezio, while others were lodged nearby at the Leonine College, which is also the Provincial House of the confreres of Rome.

The sessions were held in the large conference room of the Via Ezio which is equipped for simultaneous translation. Fourteen dedicated translators competently and patiently translated the talks and documents, either orally or in writing, into French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. The three moderators, Frs. Christian Sens, Joseph Levesque and Jaime Corera directed the work and the discussions. Fr. Giuseppe Turati, named Secretary of the Assembly, faithfully wrote up the minutes of the Assembly with the help of Bruno Gonella. The former also organized the work of the various people who gave themselves unselfishly in the nearby secretariat and whose collaboration was invaluable. Fr. Serafin Peralta and Sr. Germaine Price, DC, were the facilitators. Fr. Alvaro Quevedo, chronicler, wrote an article each day which was put on the Internet web site in Spanish, French, and English, and which, we hope, kept you regularly informed on the progress of our work. Fr. Lourenço Mika was our video-reporter, filming our Assembly in all its aspects and taking many photos. He is now preparing a video in several languages in order to present the Assembly and its principal decisions to the provinces.

First days. The Assembly began on July 6 at 9 a.m. with a Eucharist presided over by Fr. Robert Maloney, Superior General, in the main chapel of the Leonine College. Songs and readings in various languages reflected the wonderful diversity of the participants. Then, in the conference hall, Fr. Maloney, opened the Assembly and gave his report on the State of the Congregation, which he presented with the projection of lively images, thanks to the marvels that computers afford us today. Several members of the General Curia presented their reports, using the same audio-visual means. Some did this with remarkable panache, like Frs. Patrick Griffin, Econome General, and Rolando Delagoza, Procurer General, who, in spite of the seriousness of their subjects, managed to capture our attention and even to give us a moment of entertainment.

After the approbation of the *Directory of the Assembly*, it was decided to adopt the *Documentum Laboris* as the basic text of the Assembly. Then, the Assembly chose Frs. Manuel Ginete, Gabriel Naranjo, John Rybolt, Gilson Camargo, Wiel Bellemakers, and Urban Osuji as members of the Central Commission which was presided over by the Superior General and on which the three moderators and the two facilitators participated.

Week of the Vincentian Family. From July 9-14, the "Week of the Vincentian Family" took place with the participation of 33 representatives from the Family in a very fraternal environment. Present were those principally responsible for the Company of the Daughters of Charity (Mother Juana Elizondo and her entire council), the AIC, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, as well as

some of those responsible on national levels for the Vincentian Marian Youth groups and the Miraculous Medal Association. Four Superiors General of Congregations of Vincentian inspiration attended the meeting, as well as three representatives of the many lay people who, without belonging to a movement, collaborate closely with us in our missions and ministries. On July 9, 11 members of a panel representing the diverse realities offered presentations on his/her community, movement, or apostolic work. Then, various work groups, in which the members of the Assembly mixed with the guests from the Vincentian Family, permitted a rich sharing of experiences and better mutual understanding. This "Week" concluded with the formulation of "Recommendations" from the groups to the General Assembly, which aimed principally at collaboration in human and Vincentian formation and the elaboration of common projects in the service of the poor. These recommendations were studied later by the Assembly. This "Week" with the 33 guests is a first in the history of the Congregation and will certainly influence its relationships of friendship and collaboration with the other branches of the Vincentian Family.

Elections of the Superior General and of the General Council. Subsequently, while studying the *Documentum Laboris*, chosen as the basic document, the Assembly proceeded to the elections. After a straw vote, in conformity with the *Directory*, the election of the successor of St. Vincent took place on July 17. Fr. Robert P. Maloney was elected Superior General for a second mandate.

On the following days, the Assembly proceeded with the elections of the Assistants General with the following results:

Fr. J. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza (Saragossa), reelected Vicar General

Fr. José Antonio Ubillús (Peru), elected Assistant General

Fr. Victor Bieler (Indonesia), reelected Assistant General

Fr. Józef Kapuciak (Poland), elected Assistant General

All these elections were welcomed with warm applause.

Return to the study of the theme and the final text of the Assembly. The Assembly elected four commissions for working on the different parts of the theme. The days were spent in meeting by language groups which studied the various aspects of the theme and presented amendments; there were also plenary discussions.

When the diverse amendments from all parts of the theme had been voted on, the Assembly turned over the whole document to the Editing Commission, composed of Frs. John Rybolt, Gabriel Naranjo, and Emeric Amyot d'Inville who were to assemble the various texts from the commissions into a single text with unified style. The text of the Editing Commission was submitted to the different language groups who presented amendments and "modi" which the Editing Commission classified and presented to the vote of the Assembly in a plenary session. This text, corrected according to the amendments and "modi" adopted by the Assembly, was approved by a large majority in the plenary session on the morning of July 31, and became the Final Text of the 1998 Assembly addressed to the entire Congregation of the Mission. It bears the following title: "With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the Threshold of the new millennium."

Study of the Postulates. At the same time, the Assembly studied the postulates which had been received. Around twenty of them were simply turned over to the Superior General so that he can see with this council what follow-up he wishes to give them. Several postulates covered the theme of the Assembly and were treated with it. The others were rejected.

Several Decrees of the 1992 Assembly were reconfirmed.

Recreational and Festive Moments. Diverse festive moments marked this Assembly: we should mention in particular the lovely day at Naples offered by the Province of Naples on Sunday, July 19; the feast day dinner organized by the Leonine College and that organized by the Sisters of Via Ezio; the World Cup matches followed passionately on the large screen in the conference hall and the celebration of France's victory; the numerous anniversaries and national feasts where we greeted one another joyously, etc.

The last day. On the morning of July 31, the last day of the Assembly, Fr. Maloney, surrounded by his council, presided over the closing Eucharist. Then the last plenary session was held in the course of which the Final Text of the Assembly was approved and Fr. Maloney gave his closing address. Then, he declared the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission closed.

After a fraternal meal, each one returned to his province and mission, with the responsibility of spreading in his province the results and decisions of the Assembly.

Opening of the General Assembly

Robert P. Maloney
Superior General

My brothers, welcome to Rome and to this 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission.

First, let me thank you who are here today _ the Visitors, the delegates, the members of the General Curia. If the Congregation is faithful in serving the poor and the clergy today, it is because of you, its members.

Notice the motto for the first week of this Assembly: "To announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Lk 4:19). This motto describes the objective of this Assembly. We come together to proclaim the good news of the Lord's love for his people, especially the poor.

As we begin this Assembly, Article 137 of our Constitutions reminds us of a very important fact: we gathered together in this hall represent the entire Congregation and, during these four weeks, *we together* are its supreme authority. Not I. We, together. So I express to you, the representatives of the entire Congregation, the gratitude I feel for all that the Company is doing as a servant of the poor and the clergy, and I encourage you, the supreme authority in the Congregation, to hold up before the entire Company clear, creative challenges that will help it to continue to grow in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of those who have worked so hard at preparing the Assembly, in particular the members of the Preparatory Commission: Frs. Corpus Juan Delgado, Alvaro Quevedo, Bernard Quinn, Serafín Peralta and Zeracristos Yosief and our in-house preparatory committee: Frs. Lauro Palú, Emeric Amyot d'Inville and Patrick Griffin. Our two facilitators, Sr. Germaine Price and Fr. Serafín Peralta worked closely with both committees and will continue to aid us during the Assembly. I would also like to express my gratitude to those who have accepted to serve as Moderators: Frs. Joseph Levesque, Christian Sens and Jaime Corera and as ad hoc Secretary, Giuseppe Turati. There are many others who will be helping us in the course of this Assembly, but I will have another occasion to thank all of them.

I will have the opportunity to speak with you at some length tomorrow, so for today's agenda, I present to you Fr. Joseph Levesque, who very generously accepted my invitation to be the moderator this first day and who will assist us through some of the initial steps in the opening of this Assembly.

Work done by the Preparatory Commission for the 1998 General Assembly

*by Corpus J. Delgado, C.M.
Member of the Preparatory Commission*

"The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of Mission in the Third Millennium." This is the theme proposed by the Superior General for the thirty-ninth General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission following the suggestions of the Visitors in their meeting in Salamanca.[fo1] The Superior General convoked the Assembly in his letter of October 1, 1996, indicating its dates as June 22 until July 18, 1998, and at the same time offering a program for Provincial Assemblies leading to the General Assembly.[fo2]

On this same[fo3] date the Preparatory Commission, approved by the General Council, was named: Alvaro Quevedo of Colombia, Bernard Quinn of US Western, Serafín Peralta of the Philippines, Zeracristos Yosief of St. Justin Jacobis Vice-Province, Corpus Delgado of Saragossa. The Superior General desired that the Preparatory Commission be formed of five members, one from each continent.

In the same letter the Superior General asked the Visitors and their Councils to respond to a questionnaire which would facilitate the commencement of the work of the Preparatory Commission.

I. First Meeting of the Preparatory Commission

This was convened at the General Curia on December 2, 1996, and lasted until December 17.

The Superior General reminded the Commission of what the Statutes[fo4] require of them, indicating the specific task for the first session: *To help the provinces prepare for their Domestic and Provincial Assemblies*; and to prepare information and questions to be discussed in these Assemblies.

To begin, the Secretary General presented to the Commission *the replies of the Visitors and their Councils* to the questionnaire sent them by the Superior General, and also some information relating to the Vincentian Family.

Replies had arrived from 45 Provinces (out of 48). They indicated satisfaction with the chosen theme as well as points of *special interest*: better understanding of the

Vincentian charism; establishing priorities in service (ministries) to the poor; formation of our members; inter-provincial collaboration, both regional and continental. Concerning the *Vincentian Family*: we must get to know it, coordinate and collaborate with it, establish just how we become a Vincentian Family; Vincentian spirituality; to contribute to the formation and animation of the groups that form the Vincentian Family.

The replies of the Provinces clearly indicate the levels of collaboration that existed at that time (October-November 1996) among the various groups of the Vincentian Family.[fo5]

a) Between the Missioners and the Daughters of Charity:

Five Provinces indicated a high level of collaboration, 21 enjoy good collaboration, 11 provinces have sporadic or occasional collaboration, 8 provinces report very rare or non-existent collaboration.

b) Between the Missioners and the AIC.

Good collaboration in 6 provinces, 9 provinces have missioners who work with members of the AIC as advisors or counsellors, 17 provinces are beginning to collaborate. In 13 provinces the AIC does not exist or is not contacted by the Congregation of the Mission.

c) Between the Missioners and the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

9 provinces report a good relationship and a desire to increase collaboration, 14 provinces some collaboration exists, some confreres advising SVDP groups. In 22 provinces there is no relationship.

d) Between the Missioners and the Vincentian Marian Youth.

10 provinces report good collaboration with JMV. 10 have intermittent relations, with little enthusiasm; 4 provinces are starting groups. No organized groups of JMV exist in 21 provinces.

e) Between the Missioners and the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

17 provinces maintain a good relationship, based on the collaboration of a few confreres in Marian celebrations. 28 provinces have no relationship with the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

f) Between the Missioners and other Vincentian groups:

21 provinces report some relationships (basically common liturgical celebrations) with groups in the extended Vincentian Family; 24 provinces indicate no contact with Vincentian Family groups.

g) Among the different groups themselves.

3 provinces celebrate common encounters; 5 provinces say they are beginning the process. In 26 provinces there is no such relationship. 11 provinces did not answer this question or they say they do not know how to answer it.

Concerning the *methodology* of the Assembly: Provincial replies stressed the importance of an effective participation of the members of the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family in our Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies; for example, that we advise them of the celebrations of our Assemblies and the themes we would treat, asking their prayers for the Assemblies, inviting them to take part in some sessions, inquiring of them what they expect of us and of the Vincentian Family.

It was also decided that the General Assembly follow the same methodology begun in 1992, attempting to achieve a true experience of encounter _ prayer, concluding with exact and efficacious conclusions. It was also asked that such conclusions be reached at provincial, interprovincial, regional, continental and international levels.

On analyzing these answers, the Preparatory Commission prepared material which could guide the conducting of Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. This was sent from Rome on December 14, 1996, labeled Consultation Document.

The Consultation Document attempted to make clear the terminology of the theme proposed to the General Assembly, seen from the point of view of a methodology of see-judge-act, beginning from Vincentian spiritual experience. It concluded with some *proposals for work* for Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.

- The first set of proposals *referred to making effective the participation of the members of different branches of the Vincentian Family in our Assemblies*. Analyzing the answers concerning the level of collaboration that exists with the different branches of the Vincentian Family shows the importance of dedicating time in Provincial and Domestic Assemblies to meeting the Vincentian Family.
- The second set was made up of a *questionnaire* consisting of 16 questions on the theme of the Assembly, the strong points indicated by the Visitors and their councils, and on the very dynamics of the Assembly.[fo6]
- The Consultation Document was accompanied by a study on the Vincentian Family done by the Superior General.[fo7]

Before leaving, the members of the Commission consulted the Directory of the General Assembly and the study of the same made by the General Council and Visitors in Salamanca.

II. Second Work Session of the Preparatory Commission

The Preparatory Commission met for its second meeting at the General Curia on February 2 - 18, 1998.

On January 25, 1997 meanwhile, the Superior General had set the date and place for the General Assembly as July 6 - 31, 1998 in Rome.[fo8]

A letter of August 14, 1997 announced the naming of Sr. Germaine Price as facilitator and that she would hence forth participate in the meetings of the Commission.[fo9]

On November 5, 1997, Fr. Serafín Peralta was also named as a facilitator.

By this date all local communities and provinces had terminated their assemblies and sent their conclusions to the General Curia.

Here follows the work of the second session:

1. *Drawing up the list of participants and their substitutes for the 39th General Assembly.* This was done following the "*acta deputationis*" of the provinces, or from the minutes of Provincial Assemblies, or (when no other way was possible) by direct consultation with the Visitors.
2. *Study of the replies from the provinces and elaborating a synthesis.* 46 out of 50 provinces had answered the questionnaire.[fo10]

The compilation of the *synthesis of replies* was hard work; it required careful study in order to collect the elements contributed by the provinces. This was very enriching for all of us because it allowed us to draw close to the reality of the provinces and their expectations with regard to the General Assembly. The members of the Assembly have already received this synthesis which we think will help them "take the pulse" of the Congregation and formulate significant commitments along the lines that the Provincial Assemblies wished.

3. *Drawing up the Documentum Laboris.* Working from the replies sent in by the provinces, we began to write, in successive drafts[fo11], the *Documentum Laboris*, which would serve as a basis for discussion during the Assembly.
4. *Revision of the Assembly Directory:* The Superior General and his council had dedicated several meetings to the study of the Directory. The Visitors meeting in Salamanca had also studied the major changes. The Preparatory Commission

studied the Directory at length in order to be able to offer a text agreeable to all. As all know, it is very important that we all agree on the Directory before the Assembly begins. For this reason all participants in the Assembly received in February the Directory and a questionnaire which elicited a very good response.

5. *Organizing postulata presented to the General Assembly:* The Preparatory Commission had gathered and organized all Postulata sent to the Curia (up until February 15, 1998). Some Postulata were clearly written, either by the Provincial Assemblies or individual confreres; others were mixed in with the acts of the Provincial Assemblies. Our first job was to separate the Postulata, then to organize them, careful to present them in the language in which they were written, so they would be understood correctly. Finally we made a few suggestions to the Superior General on the way to handle them in the Assembly. All Assembly members had received the Postulata. We trust that our suggestions have been helpful to the members of the different commissions charged with studying them.
6. *Suggestions on celebrating the Assembly offered to the Superior General:* Keeping in mind the special nature of the 39th General Assembly, the Superior General had asked us for concrete suggestions to achieve the most effective cooperation of the members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family, as well as for liturgical celebrations. The Commission spent a lot of time reflecting on and weighing different possibilities, which we shall shortly present for your consideration.
7. *Making a file on each member of the General Assembly:* The Directory advises the Preparatory Commission to seek information on every member of the General Assembly, his place of origin, his ministry, his culture.[fo12] We sought, in February, from each participant, all this information, together with color photos of all members of the General Assembly.
8. *Proposal of an Agenda for the General Assembly:* Even though the General Assembly is the supreme authority in the Congregation and can organize its work autonomously, [fo13]it seemed advisable to propose an agenda which would take into consideration the time and space necessary for different matters, in order that the Assembly could pay sufficient attention to the needs of interchange, deliberations, celebrations, and rest, following the suggestions sent by the provinces.

Conclusion

In concluding our work and giving an account of the steps taken, we, the members of the Preparatory Commission, wish to share with you *our feelings*:

1. First of all, we want to thank most sincerely Fr. Robert Maloney, the members of the General Council and everyone at the Curia for their confidence, their friendly welcome, their complete availability, and their generous collaboration.

2. We also want to express our gratitude to each of the Visitors for their replies, arriving on time, to the various questionnaires which we had to send to them during this period. Several times during our work sessions we commented on the fact that almost all the provinces had replied. Moreover, in the replies, there were expressions of encouragement for the work which the Commission had done. We, members of the Commission, now feel much closer to each province and very enriched by your reflections on the reality of the Congregation and the Vincentian Family in the world and on the challenges of the moment. We were very happy to learn that for 24 provinces, by taking into account the suggestions of the Preparatory Commission, it was possible to meet with the various branches of the Vincentian Family and take the first steps toward coordination.

3. Finally, we wish all of you good work in the General Assembly. The replies from the provinces indicate what they expect of this Assembly.

They would like this Assembly to be an expression of enthusiasm, of the realization of the urgency and of the active commitment of the Congregation of the Mission in favor of the poor today.

They would like this Assembly to help see with new eyes the behavior of Jesus, evangelizer of the poor and the Vincentian spiritual experience.

They would like this Assembly to renew and stimulate our collaboration with the Vincentian Family.

They would like this Assembly to help the Congregation to open its heart and its arms to respond to all forms of the most urgent poverties at the beginning of the third millennium.

They would like this Assembly, in a prophetic spirit, to open new horizons for the activity of the Congregation in the next century.

They would like this Assembly to conclude with a short, concrete, realistic, moving, simple, practical declaration which offers serious, binding, stimulating commitments to the Congregation, to the provinces and to each missionary, in order that the Vincentian charism would be a true reality on the threshold of the XXI century.

May the Assembly fulfill the eager desires offered by the provinces and expressed repeatedly in their replies. This is also the sincere wish of the Preparatory Commission as we conclude the task confided to us.

(Translated by John Kennedy, C.M.)

(1) The meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca took place from 5-15 June 1996. Cf. *Vincentiana* 1996, 215-219.

(2) Cf. *Vincentiana* 1996, 433-436.

(3) October 1, 1996.

(4) Cf. *Statute* 88.

(5) In an appendix, there are graphs illustrating the levels of collaboration among the various groups of the Vincentian Family, from the point of view of the Visitors and Councils of the 45 provinces which replied.

(6) The first three questions called attention to the most urgent needs of the poor and to the new challenges for the mission at the dawn of the third millennium.

Questions 4 to 9 and 14 were on collaboration with the members of the groups of the Vincentian Family.

Questions 10 and 11 provoked a deeper study of some orientations concerning the formation of our own.

Twelve referred to interprovincial collaboration.

Questions 14 and 16 were on the opportunity to formulate modifications in our *Statutes* and to present postulates.

Questions 15 and 17 were on the methodology of the Assembly and the characteristics of the final document of the Assembly.

(7) Cf. Robert Maloney, "The Vincentian Family" in *Vincentiana* 1997, 117-124.

(8) Letter to the Visitors of January 25, 1997. *Vincentiana* 1997, 65-66.

(9) In this same letter, he communicated to us the invitation he had addressed to Sr. Juana Elizondo, Mr. César Nunes Viana, and Mrs. Patricia Palacios de Nava to participate in our Assembly from July 9-14, 1998.

(10) Almost all, if one considers the fact that Nigeria did not hold an Assembly and the Provinces of Northern and Southern India held theirs together.

(11) There were five very arduous drafts, which led the members of the Commission to call it familiarly "Documentum Amoris."

ANNEX

Collaboration among the various groups of the Vincentian Family (replies from October-November 1996)

Vincentians and Daughters of Charity

- * High
- * Good
- * Sporadic
- * Rarely or not at all

Vincentians and AIC

- * Good
- * Interest and some participation
- * Beginning collaboration
- * The AIC does not exist or there are no relations

Vincentians and SSVP

- * Good
- * Some cooperation (counselors)
- * very rare or non-existent

Vincentians and the Vincentian Marian Youth

- * Good
- * Sporadic
- * Beginning
- * The Vincentian Marian Youth do not exist

Vincentians and Miraculous Medal Association

- * Some collaboration
- * No relations

Vincentians and other Vincentian groups

- * Some collaboration
- * No relations

The various groups among themselves

- * Some common meetings
- * First steps
- * No relations
- * Do not know, did not reply

(12) Cf. *Directory of the General Assembly*, art. 8, 1_. Cf. also *Statute* 82.

(13) Cf. *Constitutions*, 137.

From common spiritual heritage to shared service of the poor

by Zeracristos Yosief, C.M.

First of all, let me greet you all in the words of St. Paul: "May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace" (1 Cor 1:3). I served as a member of the Preparatory Commission of this 1998 General Assembly. The sole purpose of this presentation is to say "hello" and "welcome" to all of you, representatives of our Congregation and to offer you several points of orientation for your consideration and relevant to our gathering here in Rome with other Vincentian Family representatives.

Since June 1996 the Congregation of the Mission has been talking a great deal about and prayerfully reflecting on the Vincentian Family. It has been a real surprise for many of us to discover that the family of St. Vincent de Paul embraces more than two million people. This is truly amazing and reminds us of the great responsibility which is ours. The great challenge for us, however, is not just to acknowledge this whole group in the abstract, but to be able to welcome each group as another member of our own family and to be convinced that having the same founder or the same spiritual source means that we then share a common spiritual heritage that leads all of us to the commitment to service of the poor. With this awareness, we can even think about joining each other to plan to serve them better.

These are the basic elements which will join all of us together here. Thus we are ready for the second stage taking place this week of July 9 - 14, 1998. This is a crucial week for us and for the future of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family as a whole.

Before planning the future, we need to develop a clear idea of what it means to "be family"

Someone might ask, "What is the purpose of this week with the Vincentian Family?" My answer would be that we want to know each other better and so come to accept and even love one another as family members. We Vincentians of the Congregation now know, thanks be to God, that we do not stand alone and that we cannot be a closed organization but rather one that is open to others with whom we can plan for the future. We have come to be aware that we have two million sisters and brothers who also witness to Christ in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul.

We also believe that this week's gathering is a work of divine providence and we want it to be qualitatively different from any past General Assemblies. Thus each member of this Assembly is called upon to maintain this spirit of openness to all who

have been invited to join us here so that we can be evermore strongly committed to know and love our Vincentian Family.

St. Paul pointed out to the Philippians that "my prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and that you never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception" (Phil 1:6). I am sure that during this week we are going to do a lot of talking and come up with not a few plans and commitments. This is important and even essential but we should not allow it to be merely an intellectual exercise for its own sake.

Recalling principles and stating intentions are not enough. Rather, each of us is asked to participate in a lively way that can lead us to a greater sense of responsibility and effective action as followers of St. Vincent de Paul. The love we want to develop among ourselves is not a "political love in the Church." Love for the poor is not merely an act of the intellect but of the heart and the hands as well, as St. Vincent always reminds us. It was he himself who showed us that our spirituality consists in "practical, effective charity." Since Vincent de Paul, the apostle of charity, shows us a way of following Christ in the Church and in the world, it is important that we always stress this practical love.

St. Vincent once expressed himself in the following way: "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).

To sum up

If we can understand that the member groups of the Vincentian Family have a great deal in common with each other, even with our differences, then in the days to come we can highlight our common heritage. But since those who do not know each other cannot love each other we have to get to know, appreciate and love one another more.

This is one of our main objectives in the coming week and the process we will be following has been designed to make this more possible to achieve. We can then more realistically think that our knowledge and love for each other can lead us to love and serve the poor better. "Let us go, my brothers," as St. Vincent once said to the confreres, "let us go and occupy ourselves with new love in the service of the poor, and let us seek out as well the poorest and the most abandoned..." (SV ???).

I think that the basic attitudes we need to have during this week to come are those which have been repeated over the past two years:

- a) To recognize St. Vincent as either the founder or a principal source of inspiration for all of us,

b) A strong thrust toward serving the poor,

c) A spirituality based mainly on concrete, practical charity, lived out in simplicity and humility.

If this Assembly is going to give a new hope to the Congregation and to the Church, I think then that every branch of our family should agree with that which the AIC years ago already affirmed: "acting together against all forms of poverty." It is this awareness that I wish for each of us during the week to come.

State of the Congregation of the Mission

July 1998

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General*

Introduction

We begin this Assembly in the twilight years of the second millennium. We can already see signs on the horizon that harbingers the dawn of the third. Today we look back and we look forward, confident that the Kingdom of God is really here among us. For Christians the presence of the Kingdom has a wonderful sense of urgency: "I tell you, the time is running out," Paul writes. "From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away."¹

Theologians have attempted to describe the paradoxical nature of the Kingdom by saying that it is here "already," but "not yet" fully. Its energies are at work among us now by the power of the Risen Lord, but we await its fullness when all things are finally restored in Christ.

This already-not-yet tension places the Church in a paradoxical position in regard to time. She adheres to the *past*, with its rich tradition, but is not shackled to it; rather, she develops it, constantly mediating between the word of God and contemporary circumstances. She attends to the *present*, but she is not coerced by its demands; rather, she is continually discerning what is of God and truly promotes the human person, but also what is of sin and ultimately corrupts us. She looks forward to the *future*, but not with anxiety; rather, she awaits the Lord's coming with confidence, knowing that "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the human heart what things God has prepared for those who love him."²

I ask you today to look back briefly with me, especially over the last six years, so that we might understand ourselves better. Then I ask you to look forward in this Assembly that we might launch out on a mission that is renewed and vibrant.

I. Some Statistics

When St. Vincent died the Congregation had only about 225 members. How many are we today? Are we increasing or decreasing? What is the factual reality of the Congregation?

¹ 1 Cor 7:29-31.

² 1 Cor 2:9.

I have asked the Secretary General, Emeric Amyot d'Inville, who knows the data much better than I, to present a statistical picture for you. The data will help us see the changing face of the Congregation. It is clear that those provinces which are growing fastest are frequently those that have the fewest economic resources.

II. New international Missions

By the time of St. Vincent's death, the Congregation was already international, having moved out from France into Poland, Italy, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. Today we have 50 provinces and vice-provinces, and many of these have foreign missions. In fact, we encourage every province to start a mission, or at least to cooperate in one if possible. Some provinces have even given birth to three or four other provinces.

At the last General Assembly, in 1992, two of the commitments that the Congregation made concerned the missions *ad gentes* (# 5 and # 6), including a commitment to open at least one missionary project in Eastern Europe. In the last six years, many confreres have volunteered to go to new and generally very poor places, and the Visitors have been very generous in making the sacrifice of letting them go. As a result we have been able to send mission teams to Albania (1993), to Mbinga in Tanzania (1993), to Honiara in the Solomon Islands (1993), to China (1994), to El Alto in Bolivia (1994), to Xai-Xai in Mozambique (1994) to Kharkiv in the Ukraine (1995), to Ni_nij Tagil in Russia (1997), to Ruhengeri in Rwanda (1998). Volunteers have also gone to strengthen already existing missions in Cuba, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Algeria. Often in these missions, we work side by side with the Daughters of Charity; sometimes, in fact, the Daughters preceded us, as in Rwanda, and our going there is precisely to accompany them.

Things have not always been easy in these missions. In fact, at times inculturation has been difficult. The missionaries have had to learn new languages and to adjust to new customs and to rugged physical conditions. Some were not able to adjust, but most did. Their placements are often very remote, like Siberia or El Alto or Mpepai or the Solomon Islands; some too are very dangerous, like Rwanda and Algeria.

These are not the only new missionary initiatives. I am delighted to say that the provinces, even those with diminishing personnel, continue to open new missions both within and outside their own territories and many assist missions with financial aid. Almost all of our provinces have undergone a serious revision of works in order to reach out more clearly and effectively toward the poor.

III. Popular Missions

In these years there have also been significant efforts toward renewing the popular missions. Such efforts have often crossed provincial, and even national boundaries. These renewed missions have the following characteristics:

- a) a time of significant preparation (the pre-mission),
- b) the organization and training of a mission team, often involving a large number of priests, deacons, sisters, brothers, and lay men and women,
- c) an extended time period within the area of the mission (the time varies),
- d) catechesis and reflection on the word of God within small groups,
- e) involvement of the *local* clergy and laity in the mission itself,
- f) organization of works of charity within the mission area,
- g) follow-up.

IV. Formation of the Diocesan Clergy

At the General Assembly of 1992, in his reflection on the state of the Congregation, Fr. McCullen expressed the desire for a greater Vincentian presence in this apostolate which is so crucial for the renewal of the Church today.

I am happy to say that our presence in the formation of the diocesan clergy has increased over the last six years. Some of our new missions aim precisely at assisting the clergy. 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 Gda_sk in Poland; at Popayán, Arauca, Garzón, Ibagué, Inzá, Betel, San Vicente del Caguán, Restrepo, and Vereda Minas Belalcázar in Colombia; at Chongoene in Mozambique; at Adelaide in Australia; at Curitiba in Brazil; at Malang in Indonesia and at Honiara 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, Poland, Byelorussia, France, Mozambique, the Philippines 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).

V. Vincentian Family

Today we witness a renewed sense of enthusiasm and energy in regard to the Vincentian Family. I can only say, as St. Vincent might put it, that Providence has brought this about. When I visited Mexico with the Vicar General four years ago, I was struck forcefully by the close cooperation among the various branches of our family there. On returning here, we discussed this in the General Council and decided to call together, for the first time, the heads of the principal branches of our family. A huge amount has happened since then. In fact, the family and its mission is the theme of this General Assembly. The Vicar General, José Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, as well as Fr. Palú, who is the Assistant responsible for contact with the various lay

groups in our family, will speak about our family at length several days from now, so I will say no more today.

VI. Ongoing Formation

What about the growth of the missionaries personally? Do they continue to be renewed personally, to read, to reflect, to change?

Our Statutes (S 42) ask the provinces to promote personal and communal ongoing formation programs. Some provinces have very well organized formation plans and a director for ongoing formation. Interprovincial programs have also been creatively developed over the last six years by the various conferences of Visitors. Here I will mention a few of the most significant projects undertaken on an international level.

In order to promote the ongoing formation of the confreres, we held a Vincentian Month in 1993 on the theme of the last General Assembly: "New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities." Confreres came from all of the provinces to participate in it.

In 1994, we began the International Center for Vincentian Formation (CIF): St. Vincent de Paul. It runs two sessions a year with 20-30 participants each time. Our intent is that all confreres within the 35-50 age bracket will take part in this program. The evaluations have been very positive. Fr. John Rybolt is here. He will report to you later in this Assembly and can answer any questions that you might have.

In 1996 we published an *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission*. Now it is being used as the basis for ongoing formation programs in many provinces. I am most grateful to the Vicar General, to John Prager, Jaime Corera, Léon Lauwerier, Hugh O'Donnell, Miguel Pérez Flores, and Benjamín Romo for all their help in bringing this project to completion.

In 1996 we held a meeting of all the Visitors in Salamanca to discuss inculturation of the Vincentian charism and a whole series of other practical matters that the Visitors thought would be helpful. Similar themes had been discussed at the COVIAM meeting in Kinshasa in 1994.

In 1997 we held another Vincentian Month, on the Popular Missions. A large number of confreres came from the provinces, as well as Daughters of Charity and lay men and women who work with us on our Popular Mission Teams. The evaluations were very positive.

At the beginning of this year we held the first meeting of new Visitors and introduced the *Practical Guide for Visitors* which we hope will be helpful for all those

who take on the service of Visitor. Much of the work for this *Practical Guide* was done by Frs. Miguel Pérez Flores, Joseph Levesque, and Yves Danjou, to whom we owe lots of gratitude.

VII. Prayer

St. Vincent told us: "Give me someone who prays and he will be capable of everything." How do I assess prayer in the Congregation?

As I go around the provinces I sense that most confreres pray faithfully. Occasionally some overemphasize work to the detriment of prayer. But most are admirable in their commitment to both. In regard to our Community prayer, especially the praying of Lauds and Vespers, I sense that some progress has been made, though more could be done to make it better prepared, more beautiful, less mechanical. To help us in that regard, we named a Commission on Prayer that began to meet in 1993. We owe much gratitude to its members: John McKenna, Manuel Nóbrega, Urban Osuji, Bernard Schoepfer, and Luis Alfonso Sterling. The goal of the Commission was to help us renew our common prayer. I asked it to be guided by the following principles in regard to our common prayer:

- a. It should be beautiful.
- b. It should be simple.
- c. It should be attuned to the prayer of the Church.
- d. It should be flavored by the Vincentian tradition.
- e. It should be flexible (adaptable to different situations).

This Commission produced a provisional *Vincentian Book of Prayer*. It stated explicitly that this was not to be an 'editio typica' to be translated or followed slavishly, but that it was simply a sample of what might be done in other languages and cultures. It was not intended to replace the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, which remains the framework in which we generally pray, but was rather to provide another, more specifically Vincentian, option which might be used on various occasions.

A number of provinces have taken up the challenge to work at developing forms of communal Vincentian prayer appropriate to their own language and culture. The results of their work are on display here at the Assembly. This coming September these results will be evaluated and then the Commission will meet once again to discuss the next step.

VIII. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

When St. Vincent died it took months and months for the news to get around. Confreres were still writing to him six months after he was dead. Today news spreads

almost instantaneously because of modern means of communication. Are we using the new means of communication well?

We are, to some extent, and I hope that we can do much more in the future.

Actually, several years ago we established a Commission on the Use of the Media. I am very grateful to its members: Victor Bieler, Victor Groetelaars, Lourenço Mika, Attilio Mombelli, and Augustine Towey. It did very good work, but we found some of its proposals too expensive at that time and did not think that the costs would be proportionate to the results. But what has been done?

Recently I asked all of our provinces to establish in the Visitor's office and in the principal house of formation an Internet connection with e-mail. This will enable us to communicate very rapidly with just about all of the Visitors and all of the houses of formation. It will also enable us to send articles and other useful formation materials to the houses of formation in Spanish, French, and English and to facilitate the interchange of such materials among themselves.

During this General Assembly we are using a Vincentian Family Home Page on the Internet and putting frequent bulletins on it. This allows confreres all over the world to tune in regularly on what is happening here. A number of provinces already have their own home pages. Here at the General Curia we receive and send a great deal of the daily correspondence by e-mail.

We are also making a video of the General Assembly which we hope the Visitors will be able to use to communicate the Assembly's results more effectively to the confreres in the provinces.

The members of SIEV have produced, among other things, a compact disk which has on it the writings of St. Vincent in various languages, plus many other interesting things. A provisional version is available right here for anyone who would like a copy.

IX. Investigating the causes of poverty

You recall that in 1986 Pope John Paul II gave us a rousing challenge:

Fathers and Brothers of the Mission, search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long term solutions; adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church (Osservatore Romano, English Edition, August 11, 1986, p. 12).

There have been a few significant steps in this regard, though I wish that we were doing more. St. John's University in New York has established a Center for

Church and Society with a view toward investigating the causes of poverty and proposing short and long term solutions. It has an interesting page on the Internet.

Recently, we began to seek recognition from the United Nations as an NGO so that we might participate on the many committees at the United Nations that treat questions that interest us as Vincentians, such as poverty, famine, war and peace, health care, education, and human rights. Our application process is now complete and we are awaiting the results, which will probably not come until next December. In this realm of activity, we have learned from AIC, which is very well organized in its relationship with the UN, the European Community, and other international organizations.

X. Finances

All these things cost a lot of money. As you know, St. Vincent always wanted our works to have a sound financial basis. So, what is the financial state of the Congregation?

Later today the Econome General, Pat Griffin, will explain our financial situation and will be available to respond to any questions you might have.

Conclusion

My brothers, being fully alive means looking back and looking forward, looking in and looking out. Looking back is history. Looking forward is hope. Looking in is meditation, with a view toward conversion. Looking out is mission, with a view toward creating new life.

Today we have looked back, especially over the last six years, in order to assess the state of the Congregation. In the days ahead I ask you to look forward to envision new possibilities.

There is a theme that the prophet Isaiah loves to repeat. The prophet states: "See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light. Can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds" (43:19-20). Isaiah voices God's promise: "Behold, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create" (65:17-18a).

Isaiah sees that his prophecies are already being fulfilled. Notice that this is precisely Jesus' perspective in the text that is foundational to our Community. In the synagogue at Nazareth he unrolls the scroll and reads the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor" (Lk 4:18). "Today," Jesus adds, "this scripture passage

is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). Jesus tells us that today the longings of Isaiah are being realized.

I assure you that I have seen this repeatedly during my visits to the provinces. I have seen the signs of the kingdom today. I have seen in our Vincentian Family men and women who are filled with God's Spirit and who spread that spirit by their love, by their compassion, by their enthusiasm, by their peace. I have seen captives liberated through countless programs of integral human promotion, liberated from sin, liberated from oppression, liberated from ignorance. I have witnessed the blind seeing through operations performed in the hospitals staffed by the Daughters of Charity, or through programs that favor the blind in our schools, or through the eyes of Ladies of Charity or members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society who come to their homes to read aloud. Recently in Madagascar I saw hundreds of the lame walking, and living joyfully in our homes for the handicapped. There too I saw lepers cleansed by medicines that halt their ravaging disease, and cleansed also by the love and the care of confreres and Daughters of Charity who have welcomed them into their home.

The challenge for us is to continue to make this Isaian prophecy, and our community motto, come true today. "Today," Jesus says, "this word is fulfilled in your hearing." Today in 1998. Today in 1999. Today in the third millennium. Having repeatedly witnessed the generosity of so many members of the Vincentian Family, I encourage you, with confidence: today, and in the third millennium, continue to make the blind see, continue to make the lame walk, and continue to help the poor know that the good news is really being proclaimed in their midst.

Statistical Report on the Congregation of the Mission

*by Emeric Amyot d'Inville, C.M.
Secretary General*

As I have been asked to give a statistical report to the Assembly General on the state of the Congregation of the Mission, I will begin by giving the numbers for the past year, then for the past six years, after which I will locate those numbers in the context of the recent history of the Congregation. Then, I will give the numbers of young in formation and, finally, I will give the tendencies for the future which can be drawn from these statistics.

I. Numbers for 1977

1. The numbers by category

According to the statistical report for 1998 on the state of the Congregation of the Mission, drawn from the data sent by the Visitors at the beginning of this year, there were, on 31 December 1997, an overall total of 4,072 members divided thus;

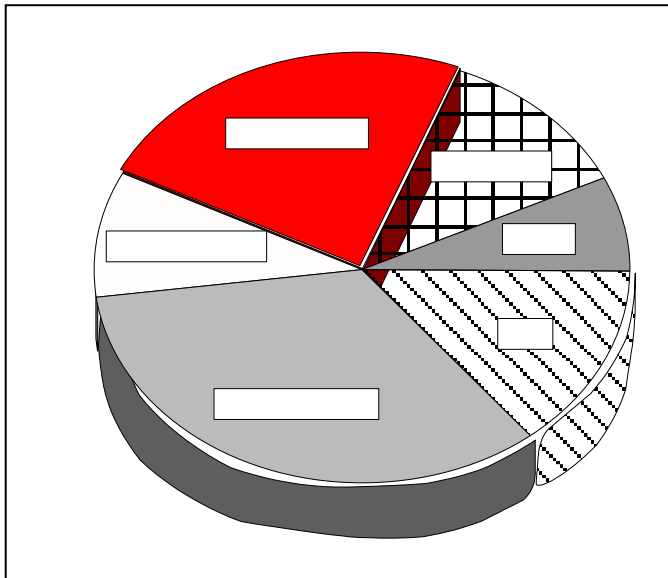
a. 3,557 incorporated members, of whom 30 are bishops, 3,194 priests, 10 permanent deacons, 195 brothers and 128 incorporated students (under vows)

b. 515 admitted members, of whom 481 are seminarists or students for priesthood and 34 are future brothers.

2. Numbers by regions of the world

If we calculate the 'adult members' (bishops, priests, brothers, permanent deacons) and group them by regions of the world, that is, where they live and work (regardless of their province of origin), we get the following results;

	Bps	Priest	Brs	Deacons	Total	(%/C.M.)
Africa	4	235	13		252	7.34%
Latin America	15	744	36	1	796	23.21%
Asia/Pacific	3	381	22	4	410	11.95%
Western Europe	4	1,087	74	3	1,168	34.06%
Eastern Europe	4	308	12		324	9.44%
USA (+ Canada)		439	38	2	479	13.96%
TOTAL	30	3,194	195	10	3,429	100%



The C.M. by region in 1997

We can see the present situation on the pie chart given. Let us accept the given numbers which show us the numerical importance of each region in the Congregation. Following that, we will take account of other criteria which will also allow us to evaluate the dynamism of each region.

II. Looking back over the past six years

1. Comparative numbers; 1991/1997

In order to be able to evaluate the numbers by category as given for 31 December 1997, we will compare them firstly, with those drawn up on 31 December 1991, which were the ones available to the last General Assembly.

Incorporated members:	1991	1997	change/per year		% over the 6 years	
Bishops	30	30				
Priests			3,267	3,189	-78	-13
						-
						2.38%
Permanent deacons	7	10	+3	+0.5		+42.85%
Students under vows		141	128	-13	-2.1	-9.21%
Brothers	236	195	-41	-6.8		-17.37%
Total	3,681	3,552	-129	-21.5		-3.5%

Admitted members (not yet under vows)

Seminarists/students	566	481	-85	-14.1		-15%
Brother candidates	14	34	+20	+3.3		+142%
Total	580	515	-65	-10.8		-11.2%
General Total	4,261	4,067	-199	-33.1		-4.6%

Therefore, we note, over the past six years, a reduction of 78 in the number of priests and 41 in the number of brothers, and of 129 in the total of those incorporated (including the permanent deacons and the students under vows) which is an overall decrease of 3.5% per year. But, before analysing this, we need to look at some other significant numbers from the past six years:

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	Total
Priestly Ordinations	68	83	84	68	77	71	451
Brothers' Vows	2	1	1		3		7
Deaths	82	72	94	80	83	77	488
Departures	(these can be calculated at 99 over the six years)						
Total (incorporated)		3,668	3,618	3,604	3,567	3,519	3,552 -129

2. Analysis of the decrease in our membership

a. *The decrease in membership of the Congregation of the Mission continues.* Starting with the 3,681 incorporated members in December 1991, this gives a decrease of 129 members, with an average of almost 21 per year, made up of 13 priests and 7 brothers, during the six-year period.

b. *The decrease is due, on the one hand, to the number of deaths* which is somewhat higher than the number of new priests and brothers (a deficit of 38 over the six years, which is an average of nearly 6 per year).

c. *It is also due to the numbers leaving the Congregation.* The number can be estimated at 99, that is an average of 16.5 per year.

Note on those leaving the Congregation. It is difficult to know exactly how many confreres have left the Congregation during the six-year term. If the number confreres leaving, who have received an official and definitive permission, from the Assembly of 1992 until today, is taken as 175, this is seen to be divided thus:

- 1) *69 dispensed from vows by the Superior General: 50 for incardination in a diocese or other religious group and 19 to brothers or students for personal reasons.*
- 2) *60 'reductions to the lay state' granted by the Holy See*
- 3) *46 dismissals from the Congregation of the Mission: 36 Ipso Facto (for civil marriage, most frequently) and 10 more confirmed by the Holy See.*

We must note, however, that a large number of these confreres were already living, in fact, outside the Congregation, sometimes over long periods, and counted as such by the Visitors. In these cases, their departure has simply been officially sanctioned by a dispensation from vows, reduction to the lay state or dismissal during the six-year period.

On the other hand, if one takes the total number of those incorporated on 31 December 1991 (3,681) and adds the number of new priests and brothers for the six years in question (458) and subtracts the number of deaths for this period (488), one can see that there is a deficit of 99, which corresponds with the actual number of confreres who left during that period, which gives an average of 16.5 per year.

d. *The decrease is proportionally stronger among the brothers* (-41, that is 9.2% over the six-year period) than among the priests (-78, that is 2.3%) whose numbers have tended to stabilise. The decrease is equally notable amongst the students under vows, but this data is relative to the date of the ordinations.

e. *There has been a notable, but relative, decrease in the numbers of members admitted* (65; or 11.2% over the six years) but that is in part due to the fact that some provinces have held over the period of the Internal Seminary until after Philosophy. This data, therefore, is not significant. It is more important to see the number of young in formation worldwide, which is encouraging.

III. Situating the data for the past six years within the history of the Congregation.

In order to evaluate this decrease in our numbers, it helps to situate it in the history of these past decades. I will take as a point of reference the six-yearly General Assemblies (with the numbers for the end of the preceding year) and with, as a point of departure, the year 1966, when the Congregation experienced its historical numerical high-point.

1. Changes in membership per six-year terms of office and by categories since 1966

Incorporated member	1966	1967	1973	1979	1985	1991	1997
Bishops	25	26	27	29	31	30	30
Priests					4,399	4,395	3,995
		3,652	3,433	3,267	3,189		
Permanent Deacons				3	8	7	10
Students in vows	881	821	676	101	94	141	128
Brothers	537	527	472	344	288	236	195
Total	5,842	5,769	5,107	4,129	3,854	3,681	3,552

2. Changes in the numbers of priests and brothers since 1966

From all these numbers, those that are really important for us are those for **priests** and **brothers**, because students used to take vows a good deal earlier in their formation in

the past than they do now, and were, therefore, more numerous. Therefore, one cannot really compare those numbers. As for the bishops (the only vocation in the Congregation where the numbers are increasing!) and the permanent deacons (a vocation which is developing only slowly), they make up only a small number and will not be included in the reckoning here, in order not to complicate matters.

Table 1

	1967-1973		1973-1979		1979-1985		1985-1991		1991-1997		1967-1997	
	total	per year	total	per year	total	per year	total	per year	total	per year	total	per year
Priests	-400	-66.7	-343	-57.1	-219	-36.5	-166	-27.6	-78	-13	-1206	-40.2
Brothers	-145	-24.3	-55	-9.2	-56	-9.3	-52	-8.7	-41	-6.8	-349	-11.6
Total	-545	-90.8	-398	-66.3	-275	-45.8	-218	-36.3	-199	-19.8	-1555	-51.8

From these numbers, we can make the following comments;

- a. Since 1966, the Congregation of the Mission has 1,555 lost priests and brothers, that is an average of 51.8 per year. That gives an overall decrease of 31.5% in membership. (Had the students in vows been included that would have given a decrease of 2,290 for that period, or 39.19%)
- b. Over all the six-year terms, we have moved from an average decrease of 75 per year, through 66, 45, 36 and, currently, about 20 per year. It seems clear then that the rate of decrease is slowing down and, therefore, our numbers are stabilising.
- c. Since 1966, the number of **priests** has decreased by 1,206 (27.41%.) The **brothers** have paid a still higher price since their numbers decreased by 349, that is 64.99% of their overall number.
- d. If the decrease in the number of **priests** has lessened in the course of the last six-years (2,38%) for the **brothers** it remains quite strong (17.37%)

Since a picture paints a thousand words, there is a graph (# 1 in the appendix) which shows, year by year, since 1955, the statistical curves for the priests and brothers. We note that:

- 1) There was a very rapid increase in the numbers of priests throughout the 1950s and up to 1964 (those were the days when we still built large seminaries!) and this was probably the time that the Congregation knew the most rapid growth in its history;
- 2) following that, there were some 'stagnant' years, from 1965 to 1968, with the historic high-point in 1966

3) then, we note the very rapid decline of the 1970s, which slowed down during the 1980s and has, overall, slowed yet more in the 1990s, perhaps veering even towards stabilising.

If we look at another graphic which shows the statistical curve of priests and brothers (# 2 in the appendix) for the period for which we have regular statistics, that is since the regular publication on the Catalogue, which began in 1853:

- 1) We note the marked regular increase in **priests** until 1966, then the decrease which we have analysed. We are presently at the level of 1940.
- 2) As for the **brothers**, having increased regularly until 1900, when their numbers totalled 805, they have decreased constantly since this time and lost 75.77% of their number.

Conclusion: In the last 30 years, we have gone through a very serious crisis in our numbers, which the priests have tended to overcome over the past few years, but which continues to seriously affect the brothers.

3. Changes in the membership by region since 1966.

The different regions of the world have been affected very differently by the crisis, due to historical, cultural and ecclesial effects.

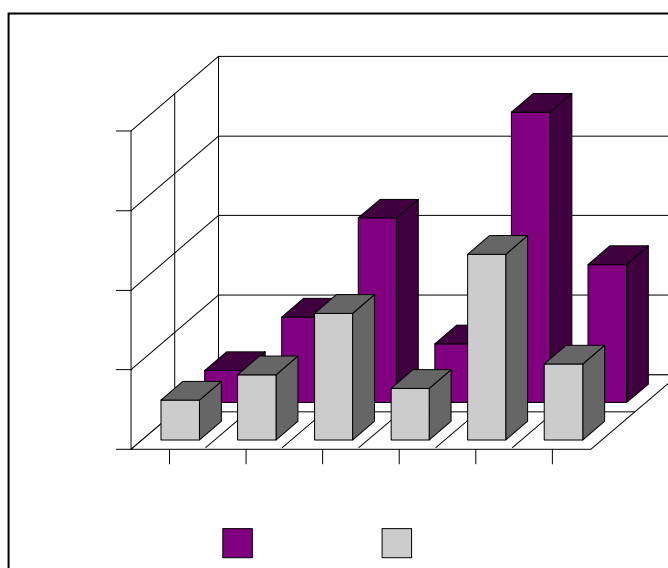
Table 2

Incorporated	1966		1997		Overall	
Members	Number	% of CM	Number	% of CM	Number	% of CM
Africa	201	4.05	252	7.34	+51	+25.37
Asia/Pacific	537	10.82	410	11.95	-127	-23.64
Latin America	1,161	23.4	796	23.21	-365	-31.43
Eastern Europe	369	7.43	324	9.45	-45	-12.19
Western Europe	1,825	36.78	1,168	34.06	-657	-36.00
USA	868	17.49	479	13.96	-389	-44.81
TOTAL	4,961	100	3,429	100	-1,532	-30.88

From the above numbers, which can be seen in the graphic following, we can make the following observations:

"ADULT" MEMBERS

- 1) In this turbulent period which the Congregation has undergone in the course of the past 30 years, it has lost 31% of its membership;
- 2) Only Africa has increased (+25.37%) since 1966. It did, however, undergo a slight decrease during the 1970s, due to the crisis experienced in the European provinces which send out missionaries. But, as indigenous vocations started to arrive, it has experienced a rapid increase.
- 3) The United States (-44.81%), Western Europe (-36%) and Latin America (-31.43%) are the regions which have lost the most members, having had many departures. But the two first-named (USA and Europe) have not experienced the dynamism of new vocations and continue to decline, while Latin America actually has a lot of vocations and, since 1991, has started to increase slightly.
- 4) Asia/Pacific (-23.64%) has decreased because it has lost contact with continental China. Moreover, there has been the continual departures of a number of western missionaries who were working in the various provinces. But, the number of vocations ensures that this region has experienced a constant and strong increase over the past few years, even if the situation does vary from province to province.
- 5) Eastern Europe (-12.19%) has suffered a great deal from Communism, although in different ways in different countries. But, despite all this, it has shown a certain vitality with numerous vocations.



IV. Statistics on the young in formation at the end of 1997

One can claim that the vitality of a province and a region depends, in large part, on the number of young in formation there, which will ensure its future and the development of its apostolates. In the numbers which we will give now, we have included all the young, regardless of their level of formation: for the

priests before ordination and before vows for the brothers (Internal Seminary, philosophy, theology, formation of the brothers, pastoral experience)

Taking the numbers of young in formation by province, the following data result (taking only the first seven provinces)

1. Philippines: 119 in formation
 2. Colombia: 85
 3. Almost ex aequo with Colombia... guess... Paris, with 83!
 4. Indonesia: 67
 5. Poland: 58
 6. With almost the same numbers:... guess again.... Ireland, with 55.
- Equally, ex aequo with Ireland, India (north and south united)

In reality, most of the students of the Paris province are from the Cameroon and Vietnam and are in formation in their countries, and all the students of the Irish province are from Nigeria, which has since been set up as a vice-province.

This shows us that this way of calculating can be deceptive. In fact, it is more interesting to calculate by region, including Vietnam in Asia and the Cameroon and Nigeria in Africa. This way of calculating shows us the lines of action for the future. This gives us:

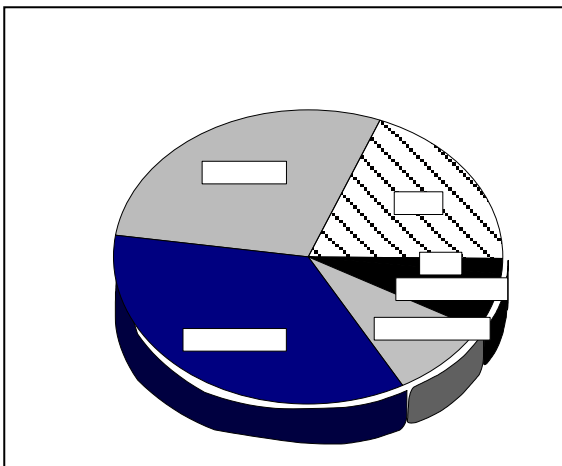
Africa:	212
Asia/Pacific:	311
Latin America:	390
Eastern Europe:	70
Western Europe:	95
USA:	17
TOTAL:	1,095

We can see clearly an important phenomenon emerging: the regions of the world which today constitute a smaller proportion of the Congregation of the Mission (Africa and Asia/Pacific) are very important in terms of our young in formation, and the inverse holds for the regions which have more members today (Western Europe and USA). We will take these numbers for the last stage of our reflection where we will attempt to deduce some tendencies for the future.

V. Tendencies for the future

The probabilities for the development, or decline, of the Congregation in the different parts of the world depend, on the one hand, on the abundance, or lack, of young people in formation and, on the other, on the average age of the senior members of these regions. We are going to study each of these factors in turn.

1. Relationship between 'senior members' and those in initial formation at the end of 1997

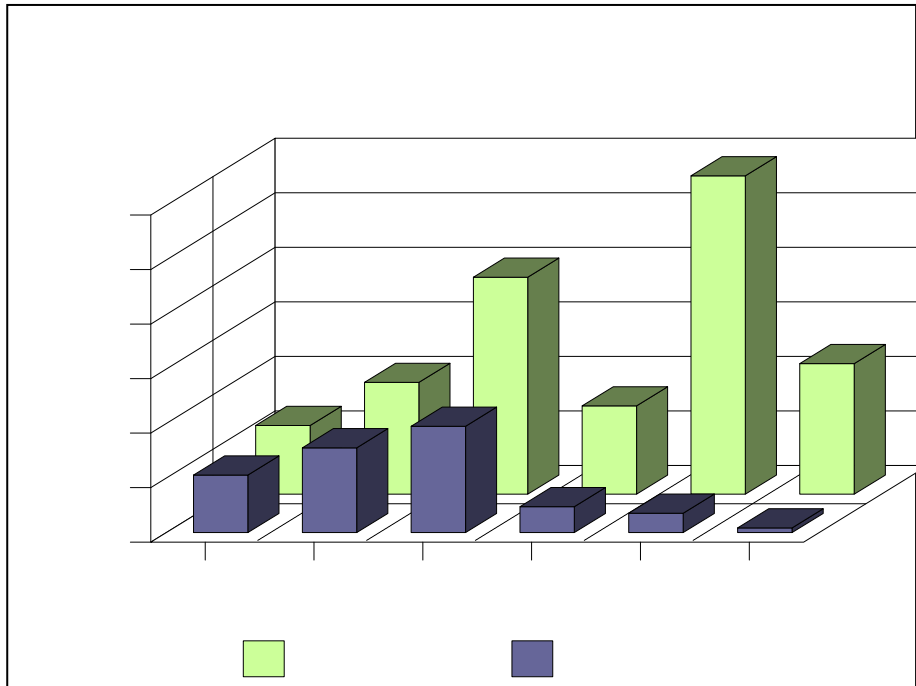


If we put side by side the numbers of senior members (Bishops, priests and brothers) and the numbers of those in initial formation, and by region, we get the following results:

	'Seniors'	Students	Relationship
Africa	252	211	83.73%
Asia/Pacific	410	311	75.85%
Latin America	796	390	48.99%
Eastern Europe	324	95	29.32%
Western Europe	1,168	71	6.07%
USA/Canada	479	17	3.55%
TOTAL	3,429	1,095	31.93%

End of 1997	Senior members		In initial formation		Ratio
	Number	% of CM	Number	% of CM	Seniors/Juniors
Africa	252	7.34%	211	19.26%	83.73%
Asia/Pacific	410	11.95%	311	27.39%	75.85%
Latin America	796	23.13%	390	35.6%	48.99%
Eastern Europe	324	9.44%	95	8.67%	29.32%
Western Europe	1,168	34.06%	71	6.48%	6.07%
USA	479	13.96%	17	1.55%	3.55%
TOTAL	3,429	100%	1,095	100%	31.93%

From this data, we can draw the following observations, which we have already noted in looking at the preceding graph:



1. The Congregation, which has, proportionally, a very large number in initial formation in **Africa** (83.73% in relation to its senior members) and in **Asia/Pacific** (75.85%) is, logically, called on to develop rapidly in these regions.

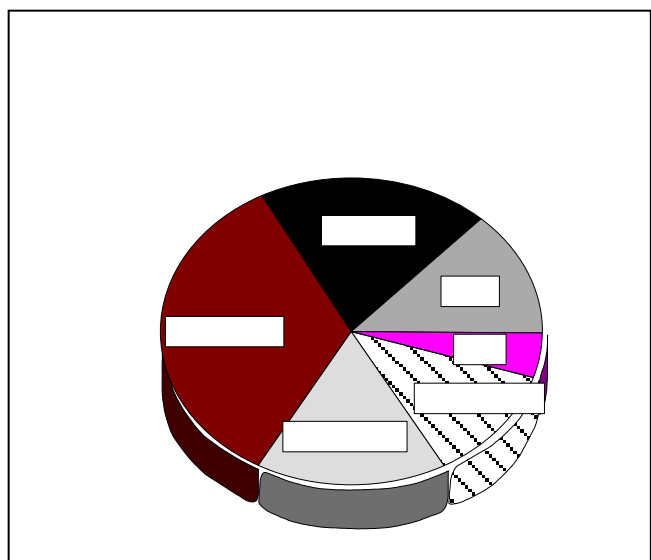
2. **Latin America**, where those in initial formation represent 49% of its senior members, also has very good numbers, although proportionally less. Therefore, it is also logical that there are good possibilities for the future.

3. The Congregation should be able to maintain its numbers in **Eastern Europe**, with a ratio of 29.32%, but it does not have enough people in formation to develop.

4. As for **Western Europe** (6.07%) and the **USA** (3.55%); these regions have very few in formation and must, logically, continue to decline.

As one might expect, there are also a number of new priests and brothers over the past six years. From 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1997, we have the following numbers;

- Africa: 62 new priests or



brothers; that is 13.53% of the CM

- Asia/Pacific: 89; that is 19.43%
- Latin America: 154 (40 of them in Colombia!); that is, 33.62%
- Eastern Europe: 75 (53 of them in Poland alone!); that is 16.37%
- Western Europe: 56; that is 12.22%
- USA: 21; that is 4.58%

2. Average age and number of deaths of confreres by region.

Simply by consulting the pages of this year's Catalogue, we note that;

- the provinces of **Africa** vary between averages of 41 and 50 years of age.
- those of **Asia/Pacific** vary between 42 and 50 years of age, with the exception of Australia (56) and China (63)
- those of **Latin America** between 47 and 63.
- those of **Eastern Europe** between 46 and 54 - except Hungary (71)
- those of **Western Europe** between 54 and 66 - except Holland (71)
- those of the **USA** between 56 and 65.

If one looks at the numbers of deceased confreres by region, from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1997, one notes the following;

- Africa:	7 deaths	
- Asia/Pacific:	33 deaths	
- Latin America:	82 deaths	
- Eastern Europe:	60 deaths	
- Western Europe:	226 deaths	
- USA:	82 deaths	
TOTAL:		490

3. Relocation of the Congregation of the Mission from the North-West towards the South-East

When we compare the numbers of deaths and the numbers of new priests and brothers by region, the following graph results, which says a great deal.

Moreover, if one links this data with what we have already seen with regard to the average age and the ratio of senior members/those in initial formation by region, one can make the following observations about the future:

1) **Africa and Asia/Pacific:** which are the regions with, proportionately, the largest number in initial formation, are also those with the lowest average ages per province, and with the fewest deaths. These factors together, and all things considered, assure a good development of these regions even if, at the moment, they are still proportionately small in the Congregation overall.

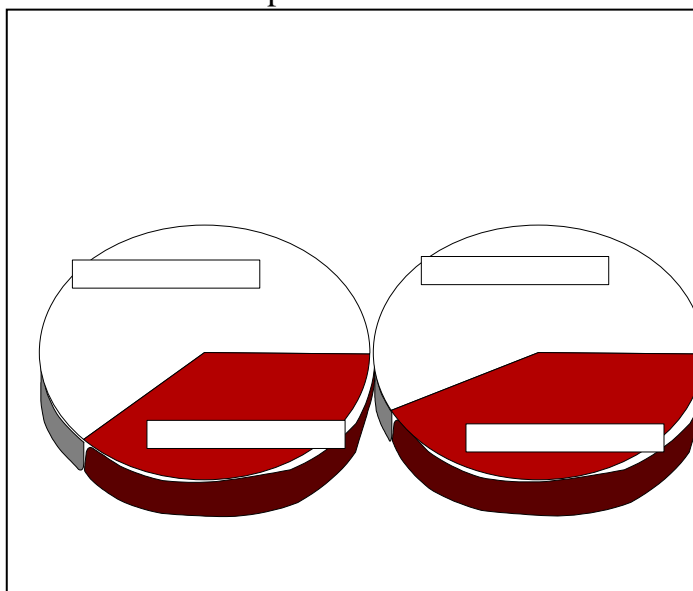
2) **Latin America:** has, at least in some measure, the same characteristics. Also, although it felt the brunt of the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, during which its numbers decreased a great deal, currently it has good possibilities for recovery.

3) **Eastern Europe:** which has fairly low average ages, has a sufficient number of people in initial formation in order to assure a stability of numbers permanently.

4) **USA and Western Europe:** are the regions with the fewest in initial formation, and thus the fewest new priests and brothers, and, at the same time, the highest average ages and, thus, the highest death rate. It should be observed also that many missionaries, originally from these provinces, who have spent all of their lives on mission in southeastern regions, are returning to their home provinces for retirement. The possibility of decreasing numbers

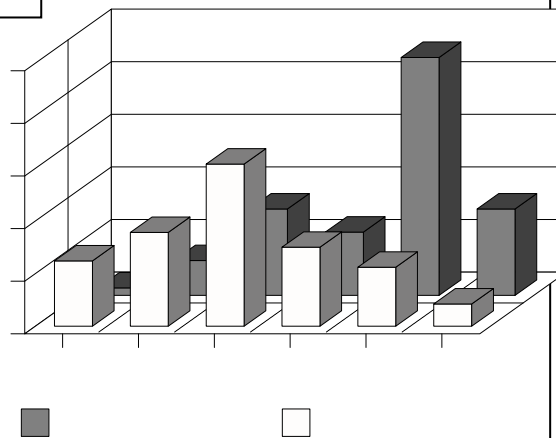
through death are most significant in these regions, without sufficient numbers of new members to replace them. Logically, these regions must continue to diminish in future years.

If one looks at the total number of new priests and brothers by region and the total number of deaths by region,



one sees that it is those regions with the highest death rate that have the lowest rate of entry and that the converse also applies.

In conclusion, one can state, overall, that the Congregation is tending to develop in the Southern and Eastern regions of the world (Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin



America) and to decline in the regions of the North and West (Europe and USA) where it had first developed. Eastern Europe presently experiences a certain stability. This links into an observation that can be made about the Church generally.

However, by reason of the lack of numbers which it still has in Africa and Asia, and of the significant losses it has experienced in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, this is not yet a noticeably marked tendency in the present numbers of adult members, as can be seen in the adjoining graph. The North-West (Europe and USA) has gone from 3,062 confreres (that is 61.73% of the CM) in 1966 to 1,971 confreres (57.48%) in 1997; and the South-East (Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America) from 1,899 confreres (38.27%) in 1966 to 1,458 confreres (42.51%) in 1977. While both have decreased in overall numbers, the North-West has decreased proportionally more. But, above all, the South-East has, for many years, experienced the vitality of numerous vocations. In fact, as can be seen in the adjoining graphs, more than 75% of the deaths in the Congregation of the Mission (368) during the past six years have been in the regions of the North and West, which have only 16.71% of those in initial formation (183). In contrast, only about 25% of the deaths in the Congregation of the Mission have been in the regions of the South and East (122), while they total 83.29% of those in formation (912). This double phenomenon should lead to a rapid acceleration in growth in the Southern-Eastern regions, while those of the North-West, with few vocations and a lot more deaths, continue to decline in the coming years, that is, unless they experience a serious influx of vocations, which is always possible, although it does not show signs of happening at this moment.

If this state of affairs continues like this for a long time, we will have a Congregation which will be firmly rooted for the most part in the Southern and Eastern regions of the world, that is, essentially, in Africa, Asia and Latin

America, while it will have little foothold in the Northern and Western regions of the world, especially in Western Europe and the USA.

But we are not yet there. And we must always take account of other renewals in history which, while unforeseen, were, nevertheless, rapid. In the end, whoever lives long enough will see how all this unfolds.

(Translated by Eugene Curran, CM)

The General Secretariat

Correspondence - Councils - Publications of the General Curia

*by Emeric Amyot d'Inville, CM
Secretary General*

I have been asked to make a presentation on the work of the General Secretariat. I will begin by stating that it is a team of people at the service of the Superior General and of the whole Congregation. There are, in fact, two Daughters of Charity, one from the United States and one from Spain, as well as two Italian laywomen working with me.

My role, as Secretary General, is, on the one hand, that which is set out in Statute 61: preparation for Councils, participation in them, writing up the decisions taken there as well as writing letters. On the other hand, my role is also to direct, coordinate and supervise the work of the secretariat team whose various members have their own areas of responsibility.

I have chosen to touch on certain more important aspects of the work of the General Secretariat, without going into too much detail, or touching on other peripheral aspects of my work: like my journeys and visits to the provinces, or my duties centred on the work of SIEV or the Vincentian Month, etc. I will, therefore, concentrate on the following three points:

- 1) Correspondence
- 2) Councils
- 3) Publications of the Curia General.

I. Correspondence

You write to us, and we to you, a great deal. There are between 4,000 and 4,500 letters, faxes or e-mails arriving at, or emanating from, the Curia each year, concerning life in the Congregation or the Vincentian Family, without counting the numerous letters of good wishes or greetings or messages of secondary importance, which are not lodged in the Archives. As a comparison: we have 3,126 letters written by St. Vincent or addressed to him, gathered together in the first eight volumes of Coste. If, one day, it was decided to publish the complete correspondence of our Superior General, Robert Maloney, who is the main author and recipient of all this correspondence, a new Coste would have to plan on editing a great many more volumes!

Furthermore, we note an overall increase in the volume of letters which come from the Curia: from 1993 to 1997, to take the two years at either end of the six-year term of office, it has increased by 50% (!) and it seems to me that in all cases the volume is greater than in the preceding six-years. By contrast, the volume of letters arriving at the Curia has stayed at pretty much the same volume throughout the term of office. It seems to me that, if the volume of letters from the Curia has increased so much, it is due to the fact that the present Superior General has a great many, and ever more, initiatives which he must set-up, follow-up, provide for, encourage (for example, the new missions, CIF, the various commissions, the Vincentian months, the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca and of the new Visitors in Rome, the Instruction on the Vows, the Practical Guide for the Visitors, etc.). This increase in post from the Curia is a sign of dynamism but it is also a sign of the work of the General Secretariat which, although the number of secretaries has increased, still keeps us constantly occupied.

A large part of the correspondence, in the broad sense, directly involves the General Secretariat. It is concerned with all the notifications (taking vows, ordinations, nominations to provincial offices and deaths) that the Visitors have to send to us. It also involves information with regard to corrections to the *Catalogue* and the annual statistics. For all of that, the secretaries who have to deal with the information are very grateful when you use the reply sheets which we have sent you, when you fill them in following the directions given and when you send them in by the required deadlines. All of this saves a lot of time.

Letters about the Congregation, both those arriving as well as those sent out, are recorded at the General Secretariat, photocopied for the different files which involve them, and filed in the archives of the Secretariat, in the provincial files, the personal files or the files on various issues.

When you write to the Curia, your letters are sent to the recipients, but the vast majority are for the Superior General. If the letters are of lesser importance, each replies to his own letters personally, within the shortest space of time, if he is not travelling. If the letters are of greater importance, they are sent to me so that I can put them on the agenda for the Council.

II. The Councils

The Council normally meets on a Tuesday morning, but there are numerous exceptions on account of the travels of the Superior General or the other members of the Council.

Each year we have an average of 35 to 40 Councils, of which four are *tempo forte* which take place over a week, with one meeting in the morning, the afternoon being used to make useful contacts in order to expedite certain matters and to write up the letters that follow on the decisions of the Council.

I give out to the members of the Council all the documentation that will be used at each meeting, which adds up to a total of about 2,200 pages a year, divided into an average of 350 to 450 questions. Each question is discussed, a decision is taken and each member of the Council, depending on his languages, is asked to prepare for the Superior General a reply which will communicate the decisions taken.

Now we come to our last point, the Curia publications, for which I am responsible and in which various members of the Secretariat collaborate.

III. The Curia Publications

For the past five years, I have been in charge of the editing of *NUNTIA* and, for the past four, I have looked after the direction of *VINCENTIANA*. I have the advantage of being able to count on the collaboration of the various secretaries, benefiting especially from the variety of languages that they speak.

1. *Nuntia*

This information bulletin, a link between the Curia and all the provinces, seeks to be a means of communication, exchange of experiences and, thus, of communion, between us.

Apart from the news from the Curia, and that sent from the '*Nuntia* correspondents' (some are very active, others less so), we glean news by reading, with the different secretaries, the provincial bulletins. With this harvest, I do a first edition of the bulletin in French, which is discussed with Frs. Lauro Palú and Italo Zedde, who make up the *NUNTIA* board. Then, the text is translated into English and Spanish by the secretariat. Finally, one of the secretaries puts it together on the page.

Over the years, we have tried to improve the content and style of the bulletin, in order that the confreres will enjoy reading it. I have tried to include news that is more substantial and concrete, without making it too long. The inquiry which I did among the Visitors at Salamanca in June 1996 shows that *NUNTIA* is well received and has also allowed me to make some improvements.

2. *Vincentiana*

When the Superior General placed me in charge of the direction of the journal *VINCENTIANA*, it was with the mission of doing so along new lines and of publishing it in three languages (French, English and Spanish) in the hope that, as it directly links with nearly 70% of the confreres, it would be more accessible and, thus, read more.

The newest aspect of the journal is firstly, at the level of its content which is normally divided in an issue in the following way:

- *The official part*, from the General Curia, with the letters of the Superior General, nominations, statistics of the Congregation, official documents, etc.

- *The Feature* (theme) which is the principal new aspect of the journal, and whose title appears on the cover. It allows us to deal with a particular theme in each number, in various articles which deal with our missionary life and our Vincentian spirituality.

- *The Studies*, which gather together various articles, often on Vincentian spirituality, chosen for their quality.

- *The Vincentian Bibliography*, in which a brief synopsis is made of all the books on St. Vincent, Vincentian spirituality, and the life and history of the Vincentian Family; all of which shows the importance of sending on to the Curia all the Vincentian books which come out. There follows a General Bibliography with only a reference to books written by confreres, but which are not of a Vincentian nature.

I am assisted by the editorial board, made up of two Curia members, Frs. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza and Rolando Delagoza. We meet from time to time to choose the themes we want to deal with and the people from whom we will commission the articles. Equally, if articles are sent to us unsolicited, we study them and decide if we will publish them. We look for subjects which will serve to enrich the understanding and reflection of the confreres at the spiritual, apostolic or community level, as well as about Vincentian sources and life in the Congregation today. When we have received the articles, we send them to the translators, then we check the texts, according to language, at the secretariat and a secretary prepares it on floppy disc for the printer. The inquiry which I did among the Visitors in Salamanca showed that they were happy with the new formula.

We have moved from a single edition in various languages to three editions (in French, English and Spanish). We produce six numbers a year, with one double number during the summer, usually fairly large, like that of the Summer of 1996 on the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca (220 pages), or of last summer on the Vincentian Month on the Popular Missions, which was a 250-page book. We have edited 1,600 pages in each language in three and a half years, which makes a total of 4,800 pages in all the languages together.

As well as the automatic subscription of each canonical house, we have offered Visitors the possibility of taking out a subscription for certain people or works in their provinces and we have suggested individual subscriptions to confreres, as well as, in a

limited way, to members of the Vincentian Family. We have gone from 550 to 830 subscriptions and I would like to see it increase still more.

We are well aware that three languages are not enough for all the Congregation. Unfortunately, it is hardly possible, in view of the limited number of confreres in the Congregation, to increase that number, because it is not easy to find translators, means even more work and would cost a great deal more.

3. Other publications

Finally, I would like to mention some other Curia publications which involve a considerable amount of work at the secretariat. There have been, in particular, the *Instruction on the Vows* and the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*. On top of that, I undertook to edit the French edition of Fr. Maloney's last book; *Seasons in Spirituality* and the reprint of *Letters of John Gabriel Perboyre* (but that did not take much work, since Paris supplied me with the floppy disc).

Finally, I would like to mention an annual publication which does take up an amount of time at the secretariat; I refer to the *Catalogue*. We have reworked the presentation in order to make it clearer and more practical, especially with regard to the information about each house. The Visitors, when consulted in Salamanca, welcomed it favourably. As far as possible, we have taken account of their suggestions.

These are the principal aspects of the work of the General Secretariat that I have chosen to present to you and through which we try to be of service to the Congregation and its mission.

Translated by Eugene Curran, CM

Report by the Assistant to the Missions For the General Assembly 1998

*by Victor Bieler, C.M.
Assistant General*

Mission in the Congregation

The missions ad gentes are mentioned in our *Constitutions and Statutes*, C. 16, S. 5, S. 6. In fact, most of our provinces do have "missions ad gentes" outside their own country, but there are several of our provinces that have also domestic "missions ad gentes." I think here of Colombia, Fortaleza, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Eritrea.

Many of the provinces that do not have or no longer have "missions ad gentes," support those that have and in that way live up to the Constitutions and Statutes.

The missions I visited:

In the past 6 years I visited our confreres engaged in the "missio ad gentes" on three continents.

- In **Africa**: Cameroon, Congo/Zaire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania
- In **America**: El Alto in Bolivia, Fortaleza in Brazil
- In **Asia** and in the **Pacific**: China, India, Indonesia, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Taiwan

Each continent has its own characteristics, common problems and difficulties, and so does each province, vice-province and region.

Problems and difficulties

It is of course not possible to give an objective evaluation of the work being done by the confreres in the missions ad gentes. Which criteria should be used in judging the effectiveness of the methods used and how do we measure the results achieved by our confreres as evangelizers of the poor?

Generally speaking I can say that in these missions the confreres work with people suffering from great poverty, instability, insecurity, and difficult communications because of the social, political and economic situation in the country. On the whole our confreres

merit our admiration for their courage, zeal, mortification, sacrifices, and great generosity. Having been a missionary myself, I know what missionary life means.

In these missions our confreres have to live with many tensions because of the political, social and economical situations that are often far from favorable to spreading or deepening the faith; not to speak of the difficulties arising from the fact that one belongs to a group with a different cultural background.

In these missions we have quite a few candidates who would like to become members of our Congregation. On the other hand, the number of formators is small and many among the formators are not qualified as such. The greater number of the so-called formators are in fact teachers of ecclesiastical subjects. However, being a good teacher does not necessarily mean being a good formator.

It is remarkable that several of the **formation houses** I saw in the missions are well built with much land around the large buildings. I always feel ill² at ease seeing such buildings. Do they not contribute to the alienation of our candidates from the people, and especially from the poor? On the other hand, it is almost impossible today for a good formation not to have certain facilities at our disposal. In most formation houses the food is simple but good, better than what the average family in the country can afford. Not to speak about cars and comfort like electricity and running water from the tap. Could we do with less?

In most of the formation houses there are libraries with books and magazines, although according to first world standards, they do not fulfill conditions.

Another problem is that most of our provinces in Africa and Asia do not have **resources** or much patrimony within the country. They are able to survive until now because of aid from abroad. In a certain sense, they have to start from scratch. The benefactors in the third world are not very rich compared to those in the first world. There might be a great number of Catholics going to church, but the collection does not provide for the living costs of the missionaries. Most of missions are able to run on Mass intentions from abroad; and these intentions are drastically decreasing. Such a situation could be the reason why in consultations for a visitor many of the autochthonous confreres prefer an expatriate visitor, in the hope that in that way financial help will not dry up.

The older provinces have built up their resources through the years; the third world provinces are just starting. They do not have a first world economy of welfare to back them. In the first world attention for the so-called missions is decreasing due to the fact that there are no longer many missionaries from overseas. They get support from the homeland; for the benefactors in the homeland, it is not the people evangelized that are the main or direct object of that support.

But there is a still greater problem: the problem of **inculturation**. Especially on the continent of Africa, the autochthons are searching for their own identity. Do they get sufficient help from their expatriate brothers in this process? In this process of inculturation it is easy to be swept away by resentment and antipathies. I am aware that what I say could be considered as an accusation. It is not; it is just stating a fact. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that being a missionary after Vatican II means that we are invited by local churches to help them in their needs. In other words, we are guests, certainly non paying and non-paid guests, but very honored, considered as friends, but nevertheless we are guests and should never impose ourselves upon our hosts.

What should be done?

A great **generosity** is asked for, because help with personnel and with money are the most important means to help the missions:

The Congregation could help if **confreres** from other provinces who are well qualified as formators would be willing to learn a new language and come to help for a few years in the needy provinces.

One could staff a **formation** center, or form flying teams that go from province to province to give updates in Vincentian studies, hold seminars, etc. The formation of our candidates should get our full attention, but even more attention should be given to the formation of our formators. Since we cannot bring all of them together at the same time for a year or more, we should find other ways. It is possible to hold regular seminars for the formators of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, every year for a couple of weeks. It is also possible to form "flying teams" that would go from province to province to hold seminars.

It would be very good if we could enable our formators in the third world to come together each year and reflect on their work, in that way forming themselves and creating bonds of friendship.

It is really necessary to intensify the process of **inculturation** of the Vincentian spirituality. This is, of course very difficult, and needs much study and prayer. But the most important thing is to really start the not wait any longer with this; it is very urgent.

There should be more money available for the missions, not only for formation in the strict sense, but also for buildings that are necessary for formation.

Money also for parishes and schools, because it is from these that we get our vocations. If we do not upgrade our efforts of evangelizing the poor, we might lose many chances. In fact, there is a whole infrastructure to be changed.

Let us be thankful to the Lord that we get the opportunity to be agents of change, in a time of continuous and rapid developments.

Contacts with the Vincentian Family

*by Lauro Palú, CM
Assistant General*

In the General Council, I have been charged with maintaining contact with the lay members of our Vincentian Family. The Superior General cannot personally attend to the ever increasing number of invitations which so frequently arrive from our entire family. Since this task was not foreseen by our Constitutions and Statutes the one given this responsibility does what he can in the midst of and often in place of his duties as Assistant. I believe this arrangement to be valid and useful, especially since this Assembly, for the first time, is dedicated to the theme of our family, and from tomorrow on we can count on the presence among us of the Daughters of Charity and other Congregations, and some lay groups of Vincentian inspiration.

I would not know how to describe how my predecessors accomplished this service. I can only describe my personal experience briefly. I see a lot of the International Association of Charities (AIC). I have attended meetings of their international board of directors many times, mainly in Belgium (Brussels, Wingene, Bruges) and in Italy (Milan and Turin), of the Permanent Committee every six months, and of the Executive Board once a year. I went to their General Assemblies in 1990 (Assisi, Italy), in 1992 (Dellaan, Belgium), in 1994 (Antigua, Guatemala), in 1996 (Rome, Italy). I have given them retreats and days of recollection. I have participated in several continental meetings, like the Latin American Seminar in Caracas, Venezuela; national: Getsemani, Ecuador; Mendes, Brazil; St. Louis and Cleveland, U.S.A.; also a few regional meetings: Lazio in Rome, Italy; finally local meetings: Guadalajara, Mexico and Funza, Colombia. I was invited to the national meeting of Association Advisors in El Escorial, Spain. I attended many times, during their beginning years, meetings of the Italian Young Vincentian Volunteers. Three years ago, I was named to be international ecclesiastical assistant for the AIC. This position has been prolonged until the end of this Assembly, because they wish to present to the Vatican a "terna" of names which will include one of the Assistants of the Superior General in order that a confrere may represent the Congregation at official AIC meetings, as I have been doing these three years, thus assuring union and continuity with the first foundation of St. Vincent. I will have more to say on this point at the end of this paper.

I was present at the end of the General Assembly of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris in 1992, and at the meeting marking the Society's 150 years in the United States, in St. Louis. I met with the Directors of the Society in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia; Lisbon, Portugal; and Madrid, Spain. On the local level I have contacted members of the Society in many different cities and towns, during visits to the provinces and while on vacation.

I took part in the European Congress of the Vincentian Marian Youth in Rome in 1996, an international congress in Paris in 1997, in a national congress in Portugal; and I believe I was seven times in Benagalbon, Spain, at meetings of their younger (15 to 18) groups; in the Catechetical School and meeting of the older (18 to 25) members. At the Catechetical School, once they got to know my ideas and I handled the language better, I was able to give some courses and talks. I also gave talks to the Daughters and confreres who work with Marian Youth, in Murgia and Madrid. After this Assembly I will return to Benagalbon, this time as a "private" for the three activities already mentioned; and after that to Murgia for a meeting with the Vincentian Marian Families and another with the older group of Vincentian Marian Youth. In Italy, when I had time, I helped the Marian Youth in their process of reorganization. In Paris also, I often met with the Marian Association for work sessions.

By preaching retreats to the Daughters of Charity, I believe I have also served the Vincentian Family, either by speaking directly to the Daughters, often inspired by some concern for other groups of the family, but especially in some countries, for Vincentian Marian Youth. I acted thus in twelve provinces where I made canonical visitations, and in others where I was invited by the Daughters or their Directors. I was very pleased in Spain and Portugal to meet many sisters and some confreres whom I had previously met as members of Vincentian Marian Youth groups. I could add the same observation about confreres and seminarians of thirteen other Provinces.

I helped make contact between Volunteers of Charity and other associations, either by providing documents, or by means of correspondence. Depending on conditions, I was able to correspond with adults and youth members of various branches of the family in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, the United States, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Albania, South Africa, Madagascar, etc.

Finally, I took part in many activities common to different groups of the family, like the group for Vincentian Animation in Quercinella, Italy; the Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces on Vincentian Laity in Santiago, Chile; days of Prayer for the Family in Brussels, Belgium and in Barcelona, Spain. During canonical visits to the provinces, or when I went to preach retreats, I attended local and regional meetings of the family in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Egypt, Mozambique, Lebanon, and Greece.

Any results from all this activity? I have learned plenty from every group, and I have passed on all I could to the General Council. There is no longer the fear, which did exist in certain sectors, that the Superior General desired to unite the Volunteers to the Conferences of St. Vincent and the Marian Youth with the Vincentian volunteers and so forth. The Family Day of Prayer had its start with the AIC. The volunteers preceded us in the intensive use of fax and electronic mail. They, together with the sisters, made us realize the importance of preparing well the advisors of the lay groups and the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity. The Marian Youth in Spain

moved the Superior General to organize youth groups on an international level. The missionary efforts of the Vincentian Marian Youth inspired us to think about seeking other forms of collaboration by our youth groups, especially on the missions. Some profitable experiences of collaboration in the formation of several groups of the family caused initiatives on our part towards joint formation on an international level, with months, weeks, and days of formation open to priests, brothers, sisters, and lay members of congregations of Vincentian inspiration.

In this paper, I have referred several times to a problem which seemed to get more serious with the passing of time: and therein is part of the problem, the passing of time so rapidly that one cannot answer the many letters that arrive, nor even give thanks for all the invitations and publications that come in. Just the study of and approval of the statutes of different national associations take an extraordinary amount of the Superior General's time. In the General Council we recently spoke of this, and we came to the conclusion that in the future, if we want to maintain contact with the greatest number possible of Vincentian Family groups in an organic and systematic way, we have to think about assigning one of the Assistants exclusively to this task; or naming a confrere to it, as is done in the case of the Director General of the Daughters of Charity. Two steps must be taken: drawing up an accurate description of the position and determining the financial possibility of covering the expenses involved in the many journeys and activities which the Superior General deems important for assuring good relations and development of the family.

(translated by John Kennedy, CM)

The International Formation Center St. Vincent de Paul (CIF)

*by John E. Rybolt, CM
Director of CIF
and Kazimierz Stelmach, CM
member of the CIF team*

I. Presentation of Fr. John Rybolt, CM

Fr. Stelmach and I are grateful to Fr. Maloney and his council for giving us the opportunity to report to you, the members of the General Assembly, on the Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program, held at CIF, the International Formation Center in Paris. The last General Assembly called for the establishment of such a center, and since that time the center has received 196 Vincentians from 44 provinces. Of these, 4 came from the Vincentian Congregation in India. You may also be interested in knowing that we have had approximately 50 different Vincentians and Daughters of Charity as speakers or retreat givers in these last four years. Besides Kazimierz and me, two others have been members of the team: Jean-Pierre Renouard, of the Province of Toulouse, and Luis Alfonso Sterling, of the Province of Colombia. We also count on the help and advice of Léon Lauwerier and Abel Maniez (treasurer of the Province of Paris). We are grateful too for the organizational skills offered by Jerzy Fluderski (missionary in Madagascar) until his death this past spring.

CIF is a work of the General Council, and we are therefore responsible to the Superior General and his council. The council appoints confreres to staff the center, approves our financing and our contract with the Maison-Mère, reviews our statutes, and regularly oversees our performance. In *Vincentiana* you will find a report that I presented at the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca. I would not like to repeat the details given in that report, but rather concentrate on other matters here.

However, to give you a brief idea of how we work, Fr. Kazimierz Stelmach will now report on the general outlines of the program.

As you can see from Kazimierz's report, the purpose of this program is, according to the official title of the program, Vincentian Ongoing Formation. Our purpose involves giving our participants a break in their regular routine as a brother, deacon or priest in the Congregation, to have the time to relax, to think and to pray about their commitments. Since most of the participants are in their 40s, we find that they come with a rich background. Besides, many are superiors of houses, professors in seminaries, directors of the Daughters of

Charity, pastors, missionaries, members of provincial councils, and so on. We have tried to give the confreres sufficient time and space to accomplish the goals of the program, with a minimum of structure. We always insist that the program is for them, not for Kazimierz and me, and that the participants are the ones who should make the necessary decisions concerning our routine.

Besides time and space, we also offer opportunities for renewal and recommitment. This is particularly evident towards the end of the program. We invite the participants to pray daily the special CIF prayer, the earliest prayer in honor of St. Vincent. In it, we pray for an increase of his spirit to love what he loved and practice what he taught. At the conclusion of the retreat, we invite the confreres to renew their vows as Vincentians. In the little chapel of Notre Dame de Grâce, where Vincent celebrated one of his first masses, we renew our priestly promises, such as priests do during Holy Week in the presence of their bishop. At the closing Eucharist, we renew our commitments to the apostolate of the Congregation and send one another forth on mission. We hope that these little ceremonies will positively influence the lives and future work of the confreres.

The results of the program are hard to measure. A brief glance at the list of the names of the participants has shown us, however, that although a few are absent or have left the Congregation, the large majority continue in their work. We have planned to ask the past participants for their current evaluation of the program, and we soon hope to finish this.

The participants evaluate the program weekly, and the results have demonstrated to us the basic soundness of the program: its goals, structure, rhythm, and topics. Not everyone, of course, agrees with every point, and we have learned a lot from their observations. We have as a result made some changes in the program in the last eight sessions, but not in our general approach. Other changes that we look forward to include involving past CIF participants as speakers and retreat givers, and inviting more women to speak on appropriate topics. We also look forward to having a web site, publishing our regular information for the confreres and others, together with the rich load of information in the papers presented by past speakers. Another source of information will be a guide to Vincentian France that I have nearly completed. This book began as a series of notes on our trips and now extends to all important (and some less important!) Vincentian sites in France. This guide book is intended for Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, members of the Vincentian Family, and for anyone interested in Vincent de Paul's life and work in France. St. Louise, of course, is well represented, as are our saints and blessed.

On a larger scale, we are thinking of ways to involve two other groups in CIF. One group is the older confreres, like me, older than 50. The other group would be members of the Vincentian Family.

In both cases, we foresee adding or substituting shorter programs in Vincentian formation and heritage for older confreres, 50 years old and above (perhaps for one month), and for the Vincentian Family (also about a month). These programs could be held in either the fall or the spring of the year, and would have to take into account differences of language.

You have received a very tentative plan for these two developments. This will take a lot of work to establish, but I think that the results will be worth it. During this assembly, we hope to talk to you and ask your opinion on our present program and possible new ones.

We would like now to address two issues that arise regularly. The first is the length of the program, and the second is its cost. The two issues are, of course, related.

We believe, based on our own experience and on the evaluations given by the participants, that the period of fourteen weeks is neither too short nor too long. Its rhythm or pace is good, as is the balance of time for work, study, prayer, community life and individual relaxation. The program can be shortened, certainly, but not without serious changes in its content.

The price of the program is 29.000 francs. For that amount, the participant receives food and lodging, and all program costs (for speakers, translators, staff, materials, travel during the program, entrance fees and the like, information _ newspapers, magazines, television, e-mail, etc.). It does not include individual travel to and from Paris, medical insurance, or personal expenses such as meals away from the program, telephone calls and other supplies.

You can see from one of the pages you have received where our funds go. These figures, the result of a professional financial audit, cover the four sessions of the years 1996 and 1997. Even a quick glance will show you that the largest expenses are for food and lodging. These figures represent actual costs, not just various contributed services or costs borne by others. At the same time, we have learned in the last four years how to make some economies, such as calculating the charges for the rooms, bulk purchases, temporary investment of funds in interest-bearing accounts, and the like. Some changes, such as a new telephone system, have been the result of innovations at the Maison-Mère, for which we are grateful.

Another set of figures presents the result of our activities for the last two years. When the number of participants is high enough we can meet our fixed costs and fund our depreciation. We did not do so in 1996, but we did reach our target in 1997. Some costs will increase, and consequently we may have to make changes either in the program expenses or in our income.

Let me conclude with three reflections. First _ and this is something that always comes to mind _ I am proud to be associated with the wonderful

confreres who come to the program. The opportunity to share in some way in their lives and ministry is enriching. Second, we have started to see an increasing interest in matters Vincentian. By this I mean a greater awareness of our Vincentian roots. This is shown in increasing interest in publications, conferences and seminars, as well as in the Vincentian Family. CIF is not the cause of all this, but I believe that our participants have taken a healthy interest in these areas because of their time in Paris.

Third, and lastly, I always reflect that divine providence is evident in our work: God seemingly taking care of this poor little Company of the Mission. There have been so many times that we were facing a crisis of one sort or another (schedule, speaker, translator, bus, lodging, and so on), only to have the issue resolved well. Reflection on this at the time and later has shown the hand of God here. It is wonderful to be a part of this.

Both Kazimierz and I look forward to talking with you about the program now and later during the assembly.

* * * * *

II. Presentation of Fr. Kazimierz Stelmach, CM

The first point of the Statutes of CIF says, among other things: "*The International Formation Center: St. Vincent de Paul (CIF) offers to members of the Congregation of the Mission an integral program of ongoing Vincentian formation, destined to help them carry out the objective of following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. ... the program is geared primarily toward members of the Congregation of the Mission.... The program of the Center includes the following components: academic disciplines, personal study, research, teaching, the development of the vocation and ministry of the Vincentians, liturgical celebrations, time for prayer and a retreat, and the experience of community life.*"

I will seek now to develop very briefly some of these points to give you an idea of the program.

1. The program in general. The length of the course is 14 weeks. Every week has its specific theme and almost always an invited speaker – this depends on the theme. The themes are based on our *Constitutions and Statutes*. Thus, the first week has the title: "St. Vincent de Paul today." Its purpose is to be familiar with the universal state of Vincentian studies both today and in our history. For the program of the other weeks, please consult the annex below. If anyone would like more information, I can answer your question.

Normally, the sixth week, or a week in the middle of the program, we have called "personal activities." At this time the participants are asked to set their own schedule – some use this time for personal research, others for visits, etc. Many of them pass this time in Rome at the General Curia.

During every session we have a meeting with the Superior General. There is a conference, a Mass, and the chance for dialogue. There is also a meeting with Mother Elizondo, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity. During this meeting the Mother General presents us the present-day situation of the Company with its own problems and, in particular the collaboration between the two Communities, etc.

2. The structure of the week. Normally on Mondays and Tuesdays the presenters take up the theme of the week. On Wednesday we consider the history of the Congregation of the Mission. Thursday is devoted to work in small language groups. On Friday we exchange ideas concerning the theme in the large group. On Saturday we often visit one of the Vincentian sites. We also program a visit to the archives of the Congregation of the Mission and those of the Daughters of Charity.

Every day there is prayer, meditation, and Mass in common – the "how" depends on each linguistic group. There are also common celebrations – especially those in the Vincentian places like rue du Bac, the tomb of Ozanam, Reuilly, Clichy, and also during the trip to the sites of St. Vincent.

3. I would like to present briefly our Vincentian trip, which is an integral part of the program. To know something well, you have to see and to touch. Half of the weekends are given over to a visit to some place linked to the history of the Congregation of the Mission. Always at the beginning of the program we see "Vincentian Paris" and Versailles, then Gannes and Folleville. You will find these places listed in the annex below. Every place is linked to the history of the Congregation of the Mission or that of the universal Church.

Then there is the retreat – the essential moment of the program. For every language group we invite a preacher. The retreat lasts four days. At the end we renew our vows. After the retreat, at the invitation of the confreres of Saragossa, we make a brief visit to Loyola, San Sebastian, and the provincial house.

I think that in this brief report I have been able to give, even if in a general manner, an idea about the program that is generally well accepted and appreciated by the participants.

Annex: General Program of CIF

The first week is entitled "St. Vincent Today." The purpose is to know the global state of Vincentian studies today.

Second week: "Identity of the Congregation of the Mission" (C 1-9). This comprises our juridical and theological identity today and historically.

Third week: "Apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission" (C 10-18). The Congregation of the Mission yesterday and today; in what way is it present in the world.

Fourth week: "Community Life" (C 19-27). According to St. Vincent and the different experiences in the world.

Fifth week: "The Vows" (C 28-39). Vincentian, juridical and theological points of view.

Sixth week: "Pastoral Activity."

Seventh week: "Prayer" (C 40-50). Vincentian prayer in general.

Eighth week: "The Spiritual Life, the Five Virtues" (C 4, 7, 24). Vincentian and general foundations of the spiritual life; the five virtues today.

Ninth week: "Social Action of the Congregation of the Mission" (S 9). Basis and reality today.

Tenth week: "The Vincentian Family" (C 50). The saints and blessed of the Congregation of the Mission. The important Vincentian figures.

Eleventh week: "Retreat. Major Vincentian Tour."

Twelfth week: "Vincentian Testimonies." During this week, those responsible for various branches of the Vincentian Family and Vincentian movements are invited to speak to us of their history and their activities today.

Thirteenth week: "Vincentian Themes." Different speakers present us with present-day themes, such as Islam, the great Vincentian theologians, etc.

Fourteenth week: "Analysis and Synthesis of the Personal Project" which each participant is invited to develop in the course of the session.

Principal Vincentian Sites Visited during the Session of CIF

Vincentian Paris,

Versailles,
Clichy, Reuilly,
Gannes, Folleville, Amiens,
Joigny, Montmirail,
Fain-les-Moutiers,
Major Vincentian Tour _ Retreat:
 Richelieu, Château l'Evêque,
 Lourdes, Tarbes, Toulouse, Buzet, Notre Dame de Grâce,
 Montgesty
 Châtillon, Lyon, Pérouge, Ars, Valfleury.

Presentation of Fr. Stelmach translated by Robert Stone, CM

The Activities of SIEV

*by Roberto Lovera, C.M.
Executive Secretary of SIEV*

1. SIEV (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies) was born in 1982 as a response to a Postulatum of the 1980 General Assembly, which sought to create local organizations for the promotion of Vincentian Studies, and an organization at the international level with the job of coordinating them. Before SIEV, there was an unofficial group known as GIEV.

2. The purpose of SIEV is to "animate, inform, and promote everything that has to do with Vincentian Studies."

3. To realize this purpose, certain paths are indicated in the Statutes of SIEV:

- assure information and communication;
- be at the center of Vincentian studies and promote new studies of Vincentian matters;
- furnish concrete instruments for Vincentian formation;
- invite specialists to share the results of their research by organizing dialogues on specific themes;
- support the publication of a Vincentian bibliography that is as complete as possible;
- stimulate the organized care of archives and of historical research;
- propose to the General Council the organization of international Vincentian Study months.

4. The members of SIEV were eight, plus the representative of the General Council, until December 1996. Since 1 January 1997, there are 5 members. Fr. Emeric Amyot d'Inville represents the General Council. The other members are: Hernando Escobar and Norbert Tix, nominated in 1992; John Prager, Kazimierz Stelmach and Roberto Lovera, nominated in 1997. Lovera is the executive secretary.

5. In these last six years, the interests of SIEV have been focused on the following matters:

- 5.1 collect and publish material to help everyone in knowledge and study;
- preparation of a CD-ROM with all the Vincentian texts available in computer language;

- the plan of a CD with Vincentian photographic material of both historical and contemporary nature that can be updated from time to time;
- preparation and publication of a Vincentian bibliography in the various languages according to a scheme that gives a uniform base;
- preparation of an index of Vincentian articles published in our principal magazines;
- evaluation of the notes left by Fr. Chalumeau and of all the material left by Fr. Dodin;
- gathering of the documents of the Holy See about the Congregation of the Mission or concerning general interest for the Vincentian Family published after 1876 (the date of the publication of the last such collection);
- publication of some of the reports given at the European sessions for our young in formation and at CIF;
- other matters.

5.2 stimulate new publications; in particular, we are looking for a confrere who might prepare a biography of Perboyre for 2002, the 200th anniversary of his birth; it should be a well researched and critical work, but at the same time easily accessible to the public at large;

5.3 organize directly or support those who organize the Vincentian months and of other moments of study and deepening of knowledge;

1. In 1993 we held the Vincentian month on the theme of the General Assembly 1992: *New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities*, especially directed to those confreres less than 12 years ordained or, in the case of brothers, with less than 12 years in vows;
2. In 1997 we held the Vincentian month on the theme of evangelization through popular missions; not only confreres involved in evangelization, but also Daughters of Charity, sisters of other communities, and lay people who work in the popular missions participated in this session;
3. We are preparing for 1999 a session of study on Islam and the relationship between the Congregation of the Mission and the Islamic world;
4. We are planning for 2001 a Vincentian month reserved to the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity; the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity herself asked for this.

5.4 assist the mutual awareness of the various organizations of Vincentian Studies spread out through the various provinces so that there be a real collaboration and a reciprocal enrichment; we are trying to take a census of all these study organizations; we will publish the data so that everyone can know what is happening.

5.5 help the provinces in the work of formation: we are preparing an essential bibliography that indicates the most accessible material in the various languages so we can make use of it in the formation of our own.

5.6 pass on information of the initiatives in process through, for example, the brief information page we send to the Visitors and to the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity after every meeting of SIEV; this is also published in *Vincentiana*.

There are other things in the Statutes of SIEV that we have not been able to develop or to take into consideration. There are certainly other significant themes or other aspects that the confreres of the provinces have. One of the best ways to make SIEV work for you is to send suggestions and even criticisms either from the Visitors or from individual confreres. In my judgement, we still have to develop our understanding of the task of the "corresponding members" in the provinces or in regions (Statute 3,4) to get more functional collaboration; the secretaries of the various organizations of Vincentian Studies in the different provinces or regions could function in this way.

1. The members of SIEV ordinarily meet once a year (our next meeting is at the Collegio Alberoni, Piacenza, Italy, in the middle of September, 1998). The decisions and directions that come out of this meeting are given to the Superior General and his Council for their examination before they become operative. Once they are approved or corrected, they become the operative guides for the work.
2. A final word on the making of the CD-ROM with the Vincentian texts. We had thought about this project for a long time, and finally got it accomplished, thanks to the collaboration of many confreres, beginning with those who took care of the translation of this text from the written word to computer language. We owe a special debt of gratitude in this area to Fr. Claude Lautissier, who was not only the pioneer, but who did an enormous amount of work together with those with whom he collaborated. We are grateful because all of these confreres (those who did material work as well as those possessing the "right of the author") gave us their material *gratis* so that the CD-ROM's cost would be very low. This was one of the desires of the Superior General and of the Council so that this instrument could be distributed widely.

The CD-ROM is an experimental version, as Fr. John Freund, who took care of the technical part of making it, will tell us. We thank him and his collaborators for having done this work in an extremely short period of time so we could present it to you at the General Assembly.

On the CD there is a very large amount of material in French, much in Spanish, some volumes of Coste in Italian and English. By making the CD-ROM available now, even if we do not have all the texts in all the languages, we hope it will be a stimulus to the confreres and to the provinces to prepare the material that is missing so that as soon as possible we may have a complete version and one which is even better in the technical sense, thanks to your good suggestions.

Visits to the Provinces and Vice Provinces

by Italo G. Zedde, CM

In this brief presentation, I can only make a few references. We all know that the visitations of the Superior General, or his delegate, were already considered very important in the time of St. Vincent. In his words, the visit is an occasion sent to us by God to maintain the unity of the Congregation and the apostolic activity proper to it, but it is above all an occasion for spiritual renewal, all ideas that have entered into our *Constitutions and Statutes*.

St. Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, Superior at Richelieu, on 26 August 1640. "In this moment here [at St. Lazare] we are having visitation. Never as now have I realized how important it is for us to use this time for our spiritual growth. Providence has given us the visitation for this purpose" (SV II, 96-97).

With the publication of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, we need to look at nn. 318-324, which speak of the visitation of the Superior General to the provinces or the vice provinces. Here we recall briefly two points:

I. Reason for the visitation

Throughout our history the nature of the visitation has undergone a revealing evolution. In this moment the *Constitutions and Statutes* regulate it. The only explicit reference is in the *Statutes*, which say:

Besides the faculties granted him by universal law or by special concession, it is the function of the Superior General: ... 2_ without prejudice to his right to make a canonical visitation whenever one is needed, to visit the provinces and vice-provinces at least once during his time of office, either personally or by a delegate, in order to animate them and be informed about how their members are doing (Statute 51, 2).

Instead, articles 101-103 of the *Constitutions* give the juridical base (though not the complete one) of the general governance in the Congregation by the Superior General. These articles include, among the other tasks of the Superior General, the visitation of the provinces and the vice-provinces as a privileged means to bring life to individual communities, to maintain and make grow the spirit of St. Vincent, and to preserve the unity of the Congregation.

II. How the visitation takes place

Given the contents of the *Constitutions and Statutes* just mentioned, the visitation of the Superior General has two fundamental purposes: 1. bring life to the provinces and vice-provinces in all the aspects of our life in such a way as to reinforce the unity of the Congregation; 2. facilitate reciprocal communication of the confreres and the province with the Superior General and the General Curia. Usually, though not always, the Superior General assigns the visitations to the Assistants General, keeping his own visits to the provinces, vice-provinces and missions of a more pastoral type, in which the Daughters of Charity and the other members of the Vincentian Family are involved.

Once the Superior General has fixed the program of visitations, the Assistant communicates the decision to each Visitor so he can prepare the schedule. At the beginning of the visitation, the Provincial Council meets, to give the best information possible on the state of the province; there is a second council meeting at the end of the visitation, in the presence of the Superior General or his Assistant to hear the observations and the recommendations proposed at the conclusion of the visitation.

Usually during the visitations of the individual houses or communities, the Superior General or his Assistant has a personal dialogue with each confrere; there is a community meeting when possible; particular attention is paid to the houses of formation; the provincial project is examined, the project of each individual house, and in general everything that helps the good working of community and apostolic life.

After the visitation, the Assistant General writes a report for the Superior General and his council, in which the positive and negative elements gathered during the visit are revealed. After this, the Superior General sends two letters: one to the province in general, and one to the Visitor and his council, for questions that require greater discretion, or that belong to the council's job.

I thank, with all my heart, in the name of the whole General Council, all of you for your availability, brotherhood, and cooperation during the visitations we have done, hoping that with these visitations we have worked well together for the good of all the confreres.

(Translated by Robert Stone, CM)

The Causes of Saints in the Vincentian Family

*by Roberto D'Amico, C.M.
Postulator General*

In this brief report, I will seek to anticipate the answers to some questions you might have and that you often ask of the Superior General or one of his assistants when they visit your provinces. (Cf. *Vincentiana* n. 4-5, 1996, "Meeting of the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, Salamanca, 5-15 June 1996").

I. Which cause is closest to canonization?

Blessed Francis Regis Clet, beatified 27 May 1900.

In April of last year I presented, together with other postulators, a dossier about the reputation of martyrdom and holiness of all the Chinese "blessed," but now everything has stopped. We do not know if it is because of political difficulties or whether there are other problems.

II. Which are the causes that are continuing toward beatification?

1. Servant of God, Sr. Rosalie Rendu, DC (1786-1856)

Almost six years have passed since the presentation of the *Positio*, and its examination by the Congress of theologians is near. In the meantime, we opened a Diocesan investigation in Paris in January of this year to examine a presumed miracle that took place in 1992.

2. Servant of God Sr. Giuseppina Nicòli, DC (1863-1924)

At the beginning of March of this year the *Positio* on the virtues and on the reputation of sanctity was presented – now we have to wait for its turn (at least 5 or 6 years) to be examined. The examination process was begun in Milan, with the hope that it would have greater possibility of being recognized.

3. Servant of God Fr. Salvatore Micalizzi, CM (1856-1937)

The *Positio* on the virtues and on the reputation of sanctity was handed to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on 27 June of this year. Again, we shall have to wait the usual 5 or 6 years before it will be examined by the commission of theologians. In the meantime, a doctor of the Congregation is studying some extraordinary graces obtained through the intercession of our servant of God, to analyze them to see if they can be explained by normal medical practice.

4. Servant of God Bishop John Francis Gnidovec, CM, Bishop of Skopje (former Yugoslavia) (1873-1939)

Following the rediscovery of many other documents the *Summarium* is completed and already published, with an "addition." We are preparing the *Informatio*. In the meantime we are studying a presumed miracle that happened in Santiago de Chile in 1985.

5. Servant of God Bishop Antonio Ferreira Viçoso, CM, Bishop (Portuguese) of Mariana, Brazil

The Diocese of Mariana, Brazil, as "co-actor" of the cause, follows with great interest how it is moving forward, sustaining it with financial help. We have finally found the records of the first Diocesan process, for years lost in the archives of the Diocese of Mariana, and we have gotten the decree validating the process. In December of 1997, the work on the *Positio* of the cause concluded; now we have to translate it into one of the languages admitted by the Congregation, so it can be examined by the historical commission on the solidity of its documentation, as well as its completeness and sufficiency for the purposes of the cause.

6. Servant of God Mother Justa Dominguez De Viaduretta, DC (1875-1958), Visitatrix of the Province of Madrid (St. Vincent) from 24 July 1932 until her death

The *Summarium* of documents and texts has already been printed. The work of the *Positio* goes forward slowly. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints has on record the acts of a presumed miracle that took place in 1972 in favor of Sr. Prudencio Zuazo, DC

7. Servant of God Sr. Marguerite Rutan, DC (1736-1794) Martyr of the French Revolution

This cause had been abandoned since 1936. The office of the Postulator General asked that it be reopened following the insistence of some lay people and of the Vincentian family in Toulouse. The Bishop of Dax has named a historical commission that has prepared a dossier on her martyrdom and on the continuing reputation as a martyr of the servant of God. The Congregation has issued a decree of validity for the process. Now the work of the *Positio* is beginning.

8. Servant of God Sr. Josefa Martínez Pérez, and 12 companions, DC, Martyrs at Valencia, 1936-1939

Thirteen Daughters of Charity were killed during the Spanish persecution in 1939 in Valencia. The process begun in 1960 was interrupted in 1966 for "pastoral

prudence." Reopened in 1995, it was concluded on 22 May 22 1996. The process was opened with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at Rome on 3 June 1996. The decree of validity was issued on 22 February 1998. Now we have begun the work of the *Positio*.

III. Which causes are "halted" while awaiting further study?

1. Servant of God Fr. Marc Antonio Durando, CM (1801-1880), Co-founder of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazarene

We are awaiting a historical study by a confrere on the relationships with the servants of God Mother Verna and la Clarac (?).

2. Servant of God Frs. Fortunato Velasco Tobar and 14 Confreres, CM

This is the cause of Vincentian martyrs of different dioceses during the Spanish persecution. In 1996 there were some difficulties with the "relator" of the Cause, and now we are awaiting a reopening of the work.

3. Servant of God Fr. Gianbattista Manzella, CM (1855-1937)

There are some questions that have been sent back to us for which we await better times so that they will be eliminated. That is what we hope. Officially everything is unspoken.

IV. In recent years have some new diocesan investigations been opened?

1. Servant of God. Sr. Clemência Oliveira, DC (1896-1966)

Given completely to the service of the poor, she had some charismatic gifts of healing. The diocesan investigation opened in Baturitè (Diocese of Fortaleza, Brazil) on 6 September 1995.

2. Servant of God Bishop Bonaventura Codina, CM, Bishop of the Canary Islands (1785-1857)

Man of God, poor, lover of the poor, the sick, and those inflicted with cholera. Ready to resign as Bishop and to be readmitted into the community. The diocese of the Canary Islands has set itself up as the Actor of the Cause of this Servant of God. The diocesan investigation opened on 19 January 1995.

3. Servant of God Sr. Marta Maria Wiecka, DC (1874-1904)

She took care of the sick in hospitals: in Lwow, Poidhajce, Bochnia, and Sniatyn. They called her the "benefactress" and "little mother." Her existence held together by prayer and the joy of service was crowned by the gift of her life. At her tomb today both Catholics and the Orthodox are joined together in prayer. The diocesan investigation began on 27 June 1997 in the cathedral of Lwow and concluded in the same place on 30 June 1998.

4 Sr. Anna Cantalupo, DC (1888-1983)

The reputation of sanctity is alive above all in Catania where this Daughter of Charity, of Neapolitan descent, became the point of reference of all the charitable and catechetical activities. The diocesan investigation opened on 27 October 1997.

5. Servant of God Sr. Melchora Adoración Cortés Bueno and 14 companions, DC of Madrid

In occasion of the celebration of the Vincentian Tricentennial of the death of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac they opened the process on 7 November 1960 in the Diocese of Madrid for 17 priests, 17 brothers and 15 Daughters of Charity, a total 49 martyrs.

Different difficulties of a local and general nature did not permit the continuation of this process. Now, the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Madrid, St. Vincent have gathered together a rich documentation and the diocesan investigation was reopened on 28 April 1998

V. Is there any possibility of any new diocesan investigation?

1. Archbishop Emilio Francisco Lisson Chaves, CM, Archbishop of Lima (1918-1931), (1872-1961)

His remains were brought back from Spain to the Cathedral of Lima on 24 July 1991 (cf. *Vincentiana*, n. 33 (1991), pp. 261-265). A vice-Postulator has been nominated so that the diocesan investigation can begin. This process will be very complicated, because there are many issues that have to be investigated and clarified.

2. Bishop Peter Schumacher, CM (1832-1902), Bishop of Portovejo, Ecuador

Founder of the seminaries of Ecuador. Nominated Bishop of Portovejo in 1885. Falsely accused and persecuted by the masonic lodges, during the revolution of Quito, he was the confessor of those condemned to death. He was sent into exile to Samaniego, on the Colombian border, where he died. The Archbishop of Portovejo and the Bishop of d'Ipiales Nariño, Colombia, intend to open a diocesan investigation for the beatification and canonization of our confrere.

3. Fr. Giovanni Battista Tornatore, CM (1820-1895), Co-founder of the Daughters of St. Anne

The Daughters of St. Anne, after Vatican II, as they brought up to date their rules, rediscovered the role that Fr. Tornatore had in the foundation of their community and the holiness of this confrere of ours from the Roman province, after having wiped his memory out of the history of the life of their Congregation. These religious have taken up as a community task "to begin the process for the cause of beatification without waiting for better times," and at the same time they hope that "something in addition to this the Vincentian Fathers might be able to do" (cf. *Annali della Missione*, 193, p. 111). In July of 1981, his remains were taken from the cemetery of San Lazzaro in Piacenza to the Mother House of the Daughters of St. Anne in Piacenza

Conclusion

Behind this circle of names and dates is a truly marvelous history of holiness and self-giving. The Postulator General has the job of being aware of this superabundant grace present in our Community and to help the various provinces to make these men and women visible, luminous instruments of this grace. Through canonization, these, our sisters and brothers, raised up on the candelabra of the house of God, can light up with their example, and sustain with their prayer the Vincentian Family in their task of making the reign of God grow day by day.

(Translated by Robert Stone, C.M.)

Office of the Procurator General

*by Rolando Delagoza, C.M.
Procurator General*

N.B. The following text is a description of the Powerpoint Presentation which graphically and vividly delineated the various functions of the office of the Procurator General. This high technology presentation combined graphics, video, text, and sound through the use of computers and scanners. Each paragraph in the presentation had a script describing the simulation, the figures, the movements exhibited in around 20 slides. For example, to show that the Procurator General has to visit a dozen offices, a simulation, employing the magic of graphics, displayed a man moving from one office to another. In this way, the Assembly members were hearing, seeing and experiencing the actual work of the Procurator General and came to appreciate it as part of the administration of the General Curia.

Introduction. As all of you are aware, the small office of the Procurator General is at the service of the whole Vincentian Family. I shall only present to you a historical definition, an outline and some tips on how to prepare a good dispensation case.

I. The Office of the Procurator General

The Procurator General is a member of any religious order or congregation in charge of dealing with the Holy See on the affairs of the religious order or congregation in the interest of the whole community or of any member thereof (i.e. province, house or individual members). The obligation of having a representative of the Father General in Rome was already practiced before 1814. The Congregation of Bishops and Religious decreed on August 22, 1814 that all male religious orders or congregations of Pontifical Right should maintain a procurator general at the Holy See (translated from *Dizionario Ecclesiastico III*, 346).

It was on March 5, 1843 that the Congregation of the Mission officially appointed a procurator general in the person of Fr. Simone Ugo (Circ. Sup. Gen IR, 31, 571). Before 1843, there were 24 Vincentians who were assigned the job but without the official title. Among these were: François Ducoudray who obtained the bull "Salvatoris Nostri" (January 12, 1633); Louis Lebreton who got the rescript to found the first house in Rome (July 11, 1641); Thomas Berthe and Edme Jolly for the approval of the vows through the Papal Brief "Ex Commissa Nobis" (September 22, 1655).

Slide No. 1. This is a general outline of the work of the Procurator General. The Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the other Vincentian Family members submit to him any business that needs the approval of the Holy See. He examines the documents, writes a recommendation, submits them to respective offices and waits for the approval or disapproval. The various Vatican offices with the most number of business are listed on the side of slide no. 1.

Slide No. 2. This is a more detailed outline of business transactions with the Holy See showing the input, the Vatican offices and the expected output. The most important Vatican office as far as the Procurator General is concerned is the CIVCSVA which means the "Congregatio pro Institutis vitae consecratae et societatibus vitae apostolicae." It is the office that deals with most of the rescripts asked by the General Curia and the provinces.

Slide No. 3. This is a graphic presentation of the distribution of letters sent and the time distribution at the office of the Procurator General. You can easily see that the two most important offices for us are those of the Secretary of State and the CIVCSVA.

II. Preparation of Cases: Some Tips

1. Introduction. While the office of the Procurator General is very willing and eager to help all the provinces solve important cases, especially AOO (ab omnibus oneribus) cases, its success in obtaining dispensations depends, to a large extent, on the Provincial Visitors. Here are some tips or suggestions for improving our service.

2. Documentation. This includes the letter of the petitioner, curriculum vitae of the petitioner, decree of suspension, mandates, testimony of the petitioner, testimony of two persons who know the petitioner, medical records, scrutinies, votum of the priest-instructor, votum of the Ordinary, votum of the local ordinary and certificate of authenticity.

Completeness also refers to the content of each particular document.

3. Strong Arguments.

- Preferably from the petitioner himself, e.g., he should not have been ordained in the first place.
- From the formators, e.g., the faculty was divided on whether to ordain or not to ordain.
- Medical or psychiatric records.

- Vota of the priest-instructor and the Ordinary (Provincial Superior) should be written in such a way that the strength and thoroughness of the case are evident.

4. Good Presentation.

- Pages are numbered consecutively and authenticated by the Notary.
- Handwritten documents should have a typewritten or computerized transcription.
- Official copies of certificates of attempted marriage, etc. should be legible.

5. Expert Help

- From language groups
- From non-Vincentian groups, e.g. diocesan and religious groups

6. Role of the Procurator General

- Reviews the case, e.g., checks documents for completeness
- Prepares a summary and an opinion
- Prepares transmittal letter
- Submits papers to the Holy See
- Waits for the decision of the Holy See
- Transmits decision to the petitioner through the Provincial Visitor

It is my hope that all of you will help the office of the Procurator General, so that following in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, we will all become true "servant leaders" ready to serve our confreres in need. Thank you very much and may God bless us all.

The Actions of the International Association of Charity Collaboration with the Other Branches Of the Vincentian Family

*by Patricia Palacios de Nava
International President AIC*

As members of the AIC, it is a great pleasure to be here, at the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. We are grateful to Fr. Robert P. Maloney for having invited us, but above all, for the way in which he has animated all Vincentians, to seek out common paths so that together we can fulfill our mission, as it was envisioned by St. Vincent de Paul, who founded us, with collaboration in mind.

On this occasion we have been asked to present the works of the International Association of Charity and our collaboration with the other branches of the Vincentian Family. This is a broad theme whose lines of action are so diverse and numerous, as the poor we encounter on our way, which unfortunately increase day by day. In no way do I want to fall in the trap of enumerating our actions and projects which may seem similar to works of other groups of assistance and social promotion. It seems to me to be more interesting to point out some of the characteristics of these actions, and share with you the philosophy that motivates us, what our attitude is confronting poverty, a reality that multiplies the poor in our midst, and how we want to draw closer to them as friends.

We are conscious that there are groups of the AIC, with a great resistance to change, and without leaving aside their desire to serve, prefer to maintain the old forms, the old systems of unjustified assistance, that are not forward-looking, often due to: boredom, a lack of analysis, and fear of a commitment. These groups of charities continue to exist, each time smaller in number, because they have not bettered the life of the poor, and on occasions have helped to perpetuate the marginalization of the people that they encounter. To improve this situation we have been committed to actualizing the mission of the "Charities."

On this occasion, I will speak about our ideals, the goals that we desire, and what we can achieve. I will speak of what we will accomplish by means of our lines of action, and what we have learned through the experience of many volunteers in the world, now committed with enthusiasm and with a passion for social transformation. I will mention our convictions that have become criteria in our analysis. We want our criteria to be present in all our actions so that we can choose projects that will directly transform the lives of the destitute. These elements were present in the 17th Century, in the inventiveness and strength of St. Vincent de Paul, who achieved what was always valid and real. St. Vincent did his part and it is up to us to attentively read the signs of the times, so that we will discover their true meaning.

It is necessary to point out that we must always keep in mind that the evangelization of the poor is the central element of our action.

We could in no way be faithful to the charism of our founder if all are actions and projects were not oriented toward the evangelization of the poor. St. Vincent recommended among the principal virtues "zeal for souls." He recommended announcing Christ everywhere, by means of the word but also by deeds, by affective love but also effective. We, members of AIC, commit ourselves to evangelize the poor and to be evangelized by them. We must commit ourselves to make the gospel alive and to give witness to Christ's love for the most deprived.

It is only in this way that our faith can transform itself into a sign and make the gospel concrete. The evangelization of the poor is at the center of each of our actions.

After this essential affirmation and taking into account the criteria and convictions that have given life to our programs, we will make reference to two fundamental aspects: watching the signs of the times and being attentive to the person of the poor. These are the starting points which must orient all our actions.

I. Conditions, a priori, that should be present in all our actions.

1. Attention to the "signs of the times"

Situating ourselves in the time and reality that we live globally in this moment, we are faced with a serious preoccupation about the future of the poor. The neo-liberal project that has extended to the most diverse places and cultures does not take into account the poor and the homeless. The rejected of the planet are considered unproductive, "unexploitable," and for that reason useless.

When we attentively analyze neo-liberalism we become convinced of the validity of our actions. The poor are at an enormous disadvantage because of the politics of the State, which intervenes, limits, and takes away responsibility for the minimum goods that should be enjoyed by all citizens, from the fact of being a person. The elimination of programs which created opportunities for all obliges us to evaluate every one of our actions. We will never face an actual situation without having to reevaluate our former way of responding, which we have used for a long time.

This calls us to:

1. Insist on the need for periodic evaluations.
2. Seek out a formation that will personally transform "volunteers," so that they have a vision less simplistic of historical events, and that they will be committed to the poorest of the poor and to social transformation.

3. Promote the poor so that they are conscious of their own dignity, rights, their own capacities, and the importance of self-determination.
4. Establish a dialogue with civil leaders, institutions, and ecclesiastical bodies, in order to influence decisions especially in public policies which effect the excluded.
5. Use and exercise pressure in the mass media.

2. Attention to the person of the poor

The preferential option for the poor implies a commitment to justice and peace. To opt for these values is not a romantic ideal, nor something intangible. To be committed to these values means to take risks in order to obtain them. It means understanding one's needs, expectations, and desires, expressed or not, so that starting from a serious analysis of reality and one's surroundings, the community can choose without fear and with a creative spirit, methods and lines of action that respond to our time and our society. The reemergence of the person's social conscience is one of the signs of hope facing an uncertain future. As volunteers we have taken advantage of this awakening and we support efforts at organizing that have grown out of marginalized groups.

This calls us to:

6. Revise our way of approaching the poorest of the poor, promoting better understanding, solidarity and friendship.
7. Evaluate our actions and projects so that the immediate economic resources do not interrupt the formation process of individuals and communities in their own process of growth and self-determination.
8. Promote respect for cultural identity of the persons with whom we work.
9. Change our concepts of poverty and demonstrate that extreme poverty and exclusion are violations of the most fundamental human rights, and cannot be considered as something casual nor natural, the product of hopelessness.
10. To be conscious that the poor and poverty have changed and as a consequence call for participation and respect for native leaders and the emergence of the community as the subject of its own history.

The new elements included or that we should include in our actions, so that they can be truly transforming are:

11. The promotion and defense of human rights
12. Actions of denouncing and placing pressure on decision-makers
13. Actions for cultural transformation
14. The creation of networks to fight against poverty
15. Actions using the mass media
16. Participation in international organizations.

In speaking about these new elements, I will refer to one example which can be used as a model to explain the way the AIC proceeds in respect to each one of the actions that will help us to obtain the change of social attitude, which is our goal.

The promotion and defense of human rights are the actions that we have tried to include in the different projects, with the conviction that it is not enough to give alternative solutions to the violations against these rights, but it is also necessary to be committed to their defense.

- * One example of a traditional action is caring for the elderly in an official institution or home, where the volunteers are limited to obtain funds and to visiting the elderly. In the AIC we do not want to be satisfied only with the indispensable. One of the collateral actions that we accomplished was to promote the rights of the elderly by means of pressure on those responsible for the administration of the home, in order that there could be better treatment of the elderly and their families, so that, treated with care and respect, the conditions of hygiene, nourishment, medical treatments and training for the workers improved.

The actions of denouncing and pressure constitute a political dimension of our mission. This is based in our obligation to be prophets. We are committed to announce and denounce and to point out all that works against the dignity of men and women.

- * Many times we, members of AIC, detect unjust situations against which we must act. In the case, for example, of abused women, it is not only to be compassionate about their misfortune, but also to make them aware of the injustice of the situation. We must motivate them so that they will denounce those responsible to the competent authorities in order to prevent the repetition of the deed. Let us take the example of an AIC center which specializes not only in attention to these women's needs, but also in setting up a real educational campaign for the women themselves and the various marginalized communities in order to combat sexual abuse and try to bring the problem to

the Parliament so as to amend the law. There are many other cases of this type in which we can and must intervene to arrive at greater justice.

The actions for cultural transformation never mean a lack of respect for people's customs nor intrusion into their way of life. To the contrary, actions must be combined with a desire for progress, justice, solidarity, and with the respect for the cultural values of each social group. The Volunteers of AIC commit ourselves, along with other social actors, to a cultural action that creates a new model of values, that helps the society live out the principles of solidarity and promotes the common good, in order to respond to the needs of each one by welcoming the challenges of relationships between peoples, the authenticity of values, and the respect of each one's dignity.

- * To involve other people in the care of the poor is very Vincentian. So we formed groups of the AIC in the same places where we work. In the Home for the Elderly we installed a group of AIC volunteers, including senior members of the Home, in order to help them with their greatest needs.

We can cite as an example the case of a European association which, aware that there was an important lacuna in the law on immigrants, brought this problem to the level of the volunteers, to which the association belonged from the beginning. The volunteers studied the alternative propositions and succeeded in having the law amended to provide better conditions in the life of the immigrants.

The Volunteers are committed to forming a network to fight against poverty. It is clear that a worldwide network in solidarity with the poor can and should exercise common projects, in accordance with specific needs and the goals of organizations. Actions of political pressure question the political decisions of our day and those responsible. The principle network, which has existed for more than 300 years, is the Vincentian Family and our commitment in the present moment to grow and influence on behalf of the poor is being realized every day with greater force.

- * The volunteers of AIC are not limited to work with the elderly of the home, but to create a network among all the local groups that work with the elderly. We divide up tasks and share responsibilities, establishing contacts with other organizations so that each one is responsible for different areas: the homebound, seniors who are active, the physically sick, those with diminished mental capacities, those who cannot help themselves, etc. We would hope, for example, that a contract could exist between different institutions so that seniors could choose between services of one place or the other, as their needs arise.

In the struggle against poverty, the mass media can be our bitter enemy or invaluable ally. The Volunteers of AIC that we have prepared to work in the media can use their expertise to teach others about situations of poverty and injustice, as did St. Vincent de Paul in his own day, with the thousands of letters that he wrote, or

through the "*friendships*" that he enjoyed. Moreover, we are called to confront the media when their reporting has moved away from the truth.

In face of the problem of the elderly, abused women, or the multiple forms of violations against human rights, certain AIC groups have made reports for magazines and television, denouncing the injustices detected. In the case of abused women, for example, the volunteers carried out a media campaign using radio and television spots, reports, interviews, and call-in programs to sensitize society and prevent sexual abuse. Another example is the campaigns and cooperation in the struggle for the insertion of the elderly into the social life of a specific community.

Our presence in international organizations, through representatives of AIC that are trained for this work, is one of the greatest possibilities and strong points of AIC for social action. In these organizations we are obliged to participate in the name of the poor and be committed to their defense. In this work we take positions as those who know the poor as friends and are their defenders, and we act in the name of those suffering, offering a commitment of announcing and denouncing, maturely and vigilantly, to achieve goals of justice. That is to say, we assume a prophetic role, working in this place to transform society.

For example, in connection with the housing problem, on the occasion of the program "Habitat II" of UNESCO, which was held in Istanbul in order that the desires and concerns of the poor with regard to housing might be brought to the attention of this organization, we collected, with the collaboration of the local volunteers in different countries of the world, more than 1500 testimonies from the poor themselves. Their replies were handed over at the conference itself which studied them very attentively. These contributions from the poorest, classified by the AIC representatives, were a determining factor in bringing to light the real situation and in developing the programs which came out of this meeting.

In summary, we can say that our manner of working, our works in the concrete, and the principles which animate us, are based on the reflections that come from our different AIC volunteers. These dedicated people give validity to our Association and they constitute our greatest resource. Their direct contact with the poor, their friendships in diverse contexts, are key elements for transforming our vision of the world and of the human person.

17. In some developed countries, there are volunteers fully inserted in modern society, and they assume models of social advancement and use methodologies of work according to the needs of the times in which we live. These volunteers work in direct relation with civil authorities and other institutions and they employ specific models in the struggle against poverty. Using modern technology and the mass media, these groups are up to date and effective.
18. There are other volunteers whose fundamental characteristic and whose primary means of exerting influence is through participation in networks and

platforms of social action in which, in many cases, they have played a pioneer's role, setting the goals for eliminating various causes of poverty and creating valid models to be used both nationally and internationally.

19. Others, fully inserted in the life of the communities, represent a new way of being volunteers. Committed to their own communities they are involved in a very interesting process of self-determination and promotion. These types of groups, integrated by volunteers that suffer poverty in their own daily lived experiences, are everyday more common in different countries, above all in the third world.
20. Many volunteers, also poor, are fully connected to the processes of their communities and the natural events that occur. They are volunteers who work the land and ensure by their own hands the support of their spouses and children. These volunteers harvest the lands of rice, tapioca and peanut plants, and many other products, in order to meet their basic needs. They meet their expenses as well as help others poorer than they, in order to cover quotas of production needed to sustain the associations in which they participate, whose work is indispensable on the local scene and also nationally and internationally. These worker volunteers labor in many farms and in many ways, starting early each morning, in order to raise funds for organizations serving the common good.
21. Finally, in order to give a clear idea about the different types of volunteers in the AIC, I would like to quote the words of our regional animator for Africa and Madagascar: *"In the 10 years of life of the Association, the Holy Spirit has been present to the group of Madagascar... it is the Spirit that has flown to our aide after every fall, after every apparent setback,... always there to animate us in advance when everything inside of us wanted to standstill because of doubts and discouragement. It is the Holy Spirit that whispered that we should smile and remain smiling when all our insides cried out in tears and desperation. The Spirit said "mission" while in us there existed the word "resign." During these 10 years we have not ceased to be: "creative unto infinity" changing ourselves into harvesters of rice, raisers of fertile chickens, promoters of new ideas, workers of large or small projects, diplomats before the powerful civil authorities, teachers of the poor, and many other roles which we never had thought of doing 10 years ago when we started the AIC in Madagascar, with the support of the Daughters of Charity."*

The above examples have reaffirmed in us the conviction that one isolated event cannot produce a change in the quality of life for the poor, nor contribute to social transformation. For this reason then we, the volunteers of the AIC, use our talents and resources to rethink our actions, complementing the work already being done with other services and actions, so that in the end a transforming effect is achieved.

Obviously, all of this means a greater commitment on the part of AIC to offer needed services on an international level. Furthermore, this clearly implies an explicit commitment on the part of the volunteers and their leaders to provide guidance and leadership for the Vincentian groups.

II. Collaboration with the other branches of the Vincentian Family

1. Present collaboration

Up to the present moment the interaction of the AIC has been with the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. However, volunteers are conscious of the need to widen the network so that other groups of the Vincentian Family may participate. This collaboration has been envisioned and supported by Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M. The four international meetings that he has convoked have opened new roads of collaboration in various countries of the world. Moreover, we are moved by the conviction that religious communities "*ought to share with the laity the charism of their own community*" and that "*the diverse members of the Church can and ought to unite their strengths... with the goal of participating more effectively in the Church's mission.*" (1)

With this firm conviction, the AIC has sought to widen bonds of existing collaboration, by means of many types of initiatives:

22. Invitations to seminaries and regional, national, and international assemblies.
23. Responses to the invitations of the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity.
24. Mailing the International AIC Bulletin to interested persons.
25. Visiting Double Family and AIC leaders in their different countries.
26. Motivating seminarians and novices to become involved on our works.
27. Participation in common projects and initiatives of social promotion, evangelization and formation.
28. Working as a team while supporting local actions.
29. Economic support for a particular group or community.
30. Prayer and reflection in common.

2. Perspectives for the near future

It is important that we ask: "What is the vision of the Vincentian Family towards the future?" Before setting any goals, it is necessary to consider the opportunities, that exist: "Where are there chances for success in meeting the needs of the poor?" Moreover, it is necessary to consider the risks, that is, "What are the obstacles that can effect the objectives that we want to achieve?"

2.1 The Opportunities

This is a privileged moment for collaboration because this idea of working together has been planted and grown for many years. The following is a series of opportunities or factors that have positively influenced our goal of collaboration:

31. The interest of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, along with international leaders of the diverse branches of the Vincentian Family, who actively promote collaboration.
32. Many national leaders and organizations share our goal of collaboration in favor of the poor.
33. Our courses of formation are pilot projects which serve as models and stimulate interest.
34. The initiatives of knowing one another more personally, as brothers and sisters of the branches of the wider Vincentian Family.
35. The sustained interest and dedication of many Vincentians and Daughters to form lay Vincentian groups and the emergence of new initiatives among the poor with new social leaders such as native peoples and *Campesinos*, to promote their own communities.

2.2 Difficulties and Risks

Clearly, our experience teaches us that new initiatives bring about new risks and difficulties which, when faced with determination in a spirit of humility and service, help us to grow. Some examples of the risks are:

36. The fear of some groups that they will loose their liberty and autonomy, and find themselves in a submissive and dependent situation.
37. The immaturity of some lay people who do not desire collaboration and would prefer to depend on authority.

38. The lack of confidence of some priests and sisters in the talents and potentials of the laity.
39. The inadequate and obsolete goals and methods of some groups so that priests, sisters, and brothers, are not interested in collaborating with them.
40. Not knowing one another's charism and mission in each of the branches of the Vincentian Family and little interest in forming relationships.
41. The failure of previous initiatives of collaboration because of poor planning. At times we have rushed ahead to obtain goals without following an appropriate process.
42. The attachment of certain groups to continue using methods of assistance which are outmoded in social action and which do not favor the self-promotion of the deprived.
43. The lack of authentic Vincentian formation that allows people to grow in the spirit of our Founder.

3. A reflection on the agenda of our near future. The goals and challenges of the Third Millennium

As our future approaches, Pope John Paul II, invites us to participate in the International Year of Charity, the Jubilee Year 2000 which motivates us with urgency to seek out new forms of collaboration. The poverty that increases day by day and the difficulties we encounter and fight against make us all the more conscious of our need to form bonds of support, which help us work together and march forward confidently in new ways of service.

We can continue, as we have in these last years, to build friendships through praying, planning, and celebrating together. However, we should not be carried away by the initial enthusiasm into forgetting that all changes require sacrifices, and these sacrifices imply suffering and pain. To renounce our own interests in favor of looking for the common good is often so painful. The difficulties that come up in our daily work, in projects assumed in common, begun with much enthusiasm, encounter difficulties and often end in failure. We should not be deceived. For those convinced of the validity of our initiatives, the challenges of our work motivate us to sacrifice more.

In our collaboration, each branch of our Vincentian Family ought to be clear in what gifts he/she specifically contributes to the network and its members. We consider that the AIC by its lay character invites and challenges all to participate and have many organizations involved to eradicate poverty and its causes. We are invited because of our mission to be present in the places of political decisions where public

policies are determined and effect so deeply the lives of the marginalized. We also support among other things, specific documents on Vincentian Lay Formation.

With the goal of bettering our interactions, it is necessary to improve communication between us by opening specific channels and opening up new networks, so that *"we can live with a more profound knowledge, mutually helping each other to grow."* (2)

Those responsible for the formation of AIC members have elaborated a document for leaders, with the invaluable help of Fr. Lauro Palú, who brought together various important texts written by members of the Congregation of the Mission. Hopefully this will be an instrument that will enable us to work more united and with a greater understanding of the formation process.

Our formation should always be evolving, so that it responds to the demands of our time and the creativity of our commitments. It must be integral, that is, corresponding to all aspects of the candidate's life, adequate to the signs of the times in different places and types of groups. Our formation consists in spiritual, social, and technical elements which require a specific and continuing deepening of our charism and our mission, with a clear understanding of our different works. The leaders of our lay groups, be they priests, brothers, sisters, or trained volunteers, should be committed to a constantly evolving formation process which responds to the needs of our times and the newness of our commitments. Only a solid Vincentian formation will permit our volunteers to be capable of serving our brothers and sisters and to participate effectively in this great worldwide network fighting against poverty.

The priests, brothers, sisters, and laity should be well prepared for their work which is a response to a true calling. At times when those responsible for formation do not feel that their work is very important, but rather view it as something that takes them away from apostolic works of charity, they often cannot inspire others nor meet expectations, and therefore do not always form the best servants of the poor.

4. In conclusion

Finally, I would like to point out that the intensifying of our relations between the branches of the Vincentian Family is one of the grand priorities of the AIC and mine personally. This initiative of collaboration I profoundly believe in because I am convinced of the wonders that we will achieve by being united, as a huge army fighting against poverty and its causes, and defending the rights of the poorest of the poor.

We pray that we will be given a liberating leadership. This leadership is defined by Fr. Alvaro Quevedo, and Fr. Raphael Ortega, as a leadership that: *"exalts in community values, solidarity, collaboration, creativity, and initiative. It is a leadership always open to dialogue, participation, reflection and co-responsibility. This leadership favors being conscious of one's own dignity, value as a person, and as*

a clear objective, the transformation of reality. This liberating leadership directs our steps to a social commitment and reminds us of our option for the poor." We pray moreover, for a greater awareness of our calling and identity, so often diluted by our daily work and worries.

The support and contacts we have had with you are great learning opportunities and have moved us to a generous sacrifice in favor of the poor. Through it all we have been enriched, we have grown and loved the poor, often following your example, a true donation and emptying of self. For these reasons and for what you represent, we have been privileged to make sacrifices, and we ask that we will be allowed to walk beside you, ever knowing you better. Your work, your faithfulness, help us to discern and open ourselves up to the prophetic history that announces new times and a fullness of life.

(Translated by Michael Mazurchuk, C.M.)

(1) *Vita Consecrata*. Post-synodal exhortation of John Paul II, 25 March 1996.

(2) Fr. Benjamín Romo, C.M. "Le caminar del Laicado vicentino en Mexico."

The Congregation of the Mission

by Victor Bieler, C.M.
Assistant General

1. What is its specific identity within the Vincentian Family?

Often people wonder why the members of this Congregation are called the members of the Congregation of the Mission, or why they are called missionaries. The **identity** of this congregation derives from its **purpose**.

What then is the **purpose of the Congregation of the Mission**?

It is, as the first article of our Constitutions says, to *follow Christ the evangelizer of the Poor. This purpose is achieved when faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:*

1° *Make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation;*

2° *Work at evangelizing the poor, especially the most abandoned;*

3° *Help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing the poor (Const. 1).*

What is our spirit?

In order to become capable of realizing that purpose we strive to be filled with a certain spirit. The **spirit of our Congregation** is a participation in the spirit of Christ himself, as proposed by St. Vincent: "He sent me to preach the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). Hence, "Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission" and shall be considered as the center of its life and activity. This spirit comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence.

The Congregation therefore tries to express this spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls (Const. 4, 5, 6, 7).

How should our work of evangelization be?

As a consequence, our *work of evangelization* should have the following characteristics:

- Clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (Mt 11:5);
- Attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;
- Some sharing in the conditions of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;
- Genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation;
- Readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation;
- Striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

2. What are our relations with the other branches of the Vincentian Family?

I could mention here some concrete experiences of collaboration, aspirations and hopes with regard to the future in collaboration. I suggest you read the letter of the Superior General as well as the reports of several common projects published in *Vincentiana* (1998/2) and in the *Echoes of the Company* (1998/5 and 6).

2.1 Cologne, Germany: Foyer Rosalie Rendu: residence for women.

Daughters of Charity of the Province of Germany. Participants: Association of diocesan groups of Cologne, diocesan Caritas of Cologne city, Charity conferences in Germany (Fribourg-en-Brisgau), Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Germany (Cologne), Vincentians (Cologne), parishes in the city of Cologne.

Team: 3 Daughters of Charity with volunteers, a number of which have been recruited and formed by them.

Cologne, a city with about a million inhabitants, has a growing number of homeless women. The causes are: strikes, divorce, drug addiction, alcoholism, violence.

2.2 Mozambique: Elderly and abandoned people.

Daughters of Charity, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincentians, Marian Youth.

Place: poor quarter of a parish: Nossa Senhora do Amparo (Matola)

Social context: civil war for 17 years causing dehumanization and disintegration of family life, abandoning the elderly and street children.

2.2 Mexico: Home for terminally ill people: hotel of hope.

Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, Marian Youth, Vincentian volunteers, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Miraculous Medal Association.

Social context: The city of Mexico has a great number of terminally ill people who have to leave the hospitals because of the few available beds. They have to go home, but often are not received by their families and society in general, because of the economic burden they form.

Purpose: medical assistance, provide a roof for them, spiritual support,

3. Which are the three most important challenges for our Congregation in the third millennium?

- The **new Areopagi**: these are the new fields where the Gospel must be proclaimed, like the world of communication, the natural sciences, international relations. All this is more urgent since the Church tries to establish peace, human development and liberation of nations.

- **New mass media**: there several new means at the disposal of catechesis, homiletics and doctrine. But these means themselves need to be evangelized. These are challenges, according to the Superior General, which are mentioned in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio* are:

- **New forms of poverty**: which demand a revision of our commitment, of our option for the poor.

4. Are there any stimulating signs for our Congregation?

- A new missionary spirit: this is clear from the new efforts being undertaken, the new international missions, and the volunteers for these missions, even for Rwanda.

- A growing number of vocations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, which gives hope that the Vincentian spirit in these continents will be strengthened and refreshed.

- A greater solidarity with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, not only by praying together on the occasion of Vincentian feasts or commemorations but also by undertaking common projects.

The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul

*Sr. Therezinha Remonatto, DC
General Assistant
of the Daughters of Charity*

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.

The Vincentian Marian Youth (Jmv) of Spain

by Edurne Urdampilleta

1. *Identity of the Vincentian Marian Youth*

Beginning with the first historical facts, our investigation starts in 1835. As is known, it was to a novice of the Daughters of Charity, Catherine Labouré, to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary confided her messages, one of which was her desire to form an association of "Children of Mary," which over the years has evolved into what we know as the Vincentian Marian Youth. Today's Vincentian Marian Youth is a lay youth movement, part of the Vincentian Family, guided by the direct heirs of the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. For this reason, our youth, during a long journey to maturity, feel the need and the desire in gratitude to serve and evangelize.

The Vincentian Marian Youth has chosen to work with youth along catechumenal lines, in order that the young members "achieve an integral maturation of faith, seeking by their formation, a joyful spirit of service and a conversion by which they will become witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world."

Systematic formation and personal accompaniment of the youth are very important in this process. For this task we have to thank the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, without whom the growth of our members would be impossible, granted that faith is in the process of maturation in our day.

2. *Relations with Other Members of the Vincentian Family*

* *Our greatest collaboration is with the Daughters of Charity on two levels:*

- Animation of projects for the evangelization of youth;
- Collaborating with them in their houses in various works of service.

* *With the Congregation of the Mission:*

Helping on popular missions and missions "ad gentes." We would like to have more relations with Vincentian parishes.

* *With AIC:*

There is a significant collaboration on the local level where AIC is present which is in 40 of our 300 centers in Spain.

* *With the SSVdP:*

Nothing significant except for a few personal exceptions.
With the Associations of the Miraculous Medal:

Some families.

Hopes for Collaboration

a. That the awareness of the Vincentian family on all levels be continually stimulated so that future generations feel a global belonging which will enrich them and open channels toward a true associative identity.

b. That the National Councils of the different associations meet to discern and program jointly in order to discover ways to collaborate in the sense we are urging.

c. That the efforts of the past few years to renew and bring up to date the lay Vincentian associations be continued so that the third millennium will see the charism of St. Vincent shared with the laity, so that they also will live in service of the poor: scattered throughout the masses, within the framework of lay Vincentian spirituality.

3. Challenges for the Vincentian Marian Youth in the Third Millennium

1. That our members continue as evangelizers of youth, adding Gospel tones to postmodern values. That they offer an integral and integrating pastoral project which meshes with the new, more universal culture in an active dynamic, joining action with contemplation, that is to say, that we live rooted in God, just as the Superior General exhorted us as one of his hopes during the first international convention in Paris, August 1997.

2. To move ahead in the social projection of our movement, by our presence in institutions where decisions are made on the causes of poverty, and by insertion into different sectors of society, keeping our sights set on true social change. We want to learn how to do this from other Vincentian Family associations. We already have members who have opted for a committed, radical lifestyle, as is the case of those young lay missionaries of the MISEVI, recently approved by the Superior General.

3. Encouraged by the Superior General, we must enrich our international statutes, and develop on an international level, what will be our first International Assembly to be celebrated here in Rome in the year 2000, at which time our first international President will be named.

4. Challenges for the Vincentian Family

1. To tighten on all levels (international, national, local) the bonds which unite all our associations, in order to promote mutual acquaintance and unity so that we will become known as the great Vincentian Family in the third millennium. To this end,

we can utilize the ever-widening scope of the mass media: the Internet, digital TV, etc.

2. To create channels of common formation, which will help us to deepen the roots of our charism and strengthen our response to the causes of poverty. For the Vincentian Marian Youth its strength lies in well-formed groups, since one convinced Christian is worth 100 not rooted in faith.

Translated by John Kennedy, C.M.

The Society of St. Vincent De Paul

*by César Nunes Viana
International President of the
Society of St. Vincent de Paul*

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a lay society always faithful to the Church and to the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. It was founded by Frederick Ozanam in 1833. At that time the dramatic consequences of the French Revolution were being felt. Sickness and poverty created victims on all sides. Under the inspiration of its founder, Ozanam, who had six companions, the first Conference was born, and that became the basis of all Vincentian work. Its objective was to reflect on the social situation and, at the same time, to promote works of concrete help to all of those who suffered sickness or hunger. This was truly a prophetic inspiration, proven by its rapid spread throughout France and many other countries.

Today the Society of St. Vincent de Paul functions in over 135 countries, with over 900,000 members distributed in 50,000 conferences. The fundamental lines of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are found in the spirituality of the entire Vincentian Family and, as with all its work, are inspired by the Gospel, faithful to the ideals of St. Vincent de Paul and their interpretation by Ozanam.

The works which the members carry out always begin with a person-to-person dialogue. Their visits to the poor are carried out in a spirit of poverty and mutual acceptance. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is alert to see remedies for all types of poverty, material or spiritual. This attitude of dialogue must always characterize their visits to the poor, and also serves to create mutual and open dialogue among the members themselves.

The conferences are organized on a parish basis, though the cells may be set up in schools and universities, and even in some commercial enterprises. When a conference prepares its visits, the members must bring a certain spirituality, a broad and specific formation, as well as specific information about the difficulties encountered, in order to seek adequate solutions in a family spirit.

The final objective is to find the efficacious and opportune solution in solving situations of material or spiritual poverty without forgetting the immediate emergency which they are taking care of. We try to develop the relationships of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul with other branches of the Vincentian Family, not only insofar as there is a fraternal and cordial attitude among the members, but also everything which concerns information, communication of significant experience and carrying out of projects in collaboration. There are hopes and aspirations to better the situations and not to let them die. These characteristics can be realized in different ways. It is important also that we all have days of prayer and reflection in common, especially on

the feast of St. Vincent de Paul (September 27), and it is hoped that this day could be celebrated by all the branches of the Vincent Family present in any one place.

After the beatification of Frederick Ozanam we Vincentians would like to celebrate September 9 (feast of Ozanam) and promote a meeting for all members during the weekend of April 23, 1999. At that time we can look into the possibility of organizing our members who live in countries with greater material and spiritual needs.

With reference to the third millennium and inspired by Frederick Ozanam, aware that we are living in revolutionary times, maybe even more dramatic than the times of Ozanam, we are going to organize a plenary Assembly in Fatima after Easter in 1999. There we will study various problems which have come up in our modern era. In the time of Ozanam, the Industrial Revolution substituted machinery in the place of man, and today modern technology, computers, substitute even for intellectual tasks.

Therefore it is necessary that we exercise imagination to permit greater social justice in greater fidelity to new areas of development in the world. There are just too many problems, such as strikes, lack of housing, systematic destruction of the family, new diseases, and new forms of poverty, like AIDS, cancer, the exploitation of poor peoples through drug trafficking by the richer nations within the framework of liberal neo-capitalism.

In all these things, the Vincentians have a fundamental job: that Christian charity give sense to our lives, so that we can collaborate, one with another, making Christian brotherhood every more alive and present.

(translated by Fr. Robert Stone, C.M.)

Réflexion sur le travail de la mission En Irlande

*Par Maureen Treanor,
Missionnaire laïque de
l'Equipe missionnaire d'Irlande*

Pour comprendre le travail de l'équipe missionnaire d'Irlande, il est nécessaire d'abord d'avoir une connaissance du contexte dans lequel nous travaillons.

L'Irlande est une petite île située à l'ouest de l'Europe. La grande majorité des 4 millions d'habitants est catholique. Elle est passée d'une économie basée sur l'agriculture à une économie davantage basée sur l'industrie, la technique et les services. Nous avons une population jeune bien éduquée. Le mode de vie s'est amélioré pour beaucoup de gens, mais nous avons également une partie de la population qui est pauvre et au chômage, se sentant exclue de cette nouvelle prospérité. Il s'est produit un changement dans les structures sociales. Nous avons des unités familiales plus petites, le couple travaillant à l'extérieur, dans la plupart des cas par nécessité. Les familles monoparentales sont en augmentation et un nombre important de naissances se font hors mariage. La place et l'influence de l'Eglise se sont modifiées et de nombreuses personnes laissent tomber la pratique religieuse. Ces dernières années nous avons eu quelques scandales dans l'Eglise d'Irlande et cela a produit un effet négatif. Dans le passé, le nombre de prêtres et de religieux était élevé. Aujourd'hui, il y a une grande baisse en ce qui concerne les candidats à la prêtrise et dans de nombreux diocèses, il y a pénurie de prêtres.

Notre équipe travaille sur toute l'Irlande. Même dans notre petit pays, il y a des différences évidentes. La pratique religieuse dans le Nord de l'Irlande reste encore très traditionnelle avec un grand nombre de personnes participant à la vie de l'Eglise. Cela est vrai aussi dans les paroisses rurales où des familles entières se rendent à l'Eglise ensemble. Contrairement à des grands centres urbains, beaucoup de paroisses ont fait l'expérience d'une chute du nombre de personnes allant à l'église.

J'ai rejoint l'équipe missionnaire en 1994. Nous sommes cinq personnes travaillant à plein temps dans l'équipe: 4 prêtres et moi même. Il y a également un certain nombre de personnes ayant des spécialités particulières et qui travaillent avec nous de temps en temps. L'équipe est basée au Collège All Hallows à Dublin. C'est un collège qui est spécialisé dans la formation pastorale et spirituelle des adultes. Il permet de passer des diplômes et licences en théologie et ministère pastoral. Nous travaillons dans les paroisses sur invitation des prêtres et du conseil pastoral. En 1997 nous avons travaillé dans 17 paroisses différentes et cette année nous travaillerons avec 15 paroisses. Notre calendrier est rempli pour 1999 et nous avons une liste d'attente jusque l'an 2000.

Nous avons mis sur pied une approche de la mission qui comprend trois phases distinctes.

1. La «pré-mission»

Cela consiste à prendre contact avec la paroisse pendant une période de 6 à 12 mois avant *l'événement de la mission*. Pendant cette période de préparation, un membre de l'équipe prend contact avec la paroisse, en rencontrant les prêtres et le conseil pastoral, et en les aidant à préparer le plan de travail pour la mission. Chaque paroisse est différente, chaque communauté aussi. De même, la manière d'entrevoir la mission sera différente. Il y a cependant des éléments qui sont communs à tous. Il y aura des célébrations liturgiques et sacramentelle spéciales, et un intérêt particulier pour la jeunesse parmi laquelle les jeunes de la paroisse donnent un coup de main pour élaborer les projets. Du temps pour la discussion et le dialogue autour de sujets d'actualité, choisis pour leur rapport avec la vie des gens, comme la famille, la morale, la foi, la prière, le deuil et la perte d'êtres chers, pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns. Il y a également le côté social de la mission où les gens se rassemblent, se rencontrent pour célébrer et se connaître d'une manière très fraternelle.

2. L'événement mission

Un temps-fort de célébration, centré à la fois sur l'Eglise et la communauté, avec un effort pour rejoindre ceux qui vivent en marge. Pendant cette période, l'équipe vivra dans la communauté et visitera les personnes isolées et les écoles de la paroisse. Il y aura un programme des événements pour chaque jour de la mission.

3. L'après-mission

En fonction du projet et de l'événement mission, quelques paroisses demandent que l'équipe soit impliquée dans le *suivi* du renouveau et du développement de la paroisse. Pour nous, c'est un nouveau champ d'activité qui va en augmentant. Utilisant les relations que nous avons avec le collège All Hallows, nous avons présenté des programmes pour l'Avent et le Carême dans différents endroits d'Irlande. Il y a une demande croissante en ce qui concerne le suivi de la foi des adultes au niveau paroissial. C'est un aspect de notre travail qui continue à se développer et offre de nouveaux défis passionnants pour le futur.

Au coeur de la mission aujourd'hui, il y a un appel à tous les baptisés à participer pleinement à la vie de l'Eglise et à travailler ensemble pour bâtir le Royaume. Si nous sommes appelés en tant qu'équipe, c'est pour travailler dans un esprit de collaboration. Si nous ne sommes pas des modèles dans notre vie, comment pouvons-nous inviter les autres à faire de même? J'ai rencontré beaucoup de soutien dans les paroisses en tant que femme travaillant dans ce ministère. Il y a eu une ou deux occasions où ma

présence en tant que femme ayant à prêcher pendant une célébration a provoqué des difficultés avec quelques prêtres.

Le processus de changement peut être difficile pour quelques-uns et il est nécessaire d'avoir une bonne dose de compréhension, de patience et de respect. Lorsque j'ai commencé à travailler avec l'équipe, un des besoins principaux a été d'impliquer les laïcs dans la vie de l'Eglise. Pendant ces quatre années passées, j'en suis venue à comprendre qu'il y a beaucoup de travail à faire auprès des prêtres irlandais dans le domaine de la formation et du renouvellement afin qu'ils commencent à être capables de travailler dans un esprit de collaboration authentique.

Ce fut une nouvelle expérience pour moi d'être ainsi intégrée en tant que membre de la Famille Vincentienne à l'assemblée de la Province d'Irlande en juin 1997. Comprendre que je faisais partie d'un grand réseau de personnes engagées, c'était pour moi quelque chose de stimulant qui m'a donné une espérance nouvelle pour le futur. En juin, j'ai eu le privilège de représenter l'équipe missionnaire d'Irlande avec le Père Jay Shanaham à Paris au *mois Vincentien*, consacré au travail de la mission. Ce fut une expérience merveilleuse d'écouter et de partager avec tant de personnes engagées dans le travail de la Mission de par le monde. Ayant eu l'occasion de visiter tous les endroits liés à saint Vincent a été pour moi quelque chose d'extraordinaire que je garderai en mémoire. En mai de cette année, je suis allée à une rencontre aux U.S.A. avec des membres des équipes de missionnaires des Etats-Unis. On espère que les liens qui se sont faits à Paris en Juillet 97 continueront à grandir et à se développer dans un esprit de vraie collaboration en suivant l'esprit de saint Vincent. La route ouverte est, pour tous les laïcs, les religieux et les prêtres de collaborer ensemble dans le travail de renouveau de la mission.

Le travail de la mission est quelque chose de central pour la famille Vincentienne. C'était pour répondre aux besoins des gens de son époque que saint Vincent a donné sa première mission. Le monde a changé de bien des manières depuis le temps de saint Vincent, mais les besoins des gens au niveau spirituel sont semblables à ce qu'ils étaient du temps de saint Vincent. Il y a un grand besoin dans les coeurs des personnes d'expérimenter la présence aimante de Dieu dans leurs vies. Comment répondre à ce besoin? C'est le défi qui est devant nous tous tandis que nous entrons devant le nouveau millénaire.

(traduction: Noël Kieken, C.M.)

The Religious of St. Vincent de Paul

*by Yvon Laroche, RSV
Superior General*

Dear brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family,

allow me to introduce the **Religious of St. Vincent de Paul** to you.

Made up of priests and brothers, the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul (formerly The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul) are a congregation of pontifical right whose constitutions, after Vatican II, were approved in 1985.

The origins.

It dates from the day when Msgr. Angebault, the bishop of Angers, blessed the newborn community at the foot of the shrine of St. Vincent, in the chapel of the Vincentians on the Rue de Sèvres in Paris. There stood Jean-Léon Le Prevost, who had initiated this undertaking, Clément Myionnet, co-founder, and a young man, Maurice Maignen, who would soon join his two companions.

Le Prevost had joined the first conference of charity (conference of St. Vincent de Paul), some months after its foundation. On 11 September 1844, Clément Myionnet, himself also a Vincentian member, had come from Angers to meet M. Le Prevost in Paris. Both had the same desires and views: to give their lives to the service of the poor in a new religious congregation.

Le Prevost's intuitions.

For eleven years, Le Prevost had committed himself to visiting the needy in their homes, to the education of young prisoners and of orphan/apprentices. Moreover, he had founded an association for impoverished families, called 'the Holy Family.' Three intuitions had directed him. His experience had shown him the importance of missions in the towns, especially in the capital of France. He had also discovered that the practice of charity is the best way to reconcile the mass of workers to God and to the Church. "Divine Providence," he wrote, "wants, in our time, to save the world by charity." Finally, this type of work required the union of priest and religious brother for the evangelisation of the people. From this he understood that the works of his institute would be "essentially missionary" and that the exercise of charity, in all its forms, would be of primary importance for revealing the love of God towards all. Finally, among the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, priests and brothers form a single spiritual and apostolic family.

Spirituality.

Formed in the school of St. Vincent and St. Francis de Sales, influenced by the French School of Spirituality of the seventeenth century, the founder gave his religious a double rule: to conform themselves to Jesus Christ and to show him to the world through their works.

Works.

From the beginning, the first brothers directed clubs for apprentices and students, then groups for young workers, the 'Holy Family' centres, popular works like libraries, soup kitchens, etc. They also opened local chapels linked with many works. Maurice Maignen became involved in the foundation of a 'Workers' Circle' and took part in the Catholic social movement which would prepare the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.

The congregation of the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul grew in France and, in 1884, established itself in Canada. Following that, and responding to the call of the Popes, new works were founded in Brazil and in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Congo-Kinshasa). The Religious of St. Vincent de Paul now number close to 300. The Generalate is at 26, Via Palestro, Rome.

They still have the clubs (the 'Patros') and other works for youth, like hostels for workers and students and circles for young people. Their field of action reaches out to street children, the handicapped, the aged, the homeless and the unemployed.

In France and in Canada, they have taken on parishes in areas of high population. In Brazil especially, and in Congo, in parishes in highly populated areas, they work at evangelisation and the formation of basic communities. These parishes are, naturally, connected with numerous and varied works: basic literacy, secondhand clothes shops, courses in catechesis, family associations, retreats. On the occasion of the Great Jubilee, may we receive a new grace, that of working with the Vincentian Family.

(Translated by Eugene Curran, CM)

The Association of the Miraculous Medal

A Sharing for the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission

*by Charles Shelby, C.M.
Director, Association of the Miraculous Medal
Perryville, Missouri, USA*

The Specific Identity of the Association of the Miraculous Medal

I will assume that this group is familiar with the story of the Miraculous Medal. An Association of the Holy Medal of the Immaculate Conception was begun in Paris and approved for Paris by the Holy See in 1847. Worldwide approval came on July 8, 1909, and revised international statutes were approved in 1998. Anyone who wears a blessed Miraculous Medal is a member of this international Association.

The Association which I lead, a part of the international Association, brings Mary conceived without sin to the Catholics of North America. There are over 2,250,000 registered members and 60,000 promoters who spread the devotion by enrolling members. About 350,000 people around the United States regularly receive our literature with its devotional and educational contents. We were established in 1918 with 25¢ a year as the membership donation (\$10 for perpetual membership), and the amount is the same today, 80 years later. It is the best bargain in Christendom.

The Relationship of the Association with the other members of the Vincentian Family: Experiences and Hopes about Collaboration

The basis in principle for a relationship between the Association of the Holy Medal and the Vincentian Family is that the Association is entrusted to our Superior General as its Director General. The practical relationship of the Association with the Vincentian Family depends very much on the country in which it operates formally. In the six national associations I am familiar with, the national director is a confrere who instills in the association the spirit of Vincent. In three cases there are annual national gatherings of members or of local *asesorers* for instruction and prayer. And in Mexico the Association is involved in one of the model collaborative Vincentian Family projects. There is also a long-standing relationship between the Association and the Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV).

Here is one example of collaboration involving my own Association. In the western United States, the Association is a major support for the operation of the Congregation. Annually we give over \$2,000,000 to the province and the worldwide missions of the Congregation. We also place our resources, especially in the area of communication, at the service of the province and its ministries.

Is there more? I dream of bringing the large, widely scattered membership of the Association into active service of the poor and of the gospel wherever they are. I want them to hear Mary's message for what it is, the intervention of God in the world today with its own poor, hungry for a purpose in life but not knowing where to look for it.

The Three Most Important Challenges the Association Is Facing in the Third Millennium

The sheer size of the Association makes it potentially a formidable force for realizing the vision of St. Vincent.

1. The Association must become more widely known in the Congregation as a vehicle for evangelization and service of the poor.
2. The message of the Miraculous Medal must be translated into the language of the next generation, a generation that has lost its faith or never received it, a generation in a society no longer Christian.
3. The message of the Miraculous Medal must be communicated to the widest possible audience in a way that engages them in the gospel and active charity to the most abandoned.

The Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne-Antide Thouret

*by Sr. Marie-Antoine Henriot
Superior General*

Short presentation on the Congregation

- its identity
- its relationships with other groups in the Vincentian Family
- the challenges which we perceive as the most important at this time and
- the most encouraging signs for the future.

1. Identity

The Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne-Antide Thouret make up a religious congregation of apostolic life, approved by Pope Pius VII on 23 July 1819.

The congregation was founded by St. Jeanne-Antide Thouret in Besançon, France, on 11 April 1799 in response to representatives of that diocese gathered in Switzerland:

You will take young girls and form them as you have yourself been formed and you will establish yourselves at Besançon, for the instruction of young people and to give help to the sick poor in their homes (MSR).

Preparing the constitutions for her institute, Jeanne-Antide wrote, in the Primary Discourse of 1802:

We have taken these Constitutions and these Rules for the greater part from what we observed as practised among the Daughters of Charity. We believe this usage to have been established by St. Vincent de Paul. That is why you will, with good reason, look upon this great servant of God as your founder, your special protector and your father.

From the beginning, the Sisters of Charity made four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and spiritual and temporal service of the poor. They live in fraternal community, whose superior, following the Vincentian tradition, is known as 'Sister Servant.' Their style of life has charity, humility and simplicity as its characteristics.

Today, in the Rule of Life approved by the Church on 11 April 1981, following the revision required by Vatican Council II, the charism of the sisters is expressed thus:

To love Christ Jesus, to love and serve the poor who are his members, to show them the love of the Father, is the grace and mission that St. Vincent de Paul and St. Jeanne-Antide received from God.

Called by God into the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity, we participate in that charism and we are the ones responsible for it today (Rules 1.1.1).

Our charity seeks to be universal, but our mission keeps us, by a special vow and in various ways, for the service of the poor, the 'little ones', the weak, according to the Vincentian tradition as lived out by St. Jeanne-Antide (Rules 1.1.2).

Our vocation is to live each day as part of the Church, in fraternal community, at the heart of a living tradition:

Jesus Christ, who is our life, serves the poor through us and, in them, we serve Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the 'littlest ones' and those most scorned. (Rules 5.1.2)

2. Relationships with other groups in the Vincentian Family

In general, wherever there are communities of the Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, or groups of lay Vincentians, the Sisters of Charity have good relationships with them, which can be considered under three headings:

* **Ordinary life:** on a daily or occasional basis, participation in the Eucharist, times of prayer and festive occasions serve to build up fraternity and mutual understanding; e.g., the feasts of St. Vincent and St. Jeanne-Antide, the 50th celebrations of the canonisations of St. Louise de Marillac or St. Jeanne-Antide (1984). In Algiers, the one Sister of Charity there finds welcome and recreation in the house of the Daughters of Charity.

* **Service of the Poor:** in this area, collaboration is very varied.

- welcoming, listening to people or families in difficulty and looking for ways to help them
- home visiting, participation in works and initiatives in favour of the poor
- pastoral care in a rural area
- preparation and animation of popular missions.

* **Formation**

- participation in GAV in Italy, in Vincentian sessions and in courses organised by the Priests of the Mission
- being part of a Vincentian Cultural Centre (Northern Italy and Sardinia)

- choosing Priests of the Mission as retreat directors, facilitators for sessions about the Vincentian charism or spirit
- meetings of the Provincial Councils of the Sisters and Daughters of Charity
- regular meetings between the two noviciates in Rome: on formation, prayer and getting to know one another
- this year, a young Indonesian Vincentian has helped one of our sisters to prepare the translation of our Rule of Life into Indonesian

More and more, links are forming between the Sisters of Charity and other groups. We feel ourselves to be more and more part of the same family, called to evangelise the poor today and together.

3. The most important challenges for us at this time

* To evangelise/serve the poor of today, with the strengths we have, given our rising average age, the lack of vocations in Europe and the USA, which all means:

- to learn, and relearn, how to speak of God today, where we are, taking account of the culture, the generation gap, the universe and the conditions of the poor
- to redefine in today's world the principle priorities at the heart of those established on the occasion of the General Chapter of 1980
- to think 'new' and not along old lines

* To rediscover the radicality of the Vincentian 'lifestyle' which is sober, simple, poor, open to welcoming others, the poor, sharing that life with them, and with the little ones in a way that is friendly and respectful

* A fraternity that is lived out internationally in a world that builds barriers to protect itself

4. The most encouraging signs for our future

* The gift of **vocations** in countries that are poor, in difficulties, or where Muslims are in the majority: Asia, Central Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Romania

* the **calls** which come to us in favour of the poor

* the **requests of numerous lay people** who want to live according to our spirit.

(Translated by Eugene Curran, CM)

Federation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

by Sr. Theresa Capria, S.C.

I am honored to be here with you this week and am grateful for the invitation from Fr. Robert Maloney. I am a Sister of Charity of New York and am here to represent the Sisters of Charity Federation in the United States and Canada.

The initial foundation of the American Sisters of Charity was made by St. Elizabeth Seton at Emmitsburg, Maryland in 1809. In the following year Bishop Flaget brought from France a copy of the rule given to the first Daughters of Charity by St. Vincent de Paul in 1647. When Elizabeth Seton read the rule, she immediately identified with it. And so in 1812, with minor adaptations, the rule of St. Vincent was adopted by the new community. In time the Emmitsburg foundation spread to New York, Cincinnati, Halifax, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In these places the Sisters engaged in child care, health care, education and a variety of social services.

In 1947 these six communities, which had become independent congregations, came together to form the Conference of Mother Seton's Daughters. They had two goals: to strengthen the union among them and to advance the cause of Mother Seton. The Federation continued after Mother Seton was canonized by efforts to celebrate their common heritage and broaden their understanding of their shared charism. In 1989 the Federation expanded to include other congregations which followed the rule of St. Vincent. Today thirteen groups are members of the Federation numbering about 7,000.

Our vision statement expresses our identity:

Claiming our future as women of faith, we are bonded by the charism of charity; impelled to respond to the needs of our day, especially among the poor; committed to collaboration.

The actions which flow from this vision include joint sponsorship of programs and experiences to strengthen networking and bonding, opportunities to deepen our common heritage rooted in Vincent, Louise and Elizabeth and efforts to use our corporate power for advocacy, witness and systemic change. The most recent example of this is our new NGO status with the United Nations. Five of the member groups are part of a Collaborative Novitiate; all groups participate in the gatherings of Company of Charity Formation Personnel; the Associates of each group come together as Charity Associates.

More recently we have joined local gatherings of the larger Vincentian Family. In New York we gathered for the first time at St. John's University on April 19, 1997.

Our theme was: Love—Inventive To Infinity. This year on October 3 we will have our second gathering around the theme: Vincentian Love in Action. We will be part of a nationwide celebration scheduled for September 23, 2000.

As we move into the future most of our members have chosen to focus their attention on being risk-takers for the poor, on addressing the needs of women and making real efforts to reverence the earth and all of God's creation. The insights of the new cosmology make it very clear that we are connected and that the fate of the tiniest part of God's creation affects all the others. Among the challenges we face are the need to find new ways of relating and networking with like-minded people; more holistic approaches to the complex problems generated by money-driven society; and the great challenge — to be faithful to the charism of love — to the face of LOVE incarnated in us today.

As I was packing I found a quote I would like to share. I do not know the author. But it could have been spoken by Vincent or Louise or Elizabeth or Frederick.

Humility accepts new directions with grace, simplicity acts promptly upon them and charity leavens the whole. Humility can risk new ventures because it does not fear failure; simplicity keeps the effort straightforward and self-forgetting; charity urges us to embrace the whole world.

The Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg and their Federation

*by Sr. Denise Baumann
Superior General and President of the Federation*

I. The Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg, birthplace of the Federation

Our origins.

Born in 1734 in Alsace, our Congregation would not have known at its birth that it was directly linked to St. Vincent de Paul. However, it was by the route opened by him that our founders entered. We recognise as founders: Cardinal de Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg and Grand Almoner, who wished to have a community of sisters in his diocese which was ravaged by war, sickness and misery, four young women from Alsace, in formation for two years with the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres.

From Chartres, the first sisters brought the Rule which was to be our rule of life for 150 years. A rule that is stamped from its very first pages by what is at the heart of the message of St. Vincent de Paul: belonging to the Saviour, in order to "offer to his person all those acts of charity which the least of those who belong to him have received from their (the sisters') hands."

The community grew quickly. It was able to put sisters into some hospitals and founding homes in Strasbourg. It was there, ten years after the Church had proclaimed the sanctity of Vincent de Paul, that a young priest, Antoine Jeanjean, started to arouse in the sisters an enthusiasm for the one who was already their "holy patron." Named as first ecclesiastical superior of the congregation, Antoine Jeanjean was able, up to the French Revolution, to strengthen the sisters in this spirit. The turmoil of revolution was to hunt them out of the towns of Alsace and to scatter them.

From the moment of their return to Saverne in 1804, the Community experienced a rapid growth. The sisters were called on to care for the poor and the sick in numerous hospitals in Alsace and Lorraine.

Since 1823, we had already been 'exported' to the German or Austro-Hungarian countries and due to our manner of serving the sick and the poor, our name in these areas became: Die barmherzigen Schwestern vom heiligen Vincenz von Paul.

In France, the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg never passed the thousand mark. At the end of 1997, we numbered 230. At the same time, the Federation, with its German, Austrian, Italian and Indian sisters, numbered 4,700 sisters; of whom 174 are in Africa and 42 in Peru, with 53 novices, 17 postulants and 58 aspirants.

Three distinct groups live out this life of the Congregation and of the Federation today:

- The 11 congregations gathered, since 1971, into the Federation by the decree of 2 February 1986 from the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (with a common rule of life).
- The congregations founded by Strasbourg and, over the course of the years, integrated into the Company of the Daughters of Charity.
- The Congregations founded by Strasbourg, currently linked in friendship and/or collaboration, but not federated.

2. Some links with other members of the Vincentian Family

- At the heart of our Federation, there are strong links between the three groups named above, for example, Daughters of Charity from the provinces of Salzburg, Graz and Cologne regularly participate in our Federation Councils and in formation programmes (initial and ongoing).

- The Middle European Vincentian Studies Group (MEGVIS = Mittel-Europäische Gemeinschaft Vinzentinischer Studien) seeks regularly to deepen the Vincentian spirit and service. The last three themes have been:

- * 1996: Witnesses to the faith in the Vincentian Family
- * 1997: Frederick Ozanam and Rosalie Rendu
- * 1998: Collaboration among our institutes in Europe.

- In **France**, we collaborate with the communities of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity for:

- * the formation of lay people in the Spirit of St. Vincent; for example, fidelity and creativity in the service of the poor, Vincent de Paul and management.
- * formation; visits to the Vincentian 'high places': journey 'In the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul' with sisters, young people and directors of our works.
- * reflection on our works and on the new juridical structures.

- In **Tanzania**, collaboration between the Sisters of the Congregation of Untermarchtal and the Vincentians.

-In **Europe**, particularly in our Federation, we can see some seeds of hope in the direct collaboration for the future. For example:

- * the search for new juridical structures for our works
- * the active involvement of our charism on numerous lay people in these works

- * the new face of our communities and congregations in the lasting (deep) changes in Europe
- * the attention to the new poor and the diverse responses to their needs.

Dialogue is only at its start, but the field remains open for collaboration and support that are yet more concrete.

3. Faced with the Third Millennium, the most important challenges to be taken up are:

- Sisters and lay people in the service of the same mission.

The challenge is to share the charism with lay people, our co-workers in the service of the poor and the sick. The challenge is also to live out at the heart of the modern world

_ with its technological and economic pressures _ a commitment to the priority of the human person, the sick and the poor.

- The Young.

The challenge in a rich and ageing Europe is to promote a pastoral service for the young and to promote Vincentian vocations.

- The Poor.

The challenge, with Vincentian creativity, is to continue to open new ways of serving the poor: those who are excluded, those at the beginning and end of their lives, ethical questions.

Among these challenges, there are two signs which bring hope for the future:

- a thirsting for God and a renewal of prayer
- the increasing number of men and women ready to move into action on behalf of the poor.

Translated by Eugene Curran, CM

Vincentian Charism and Spirit

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I. Charism

It is certain that neither Saint Vincent nor Saint Louise used the word “charism.” It was not until after the Second Vatican Council that the term came into general use, and one could even say over-use. Many works of the Council have specified the importance of the charismatic components inherent in Institutes of Consecrated Life. In addition, others have specified the charismatic aspect of the Church in contrast to the hierarchical-institutional aspect.

After the Council, most Institutes, with a more charismatic vision of consecrated life, undertook the work of the revision of their Rules and Constitutions trying to better harmonise the legal elements, which up until then had occupied the first place, with theological elements based on the charism of the Founders and Foundresses, always taking into account the guidelines given by *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*¹.

The priority given to the charismatic aspect of the new Constitutions was such that over the course of the process of approbation, the Holy See (the Sacred Congregation) was obliged to remind Institutes of the legal aspect of the Constitutions.

Since that time, there have been numerous commentaries and studies on the subject of the charism of Institutes of Consecrated Life from all possible angles : Charism, Founding Charism, Charism of the Founder, Charism of the Institute, etc.

It seems that it was Paul VI who was first to use this term when he addressed the Brothers of Christian Instruction of St. Gabriel². And it was also he who used the word officially in the *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelica Testificatio”*³: “Only in this way will you be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the **charisms** of your founders who were raised up by God within His Church”⁴. This same document speaks of the

¹ cf. II, I, 12-13.

² May 31, 1969.

³ July 29, 1971.

⁴ E.T., 11.

*“**charism** of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood (Jn. 1, 13), or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world (Rom. 12,2), is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.”*⁵

Lumen Gentium tells us that the **charism** of all Institutes of Consecrated Life is not directed so much toward personal sanctification as it is toward others and to the Church. Because of that, the Church has great esteem for Consecrated Life.⁶

The expression “**Charism of the Founders**,” generally refers to the gift of the Spirit which is freely offered by God to certain Founders, men and women, in order to awaken in them certain gifts. These gifts enable them to give birth to new congregations of consecrated life in the Church. The most complete definition is given in the document *Mutuae Relationes*, number 11 : “The very ‘charism of the Founders’ (E.T. 11) appears as ‘an experience of the Spirit,’ transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church.”⁷

This gift is first of all personal, in the sense that it transforms the person of the Founder preparing him or her for a particular vocation and mission in the Church. Secondly, it has a collective-community aspect, and in this way it implies that others carry out this same divine plan. Finally, it is ecclesial, because through the Founder of the Community, the gift is given to the entire Church for its dynamic edification. The entire Church is called to gather the fruits of this particular **charism**.

Founding Charism

The founder or foundress receives this gift freely, having done nothing to obtain or merit it. We could say they discover this gift by surprise.

This is what **Saint Vincent** said on numerous occasions to explain that he was not the Founder :

*It may be said with truth that it is God who established your Company. I was thinking about it the other day and I said to myself : Did you ever dream of founding a Company of Sisters ? O ! no, no, no. Did Mademoiselle le Gras ? ... Who then had the idea of establishing in the Church of God a Society of girls and women of the order of Charity wearing ordinary dress... I can repeat once more that it was God and not I.*⁸

⁵ E.T., 11.

⁶ cf. L.G., 44 and 46.

⁷ MR 11.

⁸ The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. January 22, 1645, pp. 183-84.

*...Who would ever have thought that there would be Daughters of Charity, when the first of you came to some parishes here in Paris ? Oh ! no, my daughters , I did not think of it ; nor did your Sister Servant, nor Father Portail. God thought of it for you. We can say, my daughters, that it is He who is the Author of your Company.*⁹

The Rules were also inspired by God :

*Do you know, my daughters a powerful motive for embracing your rules ? Oh ! you yourselves have mentioned it ; it is that your Superiors were inspired by God to formulate those rules and give them to you....*¹⁰

In speaking about the reasons to love our vocation, Saint Vincent says :

*To all these motives... I will add one which is, my Daughters, the **holiness** of your vocation ; **for it is not of man's institution, but of God's.***¹¹

The inspiration which **Saint Louise** received on the day of *Pentecost*, 1623, ten years before the foundation of the Company, may be considered as a **charismatic inspiration** which prepared the way for the mission that she would be called to fulfil : *"I then understood that I would be in a place where I could help my neighbour but I did not understand how this would be possible since there was to be much coming and going."*¹²

In order not to remain simply at an inspirational level, let us recall Saint Vincent's joy at the thought that God had also given him a clear model of a Daughter of Charity in the person of Marguerite Naseau. He speaks of her on several occasions :

*Marguerite Naseau of Suresnes, was the first Sister who had the happiness of pointing out the road to our other Sisters, both in the education of young girls and in nursing the sick...moved by a powerful inspiration from heaven...*¹³

I believe that the entire group of first sisters, as much as Marguerite Naseau, had been chosen by God to receive the charism of the foundation. One need only notice the humility and care with which Saint Vincent and Saint Louise questioned them and listened to them. More than one time he exclaimed and blessed God when hearing their responses, which he considered to be directly inspired by God. Even more remarkable, these Daughters were so imbued with the charism that they felt free to remind Vincent to be consistent. Once when he was no doubt under stress from his many commitments, as well as somewhat swayed by his indebtedness to the Queen of

⁹ Id. June 14, 1643, p. 102.

¹⁰ Id. May 30, 1647, p. 249.

¹¹ Id. December 25, 1648, p. 406.

¹² Sullivan, L., (ed.) Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac : Correspondence and Thoughts. p. 1.

¹³ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. July, 1642, p. 71.

Poland or the Duchess of Aiguillon, he agreed to place the Daughters in their service. That was the case when Barbe Angiboust was sent to serve the Duchess of Aiguillon. Seeing herself in the court and in the service of a great Lady, she did not hesitate to complain and say : *“Madame, I left my father’s house to serve the poor and you are a great, rich, powerful lady. If you were poor, Madame, I would gladly serve you. She said the same thing to everybody : ‘If Madame were poor, I would devote myself with a glad heart to her service ; but she is rich.’”*¹⁴ In the end, she was freed from this service.

Saint Vincent also took delight in telling the story of Marguerite Moreau, whom the Queen of Poland, Louise Marie de Gonzague, wanted to keep with her :

*“I told you about her before, but I cannot refrain from telling you again...However that may be, this Sister did not like the Queen’s proposal... Ah ! Madame, I belong to the poor ; I gave myself to God with that intention ; you will find plenty of worthy people to serve Your Majesty ; allow me to do the work to which God has called me.”*¹⁵ With exclamations, Saint Vincent blessed God because the daughters preferred the service of the Poor to the company of the queen ; the poor habit to brocade, relationships with their poor Daughters of Charity to those with the Ladies, a poor lifestyle to the luxury of the court. *“That is certainly not the work of creatures but of God.”*¹⁶

Charism of the Founder

The *charism of the Founder* is in reality passed on as the *charism of the Institute* founded by him or her. This is the case of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and the Company, and that of Saint Vincent and other Institutions which he founded.

If one were to question any Daughter of Charity on the subject of her charism, she would respond without hesitation : ***the service of the Poor***. The Founders taught this on many occasions and in many different ways, and they gave themselves totally to put it into practice. From its origins, the charism was expressed in the first article of the Common Rules :

*The principle end for which God has called and assembled the Daughters of Charity is to honour Our Lord Jesus Christ, as the source and model of all charity, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor....*¹⁷

To some Sisters sent to the provinces, Saint Vincent says : *“...If you are brought to see His Lordship the Bishop of the district...if he asks you who you are and if you are*

¹⁴ Id. April 27, 1659, p. 1198.

¹⁵ Id. May 25, 1654, p. 608.

¹⁶ Id. pp. 608-9.

¹⁷ Common Rules, I,1.

*nuns, you will tell him you are not...Tell him you are poor Daughters of Charity who have given yourselves to God **to serve the poor**...*"¹⁸

Two very clear concepts emerge : the total gift to God, even though they were not religious, and the service of the poor.

*...O Sister, how consoled you will be at the hour of death for having consumed your life for the same reason for which Jesus Christ gave his -- for charity, for God, for the poor !*¹⁹

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise stressed in a thousand ways over the course of their conferences, their letters, etc., the end, the mission of the Company: the service of the Poor. But this service, in order to truly be the service the Daughter of Charity, must have the following conditions :

*** To give preference to the most abandoned**

*"Let us go then and devote ourselves with new love to serve the poor, and even **seek out the poorest and most abandoned** ; let us confess before God that they are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy to render them our little services..."*²⁰

On July 23, 1656, Saint Vincent wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre to reproach her for not having held fast to this norm :

*"We are often urged in Paris to allow Sisters to go to visit sick persons other than the poor, but we cannot consent to their serving them...both because they are intended only for those deprived of all assistance..."*²¹

The particular Rules for school sisters also specify very clearly, that it is the poor children that they should teach, and it is a rare exception that a rich child should be admitted to the school.

"She shall understand that all kinds of girls are not to be received into her school, but only the poor. If, however, Providence and obedience calls her into a parish where there is no teacher for the rich and their parents beg her very earnestly to admit such children into her school, she may, in that case, receive them, but on

¹⁸ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. October 22, 1650, pp. 473-4.

¹⁹ Poole, M. (ed.) Vincent de Paul : Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, vol. 7. Letter to Sister Anne Hardemont, November 24, 1658, p. 396.

²⁰ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. January, 1657, p. 367.

²¹ Poole, M. (ed.) Vincent de Paul : Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, vol. 6. Letter to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre, July 25, 1656, p. 49.

condition that the poor be always preferred to the rich and that the latter do not look down on the others.”²²

To serve the most abandoned is a demanding obligation which is not easy to fulfil. It requires great mobility. At times, services which began by addressing the needs of the poorest and most destitute no longer have that same focus. This is due to growth and change in different situations and countries. We are, as it were, victims of our own efficiency. This can be seen most of all in the area of education. Small schools which began by serving the children of the marginalized, have now attained a higher status because of economic and social progress through the generations. This is reflected in the level of the students who attend our schools. It is not always easy to relinquish these services to others and to begin anew in other marginalized areas, of which there are so many today.

*** Corporal and spiritual service**

“Do you think, my daughters, that God merely expects you to bring His poor a morsel of bread, a scrap of meat, some soup and medicines ? Oh ! no, no, no, my daughters, that was not his design...He expects you to provide for the needs of the soul as well as the body...”²³

“...It is indeed something to assist the poor, as far as their body is concerned but, in truth, it was never Our Lord’s intention, in founding your Company, for you to take care only of the body, because there never will be wanting persons to do that, but it is Our Lord’s intention that you should assist the souls of the sick poor...A Turk, an idolater, can assist the body....”²⁴

*** With a love that is affective and effective**

Our Founder, with his characteristic realism and his feet on the ground, wanted the service to be real, bringing to it soul and body :

“Affective love is the element of tenderness present in love. You should love Our Lord tenderly and affectionately...this affective love gives rise to effective love, for, Sisters, the first does not suffice ; it is necessary to have both. Affective love must pass on to effective love which is the practice of the works of the Company of Charity, the service of the poor undertaken joyously, courageously, steadfastly and lovingly....The love of Daughters of Charity is not only tender, it is effective, because they serve the poor effectively, both in body and soul.”²⁵

He explains this more forcefully to the Missionaries :

²² Particular Rules for the Sisters Employed in Schools, number 20.

²³ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. January 22, 1646, p. 212.

²⁴ Id. November 11, 1657, p. 925.

²⁵ Id. February 9, 1653, pp. 526-7.

*“Let us love God, my Brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows. For very often many acts of love of God, of kindness, of benevolence, and other such affections and interior feelings of tenderness of the heart, however good and very desirable, are not to be trusted if they do not come from the practice of effective love.”*²⁶

*** All forms of poverty**

No type of poverty is excluded from Vincentian service :

*“You have a vocation which obliges you to help, without any discrimination, all sorts of persons, men, women, children, and in general all poor persons who need your assistance.”*²⁷

This thought is contained in article 1.8 of our Constitutions :

*“At the school of the son of God, the Daughters of Charity learn that no type of misery should be foreign to them. Christ appeals constantly to their Company through their suffering brothers and sisters, through the signs of the times, through the Church...Multiple are the forms of poverty and multiple the forms of service, but one is the love that God bestows on those whom he has ‘called and assembled’.”*²⁸

*** Wherever the poor are, which implies great availability and mobility**

*“That is how you should be prepared to serve the poor wherever you may be sent : in the army, as you did when called on to do so, with poor criminals and generally in all those places where you can assist the poor, because that is your end.”*²⁹

During this same conference, Saint Vincent accentuated the *missionary spirit* of the Company :

*“That is how you should act if you are to be good Daughters of Charity, going wherever God may wish to send you ; if to Africa, into Africa, to the army, the Indies, to whichever places ask for you, it does not matter ; you are Daughters of Charity and you must go.”*³⁰

*** A great openness to the future**

Our Founder, no doubt guided by the Holy Spirit, did not confine himself to the limits of his own time and context, but set his gaze further :

²⁶ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. Number 22, pp. 49-50.

²⁷ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. January 6, 1658, p 1028.

²⁸ Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent De Paul. Article 1.8, p. 7.

²⁹ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. October 18, 1655, p. 742.

³⁰ Id. p. 743.

*“...and that, my daughters, was the beginning of you Company ; as it was not then what it is now, there is reason to think that it is not now what it will be later on when God brings it to the state on which He has decided....”*³¹

This implies that there must be constant attention to the movement of the Spirit, who speaks through the signs of the times, and through ever-changing appeals and demands.

At another occasion, Saint Vincent rejoiced when he noticed how the Company was receiving new requests. He attributed this to its fidelity which was pleasing to Our Lord : *“I am pleased with these girls; they have carried out this duty so well that I will give them another.”*³² In addition to the sick, he makes reference to the poor abandoned children, to “criminals,” that is to say, the galley slaves, to the elderly in the “name of Jesus,” to the mentally ill, to refugees of war, to soldiers... and he finishes by saying :

*“We so not know whether you will live long enough to see if God will give new employments to the Company, but we do know quite well that if you live conformably to the end which Our Lord demands of you, if you fulfil you obligations faithfully, both in regard to the service of the poor and the observance of your rules, if you do all things well, as I trust you are no beginning to do, Oh ! God will bless your exercises more and more and He will preserve you ; but to be worth y of this you must be faithful to Him.”*³³

*** A simple and poor life style**

The need to embrace a poor style of life in all ways, is constantly pointed out in the teachings of our Founders. Poverty and confidence in God are the two foundations on which the Company is built.³⁴

Our Founder rejected everything that would be a sign of greatness for the nascent Company ; he delighted in calling it the *“Little Company.”* He wanted the young women who were seeking to join the company to be of humble backgrounds, like *“good village girls”* ; and he wanted their virtues to be acquired by the members of the Company - among these virtues, temperance. If an aspirant belonging to a higher class of society were admitted, it would only be on the condition that she adopt the life style of village girls. All of this had as its purpose to facilitate living a life in proximity to the poor, and to have women capable of tolerating the hardship of service to the most needy and marginalized in society. Saint Vincent learned this lesson from the Ladies of Charity, who because of their

³¹ Id. February 13, 1646, p. 218.

³² Id. October 18, 1655, pp. 740-1.

³³ Id. p. 742.

³⁴ Sullivan, L., (ed.) Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac : Correspondence and Thoughts. July 31, 1656, p. 516.

rank in society, had family needs and commitments that prevented them from being able to render direct service to the poor. This difficulty was the very origin of the Daughters of Charity, who were free from all that would keep them from being totally given to God for the service of the poor. They have a life style close to the poor, which does not have or is not seeking, a social “status” which draws them away from the poor. Of course, it is not only a question of social and monetary poverty. It is a matter of the imitation of a model which gives meaning to poverty, and to all other aspects in the life of the Daughter of Charity : the model is **Christ**.

*“...who would wish to be rich after the Son of God had resolved to be poor ?”³⁵ “My Daughters, you have chosen Him ever since you entered the Company ; you have pledged Him your word and as He led a life of poverty, **you must imitate Him in that respect.**”³⁶*

“...blessed are the Daughters of Charity who have chosen a way of life which has for its chief end to imitate that of the Son God Who, being able to possess all the treasures of the world, despised them and lived in such poverty that He had not a stone whereon to lay His head.”³⁷

He explained these concepts in concrete terms with one of his straightforward expressions which has retained its boldness through the centuries :

“You have a right only to food and clothing ; the surplus belongs to the service of the poor.”³⁸

Saint Louise was not less demanding when she said :

*“We are the servants of the poor ; therefore, **we should be poorer than they.**”³⁹*

Quality is another characteristic of the service of the Daughters of Charity.

It is not a matter of haphazard service. Their condition as servants of the poor, who are their lords and masters, obliges them to render service of the highest quality. Throughout the conferences and letters, it is possible to glean the following qualities :

- professional competence :

At various occasions, the Sisters are invited to learn to read, especially during

³⁵ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. August 20, 1656, p. 812.

³⁶ Id. p. 815.

³⁷ Id. August 20, 1656, p. 813.

³⁸ Id. January 25, 1643, p. 81.

³⁹ Id. July 3, 1660, p. 1261.

free time, the purpose of which was to teach poor girls. We know the response given by Saint Vincent when Saint Louise expressed her reluctance to let the sisters study the Bellarmine Catechism : *“There is no other catechism, Mademoiselle, than that of Bellarmine...because if it is necessary for them to demonstrate it, they must know it.”*⁴⁰

In the same way, the Founders wanted the Sisters to learn how to let blood and to be exact in following the orders of the “doctors,” etc.

The poor must also be served with :

- respect, leniency, gentleness, cordiality, discretion, prudence, compassion.

*“You are destined to represent the Goodness of God to those poor sick people.”*⁴¹ *“Sisters, you should nurse those poor sick with great charity and gentleness so that they may see you are going to their assistance with a heart filled with compassion for them.”*⁴²

*** Priority of the service of the poor**

Here is another new important focus : the service of the poor must take priority over everything, including prayer and Sunday Mass, when urgent needs require it. That is what Saint Vincent called “leaving God for God.” Already in the first conference which we have preserved, July 31, 1634, he says to us :

*“My Daughters, remember that when you leave prayer and Holy Mass to serve the poor, you are losing nothing, because **serving the poor is going to God and you should see God in them.**”*⁴³

*“My Daughters, **the service of the poor should be preferred to everything else.** You may even omit hearing Mass on Sundays and holidays of obligation, but only in case of grave necessity, such as if a patient were in danger of death...”*⁴⁴

*“If there ever is a legitimate reason (to leave prayer or spiritual reading) it is the service of the poor. **To leave God only for God...is not to leave God...**”*⁴⁵

“...as your chief obligation is the service of the sick poor, you should never be afraid to neglect some rules, when the needs of the poor are urgent, provided it is

⁴⁰ Sullivan, L., (ed.) Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac : Correspondence and Thoughts. March 31, 1648, note 1, p. 240.

⁴¹ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. November 11, 1657, p. 923.

⁴² Id. August 4, 1658, p. 1117.

⁴³ Id. July 31, 1634, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Id. January 22, 1645, p. 190.

⁴⁵ Id. May 30, 1647, p. 284.

really necessary to do so, and that you do not neglect them from idleness or mere natural inclination."⁴⁶

*** Common Fraternal Life**

The Founders did all they could to provide ways to support the service and ensure its fulfilment and continuation. That is why, knowing the great value of common fraternal life, they established the Sisters in communities where each one would be able to acquire and renew the necessary strength for service. The two Founders use the phrase, "***called and assembled by God for service.***"

Saint Vincent will consecrate several of his conferences to this theme in its various aspects. *"...as the Father gave everything of himself to his Son, and the Son everything to his Father, from which proceeds the Holy Spirit, in the same way they should be one given for the other to bring about works of charity which are attributed to the Holy Spirit...."*⁴⁷

Saint Louise gave great attention to the fraternal life of the communities that she directed and encouraged by her visits and especially by her correspondence. Fraternal life was one of the clauses in her Spiritual Testament :

*"Take good care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great union and cordiality, loving one another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord."*⁴⁸

II The Spirit

Saint Vincent, who did not use the word "***charism***," according to Father Dodin, used the word "***spirit***" 2,891 times with 27 different meanings.⁴⁹

Spirit goes hand in hand with ***charism***. Every Institute has its own spirit which enables it to fulfil the mission confided to it by the charism. The charism is a totally freely given gift of the Holy Spirit. The spirit is also given by the Holy Spirit, but it requires collaboration and effort on the part of the person who receives the charism and wants to live it. The spirit of any Institute is above all ***the imitation of Jesus Christ*** with a particular focus on certain aspects of the Lord's life which help it better live out its own charism.

Our Founder constantly invites us to imitate Jesus Christ, to be clothed with Jesus Christ, in continuing his life and his work.

⁴⁶ Id. June 14, 1643, p. 113.

⁴⁷ Coste, P. (French edition) Saint Vincent de Paul : Documents, Vol. XIII, Number 159, Conference of June 19, 1647, p. 633.

⁴⁸ Sullivan, L., (ed.) Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac : Correspondence and Thoughts. Spiritual Testament, p. 835.

⁴⁹ Dodin, A. El Espíritu Vincenciano, Salamanca 1982, p. 182.

*“...Give yourselves wholly to God to do thoroughly well what you are going to do. Ask **Him for the Spirit of His Son** that you may be able to perform all your actions, as He did His, because, being Sisters, you have the happiness of imitating the life which the Son of God led with His Apostles. I beseech Him, my Daughters, to replenish you with His spirit and to **give you the graces that are necessary for you to be true Daughters of Charity**...”⁵⁰*

“Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true model and the great invisible picture on whom we should model all our actions.”⁵¹

*“Another point to which you should pay particular attention is to **depend greatly on the guidance of the Son of God** ; I mean to say that, when you have to act, you should reflect like this : ‘Is this in conformity with the maxims of the Son of God?’...moreover, whenever there is a question of doing a good work, say to the son of God, ‘O Lord, if you were in my place, what would you have done : How would you instruct the people ? How would you console this illness of body or mind ?’”⁵²*

*“They will endeavour to **conform their lives** to his (**that of Our Lord Jesus Christ**), particularly in his poverty, his humility, his gentleness, his simplicity and temperance.”⁵³*

Our Constitutions have powerfully summarised and expressed this doctrine on the imitation of Jesus Christ in article 1.5 :

***Christ is the rule of the Daughters of Charity.** They endeavour to imitate him as their Founders perceived him revealed in Scripture : Adorer of the Father, Servant of his Loving Plan, Evangeliser of the Poor.*

To follow him more closely and to carry on his Mission, the Daughters of Charity choose to live totally and radically the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience ; this makes them available for the service of the poor, which is the end of their Company.”⁵⁴

In speaking about the imitation of Jesus Christ, Saint Vincent particularly emphasised **humility, simplicity, and charity**. These specific virtues enable the sisters to carry out the sometimes difficult mission to which their vocation calls them : service of the poor.

⁵⁰ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. October 22, 1650, p. 474.

⁵¹ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. Number 128, p. 208.

⁵² Id. Number 153, p. 327.

⁵³ Coste, P. (French edition) Saint Vincent de Paul : Documents, Vol. XIII, Number 145, Rules of the Daughters of Charity, p. 555.

⁵⁴ Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent De Paul. Article 1.5, p. 6.

To the Missionaries, Saint Vincent proposes simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal, virtues which are also necessary to live out their charism and mission : **evangelization of the poor and formation of the clergy**.

Saint Vincent devoted entire conferences to the explanation of the three virtues which he wanted as the foundation of the spirit of the company of the Daughters of Charity. The first of these conferences, which is very well-known, is that of January 25, 1653 on the imitation of country girls. Our Founder saw these virtues as the profile virtues of members of the Company. He taught the value of these virtues throughout the entire conference : simplicity, humility, temperance in eating, purity, modesty, poverty, obedience, fidelity to their vocation... He will finish the conference by saying :

*“...if I have ever said anything true and important to you, it is what you have just heard. You should strive to preserve the spirit of good and true country girls...If girls of noble families present themselves, wishing to enter your Company, O Sisters, they should do so in order to live, in body and soul, like those who really and truly possess the virtues of village girls, as our great St. Genevieve possessed them, who is now so honoured for her simplicity, humility, sobriety, modesty and obedience...”*⁵⁵

Even though the words used above may seem outdated, they do convey the message of the Founder. The Company would already be in existence for twenty years when Saint Vincent gave three complete conferences (February 2, 9, 24, 1653) exclusively on the spirit of the Company, focusing on humility, simplicity and charity, the virtues which make up the profile of the true servant of the poor.

*“You should know then, my dear Sisters, that the Spirit of your Company consists of three things : to love Our Lord and serve Him in a spirit of humility and simplicity. As long as charity, humility and simplicity exist among you, one may say : ‘The Company of Charity is still alive.’”*⁵⁶

During the course of this same conference, he repeats this idea, but makes the distinction between charity toward God, toward the poor and toward the Sisters in Community :

*“I repeat once more, Sisters, that **the spirit of your company** consists in the love of Our Lord, love of the poor, love of one another, humility and simplicity. I would be far better that there were no Daughters of Charity if they had not these virtues.”*⁵⁷

In the same conference and in others devoted to these virtues, he explains of what the virtues consist and the means to acquire them. He also talks about the negative consequences that will come about if the virtues are not

⁵⁵ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. January 25, 1643, p. 84-5.

⁵⁶ Id. February 9, 1653, p. 528.

⁵⁷ Id. p. 529

practised, as well as the joy that comes from striving to live out these virtues. On several occasions questions the Sisters, having them repeat what constitutes the spirit that should animate them. In this way he can be assured that they have understood, because he considers the spirit indispensable for the life and mission of the Company.

In each one of these virtues, he contemplates the imitation of Jesus Christ, and the power that the virtue brings in order to enable the living out of the charism.

Humility

For our Founder, humility is the virtue par excellence of Jesus Christ. *“Humility is a virtue so comprehensive, so difficult, and so necessary, that we can never reflect on it sufficiently ; it is the virtue of Jesus Christ.”*⁵⁸

At another time, he says, in speaking of Jesus Christ : *“If we carefully consider that beautiful picture which we have before our eyes, that admirable model of humility...”*⁵⁹ The invitation to constantly contemplate and imitate him, is as much for the Sisters as it is for the Priests.

*“There is a question then, my dearest brothers, of the holy virtue of humility so much loved and earnestly recommended by Our Lord and which we ought to embrace, because it is recommended and loved by Our Lord.”*⁶⁰

*“Let us give ourselves utterly to God, let us labour solidly to acquire virtue and, above all, humility, yes humility, I repeat it, humility.”*⁶¹

For the Daughters of Charity, he asks the Lord to enable them to imitate Jesus Christ in the practice of this virtue : *“You were so humble as to be willing to be regarded as a sinner and to be nailed to a cross...It is then from you, O Saviour, that we ask the grace of striving to acquire this virtue, according to your wishes.”*⁶²

Humility must be understood and lived according to the charism. It is an essential virtue for a person who wishes to devote himself or herself to evangelisation and to service of the Poor, our Lords and Masters.

Saint Vincent says to the Missionaries :

⁵⁸ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. Number 30, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Id. Number 165, pp. 367-8.

⁶⁰ Id. Number 203, p. 527.

⁶¹ Id. Number 162, p. 363.

⁶² The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. March 15, 1654, p. 605.

*“...When I say it is a virtue of Missionaries, I mean it is a virtue which they need most...for this poor Company, which is the last of all, should be founded only on humility as its own proper virtue. Otherwise we shall never do anything worthwhile, either at home or abroad...”*⁶³

And to the Sisters, he says :

*“Give me a sister in whom humility is apparent, a poor girl who thinks nothing of herself, who loves to be rebuffed...give me such a Sister, I say, and I will tell you that she is a true Daughter of Charity.”*⁶⁴

Humility must be the virtue not only of each Missionary and each Daughter of Charity, but of the two Companies :

*“I desire that the Company be established on this foundation of humility and that it conform, as much as possible, to the way of life of the Son of God.”*⁶⁵

*“As long as the Company keeps this spirit of humility and lowliness it will remain alive. But if it begins to highly esteem itself, it will be lost, and God will no longer bestow graces on it.”*⁶⁶

Simplicity

This is the hallmark characterising the works of Saint Vincent. He recommended it to the Ladies ; he emphasised to the Daughters of Charity as well as to the Missionaries. Interior simplicity, which is purity of intention, must be put into practice. The two Founders wanted their disciples to be total truth and transparency, with no duplicity or affectation. Simplicity leads directly to God and helps foster closeness to the Poor.

God is simple. For Saint Vincent, to live simplicity is to be directed toward God.

*“God is very simple, rather, he is simplicity itself ; therefore, where there is simplicity, there is God.”*⁶⁷

Simplicity brings us close to the poor, because their behaviour is free of ostentation. Saint Vincent praises this quality when he talks with his Missionaries :

⁶³ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. Number 30, p. 60.

⁶⁴ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. July 14, 1658, p. 1093.

⁶⁵ Coste, P. (French edition) Saint Vincent de Paul : Documents, Vol. XIII, Number 172, Conference of April 27, 1656, p. 716.

⁶⁶ Id. Number 170, Conference of February 27, 1656, p. 710.

⁶⁷ Id. Vol. XI, Number 33, Excerpt of conference on simplicity, p. 50.

*"If we consider our neighbour, and how we should assist him in soul and body...how essential it is for us to be on our guard against appearing crafty, wily and, above all, against everusing ambiguous language. Ah ! far be that from a Missionary !"*⁶⁸

As for the Sisters, he could not conceive of their not having simplicity ; it was an essential virtue for them :

*"...the spirit of true village girls is extremely simple ; no cunning, no double-meaning words...Daughters of Charity should be like that and by this you will know if you are really so ; I mean if you are quite simple..."*⁶⁹

Without the simplicity of a few good girls, the Company would not have been able to be founded :

*"Firstly, God has chosen poor girls. If He had chosen rich ones, would they have done what poor girls have done ? Would they have served the sick in the most lowly and painful forms of service ? Would they have carried pots of soup in the streets, panniers to the markets to purchase provisions ? And although, by God's grace, there are at present among you some of fairly high rank, it is quite credible that, in the beginning, they might not have done such things."*⁷⁰

The Founder wanted to instil in his followers the same esteem for simplicity that he himself had :

*"...God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel."*⁷¹

Charity

One might consider it redundant to name charity as one of the virtues of the spirit of the Daughters of Charity, considering that their charism and their mission are precisely that : charity lived out in all its aspects : charity toward God, charity toward the Poor, charity toward the Sisters.

It is in this light that charism and spirit meet. Today more than ever, it is necessary to stop and consider this virtue of our spirit. Any service, however praiseworthy it may be, is not necessarily charity. A good many people, even atheists, give of themselves to others through altruism, natural compassion, and

⁶⁸ Coste, P. (trans. J. Leonard) Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Priests of the Mission. Number 211, p. 674.

⁶⁹ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. January 25, 1643, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Id. May 30, 1647, p. 279.

⁷¹ Id. February 24, 1653, p. 538.

respect for the dignity of the human person. Charity requires the presence of God in our service : *“I assure you, as often as you did it for one of the least of my brothers or sisters, you did it for me.”*⁷² *“...by serving the poor, we serve Jesus Christ.”*⁷³ *“A sister will go and visit the poor ten times a day, and ten times a day she will find God there,”*⁷⁴ Saint Vincent tells us. That is also the basis of the expression *“leaving God for God.”* To serve the poor in a spirit of **charity** assumes that one sees the presence of God in them even if sometimes one needs to *“turn the medal.”* On the contrary, our service can be lacking in soul and the presence of God. It can happen that our service endures only as long as our presence in a work, or as long as a natural inclination remains. On the contrary, when our true motivation is the love of God, the flame can be easily rekindled at times of weariness or discouragement, and we will not be tempted to run from failures. This spirit of **charity** also will bring to our service the quality befitting a service given to God present in the poor.

The Charism Today

No one can doubt that both the charism and the Vincentian spirit are relevant in today's world. As we have already said, the Founder left the doors wide open ; he had the insight that over the course of time, other services, in response to the evolving needs of the poor, would be confided to his followers. Experience shows us unfortunately, that each moment of history brings new areas for the followers of the Apostle of Charity to carry out their mission. The charism is not something of the past, but as a gift of the Spirit, it must be a living reality, a constant challenge and invitation. It is up to us to preserve it, to develop it and to live it in dynamic fidelity and with audacious creativity.

In fact, the many and constant requests for the services of the Company come from all continents. Even if we cannot answer all the requests, we are able to generously answer many, even in high risk situations.

In the same way, the Church assures us of the relevance of the charism and spurs us on to radically live it. The Holy Father in his Messages to the Daughters of Charity gathered during the different General Assemblies tells us :

*“Have eyes and hearts only for the poor.”*⁷⁵

*“Come winds and high waters, keep your identity”...“My Sisters, do your utmost to go to the Poorest ! They are so numerous today !”*⁷⁶

⁷² Mt. 25, 40.

⁷³ The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity. February 13, 1646, p. 223.

⁷⁴ Id.

⁷⁵ John-Paul II, January 11, 1980.

⁷⁶ John-Paul II, June 20, 1985.

“Dear Sisters, in the name of Christ and the Church, I dare to send you out anew into the immense, very diversified world of poverty.”⁷⁷

“Walk with assurance along the pathways of the Poor. The Lord goes before you and awaits you there !”⁷⁸

“The charism of Monsieur Vincent is of burning relevance for our time...it is for you to give it life wherever you are sent.”⁷⁹

In the Cathedral of Paris, during the beatification of Frederic Ozanam, the Pope made an appeal to all the disciples of Saint Vincent :

“I encourage you to pull your forces together, so that as the one who inspires you would want, the Poor would be always better loved and better served, and Jesus Christ would be honoured in their persons.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ John-Paul II, May 27, 1991.

⁷⁸ John-Paul II, Assembly, 1997.

⁷⁹ Id.

⁸⁰ John-Paul II. Homily in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, August 22, 1997.

The Vincentian Family: an Overall Vision

*by José Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General*

I begin this conference by cordially greeting each and every one of the representatives of the different branches of the Vincentian Family gathered here:

*the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission,
Daughters of Charity,
the International Association of Charity,
the St. Vincent de Paul Society,
Vincentian Marian Youth Groups,
Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI),
the Miraculous Medal Association,
Popular Missions,
Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul,
Sister of Charity of Strasbourg,
Sisters of Saint Jeanne Antide Thouret.
The coonfederation of Mother Seaton.*

To all of you I extend my most cordial greeting.

On October 1, 1996 the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission: 1998 was convoked. The theme chosen for this assembly was the following: The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium.

I consulted a dictionary which gave the following definition of the word "family": a coming together, joining of persons or things united by common characteristics or conditions. Applying this definition to our situation, we can say that the Vincentian Family is composed of persons and institutions who have come together and who are united by a common and basic characteristic: the following of Jesus Christ, servant and evangelizer of the poor, in the manner and the way of St. Vincent de Paul.

This definition of the Vincentian Family brings us to our first conclusion: in a family of this nature two complimentary factors come into play: (1) the unity of origin and projects, and (2) the diversity of persons and institutions.

In a family, men and women, parents and children, adults and young people, descendants in a direct or an indirect line live together. All of them generally claim common ancestors and at the same time follow and share identical or similar ideals. These elements find their unique expression in the Vincentian Family. All of

us, individuals and institutions, hold in common our origin and fundamental project, namely, that which was formulated and lived by Vincent de Paul.

In this family, people from distinct nations and cultures live and collaborate together. In the actual catalogue called the personnel directory of the Vincentian Family, we find the names of men and women; clerics, religious and lay; rich and poor; socially prominent individuals and people of humble origins, persons affiliated with the family for a long time and other who have only recently been incorporated into the family.

At the present time, the Vincentian Family is not confined to a particular country or a single continent. Rather its field of action embraces almost the whole world. The Vincentian Family, in step with the actual times, is also affected by the syndrome of globalization, in the fullest sense of the word.

Belonging to the Vincentian Family

In the broad sense of the word, "all those institutions that either directly or indirectly are inspired by St. Vincent de Paul at the moment of determining their objectives and defining their spirituality" are members of the Vincentian Family. (1) Viewed in this way the Vincentian Family today has many dimensions. Allow me to call to mind some of the numbers that in the last few years we have used frequently (I thank Sr. Betty Ann McNeil, D.C. for this data). The Vincentian Family is composed of 268 institutions, of which 239 are Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 21 are lay associations and 8 are Anglican Congregations. Of all these institutions only 165 still survive. (2)

In its restricted sense, the Vincentian Family is made up of "those congregations and associations that owe their foundation to St. Vincent or have expressly declared their desire to consider themselves as his spiritual sons and daughters. (3) It is in this sense that the Congregation of the Mission, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, the International Association of Charity, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Marian Youth or the Vincentian Marian Youth and the Miraculous Medal Association belong to the Vincentian Family. I am sure, however, that other names could be included in this category.

Signs of membership and bonds that unite the members and institutions of the Vincentian Family

Institutions belong in some way to the Vincentian Family if they take on one or more of the following traits:

- directly founded by St. Vincent de Paul;
- wholly adopted or in some way adapted the *Common Rules* of St. Vincent;

- honor St. Vincent as their patron or primary source of inspiration;
- assume particular aspects of the Vincentian charism;
- profess the same spirit as the Congregation of the Mission or the Company of the Daughters of Charity;
- participate at their very core in the vocation of St. Vincent de Paul, which consists in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor;
- assume as their own the spirit of simplicity, humility and charity;
- owe their foundation to the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity or lay members of the Vincentian Family;
- are affiliated with the Congregation of the Mission or the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

We do not have available reliable statistics about the number of persons who belong to the Vincentian Family in the broad sense.

Henceforth I will refer to the Vincentian Family in its restricted sense.

A brief description of the diverse branches of the Vincentian Family

The International Association of Charity (AIC)

This association was founded by St. Vincent in Châtillon on December 6, 1617. From its beginning this institution took on certain particular characteristics: it is a lay association, Church-based, concerned about the material and spiritual well-being of the poor; has a clear understanding of organized charity, is concerned about the ongoing formation of its members and maintains a close relationship with the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

The members of this Vincentian lay group number more than 250,000 and are interspersed among 42 national associations. During the 1960's this association made notable efforts in renewing its theological and spiritual bases as well as its practices. I limit myself to listing some facts: the AIC has adopted new statutes and rules and now calls itself the International Association of Charity. Its members participate in assemblies on different levels: local, national and international. An international president and an executive committee coordinate the activities of the AIC.

In 1971 the Superior General passed the direction of this Association from his hands to the hands of national directors and local spiritual directors. Though there has been a juridical change in the relationship between the AIC and the

Congregation of the Mission, the bonds between these two institutions have not been weakened; rather, in every aspect they have become more intentional and cordial.

In 1980 the Fundamental Document was approved: "We act together against poverty." This had many ramifications in the evolution of this lay group. The Assembly of Assisi (1990) and Guatemala (1994) delineated lines of action for this Vincentian lay association. The AIC is also a member of numerous international organizations. In summary, within the context of a scrupulous fidelity to the Vincentian spirit, this lay group has again reinterpreted its proper mode of being and acting in the Church, in civil society and in the Vincentian Family.

The Congregation of the Mission

The foundation of the Congregation of the Mission took place on April 17, 1625 with the signing of the contract between the DeGondi family and St. Vincent de Paul.

The latest available statistics list the Congregation with 4,128 members, of which 29 are bishops. There are 46 provinces and 4 vice-provinces.

Since Vatican II, the Congregation of the Mission has engaged itself in the task of renewal. Three criteria guided this process: a return to the sources, the directives of Vatican II, and the profound changes experienced in the world. The efforts sustaining this renewal were centered on successive local, provincial and general assemblies. This renewal is further evidenced in the writings of the Superiors General, the work of Vincentian study groups and the numerous publications of the Congregation. A result of this community undertaking has been the approval of new Constitutions and Statutes for the Congregation of the Mission.

Because of its honest and consistent collaboration with the other branches of the family, the Congregation of the Mission has always seen itself as a member of the Vincentian family.

The Company of the Daughters of Charity

The Daughters were founded in 1633. According to the data presented in their General Assembly of 1997, there are 26,120 Daughters and 385 seminary sisters.

The renewal that was undertaken since Vatican II is clearly reflected in their new Constitutions and Statutes as well as the documents that have come forth from their last three General Assemblies. Using the same criteria as the Congregation of the Mission, namely, a rereading of the sources, acceptance of the directives of Vatican II, and an analysis of the actual changes in the world, the Daughters of Charity have redefined their way of being and their projection as a community toward

the future. In their internal organization they have adopted new forms of participation and in their missionary activity they have broadened their horizons.

The Company of the Daughters of Charity has always viewed itself as an integral member of the Vincentian Family. The document "A New Fire" approved by the General Assembly of 1997, referring to the third commitment of the community says: "We commit ourselves to collaborate with the laity, especially with the Vincentian Family." On May 8, 1997, on the occasion of the opening of their assembly, the Superior General asked the Daughters of Charity "to remember that you are part of a great family that identifies itself with a common charism and shares a common heritage."

St. Vincent de Paul Society

On April 23, 1833, Frederick Ozanam, with a small group of lay persons founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society. At that time the first conference had seven members. Since then it has experienced continued growth. Today about 900,000 men and women, from 131 distinct countries and 48,200 local conferences belong to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

This society is a worldwide lay movement of universal breath, whose objectives involve them in social and charitable works. It fosters the personal holiness of its members through service to the poor. A decisive component of this society is its following a Vincentian spirituality. St. Vincent is its patron and this group has always looked to St. Vincent as it defined its spirit and objectives. From the beginning they accepted and cultivated the evangelical and Vincentian virtues: nearness to the poor, effective charity, discretion, meekness, humility of the group, zeal for the salvation of the neighbor.

Since Vatican II this society has undertaken a series of reforms. In 1975 a new rule was approved which made the society a truly "mixed group," with a greater participation of the members, open to non-Catholics, to non-Christians. In an attempt to put an end to misery and to discover the causes of poverty, this society has widened the circle of its social and charitable action.

Marian Youth or Vincentian Marian Youth

This lay group dates back to the time of the Virgin's appearance to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830. St. Catherine received a command to establish an association of Children of Mary. Pope Pius IX, on two separate occasions, June 20, 1847 and July 19, 1850, approved this association. The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission exercises the role of Director General. This group is a Vincentian Lay Association, closely related, from its foundation, to the Congregation of the Mission. Its purpose, unchanged from its establishment, has been the formation of poor children and adolescents. Such a purpose has always been an objective of all Vincentians.

Two hundred thousand lay persons are members of this association. Its renewal, which began immediately after the Second Vatican Council, has affected its name, its way of thinking and its objectives; the formulation of its spirituality and the formation of its members; its pastoral projection and its insertion in the dioceses, and its relationship with the other members of the Vincentian Family. Today this lay association defines itself as, Church-based, Marian, Vincentian and apostolic. More recently this group has emphasized its missionary and charitable dimensions.

On February 14, 1988, Fr. Richard McCullen approved new international statutes of this group. Since that time, and in some cases prior to the above date, the national statutes of different countries have been approved.

From August 12 - 24, 1997 representatives from 45 countries participated in an international meeting of the Association in Paris. This meeting demonstrated the international dimension that this group has achieved. In the near future new international statutes will be drawn up and probably an international secretariat created.

The Miraculous Medal Association

This association also dates back to the appearances of the miraculous Virgin in 1830. This association was approved by Pius IX on June 20, 1847 for the St. Lazare house and by Pius X on July 8, 1909 for the whole Church. The direction of this group was given to the Superior General. On September 8, 1990, the Holy See modified the old statutes. On February 11, 1998 the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life approved the current statutes.

According to the new statutes, the specific ends of this association are: devotion to the miraculous Virgin, sanctification of its members, and apostolic and charitable works.

This association forms part of the Vincentian Family because of its origin, its historical relationship with the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity and its charitable action made evident especially since Vatican II.

From December 15 - 20, 1997, at the invitation of the Superior General, six members of the Congregation of the Mission from different countries met in Rome to exchange impressions about the renewal and the updating of the Miraculous Medal Association. Among other things, there is the hope of establishing an international secretariat. It is difficult to put a number on the persons who belong to this lay Vincentian association. In any case we can affirm the fact that this group is experiencing obvious growth in many countries of the world.

Because of time and space, it is impossible to mention the other entities of the Vincentian Family represented in this General Assembly. That does not mean that they cannot count on the interest and support of all here present.

Capacity for renewal

Throughout its long history, the distinct groups of the Vincentian Family have experienced moments of growth and moments of regression (regression due to unfavorable circumstances). The periods of greatest growth for each of these groups took place immediately after their establishment and after the French Revolution. On the local level, the growth or regression of the different groups effected the evolution of the Vincentian Family. Repeatedly the Vincentian Family has demonstrated a great capacity to react and renew itself in light of the changing situation.

Today what is the situation of the Vincentian Family? The Council's renewal has affected the whole Church and the Vincentian Family has likewise been influenced. In a brief period of time the different groups that make up the Vincentian Family have modified their statutes, practices, and pastoral orientation. They have been able to overcome a certain paralysis that effected them and at times a distance that separated them from the real world. Now, the Vincentian Family has set out on a new road, taking on ambitious programs that orient us toward the future. In this way the Vincentian Family has given witness to a double fidelity: fidelity to the Vincentian vocation and fidelity to the unavoidable commitment of constant renewal in order to better serve the poor of our time. In a word, we, as a Vincentian Family, have placed ourselves at the door of the Third Millennium with a new focus. Thus, the Vincentian Family today lives in a time of hope.

Signs of Unity

Let me formulate some questions: "What is the situation of the Vincentian Family today?" "Are we taking significant steps to enrich the concept and the reality of the Vincentian Family?" In my opinion our response can only be affirmative. For a long time the distinct branches that make up the Vincentian Family have been in need of and have been asking for a more informed and a closer relationship with one another. They have sought a more palpable unity within the family.

The recent meetings of the leaders of the diverse groups have contributed greatly to the achievement of these ends. The first of these meetings took place in Rome on June 3, 1995. Representatives of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the International Association of Charity, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society participated. The second meeting also took place in Rome on February 2 and 3, 1996 with the participation of the same groups. A third meeting took place on January 17 and 18, 1997. On this occasion, besides the groups mentioned above, two representatives from the Vincentian Marian Youth participated. Finally on January 16 and 17, 1998 the groups gathered together in Paris, and this

time a representative of the Miraculous Medal Association and a representative of the religious of St. Vincent de Paul joined the group. The next meeting will take place in Rome on January 16 and 17, 1999.

These meetings have served a purpose of advancing and revitalizing our understanding of the Vincentian Family. These meetings contain within themselves a sign value that has served as a guide for other similar meetings of the family in so many different parts of the world.

Remember that on May 30, 1996, the Superior General, together with the leaders of the other three Vincentian entities, invited all the members of the Vincentian Family to gather together in prayer on September 27 of each year. The response has been most encouraging throughout the world. This initiative, in no small way, has helped strengthen the bonds that unite us and has made us feel closer to one another. In summary, at this moment, a little more than three decades after the close of Vatican II and near the end of the Second Millennium, the Vincentian Family has taken significant steps.

Allow me to point out another fact with regard to the Vincentian Family. In almost all the visits of the Superior General and the Assistants to the provinces of the Congregation, the different groupings of the Vincentian Family were called together. The response in each case has been most satisfying. I can assure you that I have personally shared in the joy and happiness of having met with so many members of the Vincentian Family.

The identity of each group and mutual collaboration among the different groups

The ideas, proposals and even the agreements reached at the above mentioned meetings orient us at this present moment when we celebrate a general assembly. From the beginning the diverse components of the family proposed that preserving the identity of each group, we seek the means by which we might collaborate more effectively in serving the poor. (4)

Throughout these sessions we have exchanged information about the charism, the historical evolution, recent statistics, the juridical status and the spirituality of each group. We evaluated the level of cooperation among the different groups, cooperation on the local as well as the international level, collaboration in concrete projects as well as diverse ministries, e.g., foreign missions and popular missions, initial and ongoing Vincentian formation, youth ministry and the formation of youth group advisors. It should also be pointed out that the different groups have invited other members of the Vincentian Family to participate in their general assemblies and other similar meetings. The members of the Vincentian Family have been asked to be asked to create other branches of the family in those places and areas where they do not currently exist. The publication of a biography of the leading figures of the Vincentian Family is being explored and finally the convocation of a

Vincentian Congress in the year 2000 is being discussed. The theme of said congress would be: the spirituality of the Vincentian Family.

As might be expected, the different meetings of the representatives of the Vincentian Family, focused their attention on some points that are on the mind of all the members of the Vincentian Family.

The Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family

The Congregation of the Mission has continually viewed itself as part of the Vincentian Family. This fact is affirmed throughout its history by the written testimonies and the many works of the Congregation.

Let me briefly cite some recent texts which ought to encourage the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission to build bridges between the Congregation and with the other components of the Vincentian Family.

We read in Article 17 of the Constitutions: "Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together." Statute 7, § 1 refers to the relations between the Congregation of the Mission and lay volunteers: "Lay associations founded by St. Vincent and those which are inspired by his spirit should be of special concern to our members, since they have the right to our presence and to our support." The General Assembly of 1992 approved a text which, though more general than the other texts cited above, nonetheless is most relevant to our present discussion: "We are conscious that we are not alone in our vocation, rather we belong to a large Vincentian Family made up of Daughters of Charity, diverse religious communities, and lay men and women imbued with the spirit of St. Vincent. The Congregation of the Mission sees itself as an active member of the Vincentian Family. (5)

The above cited texts give us a glimpse of a tradition begun by St. Vincent; a long tradition that has been maintained up to the present time which finds us at the threshold of the Third Millennium.

With Joy and Humility

As we all know, the Vincentian Family began its journey almost four centuries ago. At the end of the second millennium the "sleeping lion," (applying this expression to the Vincentian Family), emerges with a new face and with new vitality. In these Post-Conciliar years, and more especially during this last decade, our family has taken significant steps in seeking its own mode of being and acting. All of this fills us with happiness and allows us to confront the future with joy.

With joy, yes but also with humility and realism. With humility because some questions are pending, questions about the identification of each member with the Vincentian charism, questions about the spiritual renewal and formation of all the family members.

Let us ask ourselves: has ongoing formation, both spiritual and Vincentian, reached the local level of the Vincentian Family, reached the grass-roots level? As a Vincentian Family, what image do we project to the poor, to young people, to the episcopal conferences? Has each member of the Vincentian Family assumed interiorly his/her membership in the Vincentian Family? What is the level of understanding and collaboration between the diverse groups of the Vincentian Family? Have the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity supported wholeheartedly the Vincentian formation of the laity.

On October 5, 1996, the planning commission for the General Assembly of 1998 sent the Visitors and their councils a questionnaire which asked them to comment on the unity and collaboration between the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family in serving the poor. On the whole the responses allow us to be optimistic, but not overly so. There are still many roads to travel. As wise people of the gospel, we must realistically evaluate the present situation and from there project ourselves into the future with joy and humility.

This 39th General Assembly begins its deliberation on the theme of the Vincentian Family in the world and its mission in the next millennium. In the shared reflections of both groups, i.e., members of the General Assembly and invited participants, it should not surprise us to hear conversations about the "blessings" and the "curses" of the Vincentian Family, about its past and present history, about its present undertakings and its hopes for the future.

The Assembly can and ought to be an historical landmark for the Vincentian Family. For the first time in its long history, the theme chosen for a General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, refers to the Vincentian Family as such. It is important to remember that during these days, with the participation of so many invited members of the family, we have a wonderful opportunity to listen to one another, to know one another better, to mutually support and encourage one another and, yes, to promote the unity of all through the diversity of gifts: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord" (1 Cor 12:4-5). Enlightened by the Holy Spirit and doing our part during this Assembly, we will be able to work collaboratively and with hope as we face together the challenges of evangelizing the poor.

Recognized Charisms

Rooted in the charisms that have been recognized by the Church, we see that throughout history, large inter-ecclesial families have been formed, families that have a double component: lay and clerical. Such is the case of the Vincentian Family promoted by St. Vincent. This family today has become a fruitful tree of great

proportions. The charism given by the Holy Spirit to St. Vincent at a given time in history is today shared in some way by millions of people.

A recent intervention of the Church's magisterium makes reference to this fact and speaks of the effects that this has had on other parts of the Church. John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consecrata" has expressed it in the following way: "These new experiences of communion and cooperation should be encouraged for various reasons. They can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the institute" (55).

In the above text the Pope speaks with a dynamic understanding of the words: "new experiences of communion and collaboration." "New experiences of communion" speaks of a unity in the basics and an ever-increasing participation on the part of all the members in the matters that unite them. "New experiences of collaboration" refers to a common action, a bringing together of individual and community efforts, in order to achieve a common purpose: the evangelization and the service of the poor.

The Pope goes on to say that from these new experiences of communion and collaboration, great benefit is derived: moved by the examples of holiness the institute will be able to move beyond the boundaries of the individual group. In this way the Church is assured that these valuable gifts and charisms will be kept alive, assured that the gift that is shared by the Vincentian Family will be handed on to other generations.

Toward the Jubilee of 2000

The Church travels toward the Jubilee Year of 2000, toward the beginning of the Third Millennium. The year 1998, the second year of proximate preparation for the Jubilee is dedicated to the Holy Spirit. At the invitation of the Pope "the reflection of the faithful ought to be focused on the value of unity within the Church _ a unity which brings together all the distinct gifts and charisms of the Spirit."

As we reflect upon the different groups of the Vincentian Family and their ways of operating, let us hold in high esteem the unity in diversity of gifts, the varied responses to these gifts and the mutual collaboration which should take precedence over organizational pluralism.

This is the challenge that the Vincentian Family faces with as it begins this 39th General Assembly, namely, respect the unique character of each group; grow in our understanding of what it means "to belong" to the Vincentian Family; discover the bonds that unite us and finally channel our energies in the task of evangelizing the poor.

Before concluding I would like to refer to the fact that the litany of saints of the Vincentian Family has received some additions during recent years. On June 2, 1996 Pope John Paul II, in St. Peter's Square declared John Gabriel Perboyre a saint. So too on May 4, 1997 the Pope included the Vincentian confrere Ceferino Jimenez Malla in the catalogue of the blessed. Both died as martyrs. Finally on August 22, 1997, Frederick Ozanam was declared blessed. We have great reason to give thanks to God for the fact that we, the Vincentian Family, have such eminent brothers and sisters renowned for their commitment and holiness.

As Vincent once exhorted the Daughters of Charity, so he continues today to encourage us with these words: "Love and respect as brothers and sisters those whom the Lord has united and joined together with his love" (XIII, 562).

1. J. M. Román, "La Familia Vicenciana: una renovación incesante" in *Vincentiana*, July-October, 1995, pp. 224-246.
2. Betty Ann McNeil, *Monograph I, The Vincentian Family Tree*, Vincentian Studies Institute, Chicago, 1996
3. Román, op. cit., p. 224
4. R. Maloney, circular letter, April 20, 1994
5. Letter to the confreres, Final Document of the General Assembly 1992.

Translated by Charles T. Plock, C.M.

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY AS MISSIONARY

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General*

There is something fascinating about the dawn of a new millennium. We stand at the threshold of a new era in history, a great jubilee, a time for rejoicing.

It may be helpful for us to note today, my brothers and sisters, that one of the principal scriptural texts in our own Vincentian tradition is precisely a jubilee text. We find it in the prophet Isaiah (61:2). Jesus used it at the beginning of his public ministry (Lk 4:18-19). And St. Vincent made its first words the motto of the Congregation of the Mission. We all know the text by heart:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;
therefore he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
Recovery of sight to the blind
and release to prisoners,
To announce a year of favor from the Lord.

Notice that Jesus' mission, and ours too, is to announce the jubilee, "a year of favor from the Lord."

It is easy to lose sight of the original meaning of the "year of favor." In fact, the people of Israel did lose sight of it, and rarely, if ever, did they put it into practice. But the jubilee was meant to be a time of rejoicing for the poor. It was intended, as *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* points out, to restore equality among all the children of Israel, offering a fresh start to families that had lost their property and even their personal freedom.¹ In that light *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* calls the whole Church today, at the dawn of the jubilee of jubilees, to lay greater emphasis on the preferential option for the poor and the outcast.²

So, I suggest to you today that our mission at the dawn of the third millennium is to make not just the year 2000, but the entire millennium a real jubilee, a time "to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and release to prisoners." The jubilee for Jesus and for St. Vincent was not just a single year. It was the celebration of the abiding, liberating presence of God's kingdom among us. As missionaries we are called to be permanent signs of the

¹ *TMA*, 13.

² *TMA*, 51.

jubilee. Our life and our mission are to proclaim that Jesus is alive, that he is present, and that he breaks the bonds that hold us captive.

I. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MISSION OF OUR VINCENTIAN FAMILY

Today I offer you four characteristics, though I am very conscious that there are many others. I choose these four not only because they are fundamental historically, but also because they seem to me particularly urgent at the dawn of the third millennium.

1. *Our mission is global.*

It is only in the 20th century, as a great modern theologian often pointed out, that Catholicism has truly become a "world-Church."³ Living here in Rome I experience this dramatically, since we have rapid communication with numerous countries throughout the world. I see strikingly different realities and varied "faces" in our worldwide family; e.g., the rapid growth of our family especially in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe; the rise of new ministries and the increased role of the laity on all the continents; the steady increase of basic ecclesial communities. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is now in more than 130 countries; the AIC in 49; the Daughters of Charity in 85; the Congregation of the Mission in 81; the Vincentian Marian Youth in about 50. All of our branches have new missions. Having gone in recent years to remote places like Tanzania, Angola, the Solomon Islands, Albania, the Altiplano of Bolivia, Mozambique, Pakistan, China, Kharkiv in the Ukraine, Siberia, Senegal, Namibia, Belize, and Rwanda _ just to name a few _ we are becoming even more international as a family.

Whereas in the period immediately after Vatican II there was significant emphasis on national identity, today there is a revitalized awareness of our family's global missionary call. This is very much the way St. Vincent envisioned the mission. In an era when travel was difficult and most people died within a few miles of their birthplace, he sent missionaries and Daughters of Charity to places like Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. He himself in his old age longed to set out for the Indies.⁴ He told the missionary priests, brothers, and sisters to establish "the Charities" wherever they went.

2. *It demands mobility.*

Hardly anything could be clearer in the New Testament. Jesus comes from the Father and returns to the Father,⁵ the source of all mission. He engages in an itinerant

³ Karl Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 90-102; cf. also "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 103-14.

⁴ SV XI, 402.

⁵ Jn 16:28; cf. Jn 1:1, Jn 14:28.

ministry. He gives his followers a mandate: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."⁶ Mission is not just one of Jesus' activities; it is part of his very being.

Today we are also very conscious that mission is not merely an activity of the Church but is part of her essence, so we stress the involvement of every Christian in the Church's mission.⁷ All of us are missionaries, women and men, young and old, lay or religious. We are missionaries in our homes, in our parishes, in our neighborhoods, and we share in the responsibility for the Church's worldwide mission too, since Jesus asks us to keep our eyes always open to share God's gifts with those who are in need.

St. Vincent is eloquent on the need for missionary mobility: "Let us imagine that He says to us: 'Go forth, missionaries, go forth. What, are you still here? Look at the poor souls who are awaiting you, whose salvation perhaps depends upon your preaching and catechesis!'"⁸ He holds up before our eyes the great missionaries who went to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada "to complete the work which Jesus Christ began on earth and never abandoned from the moment he was called."⁹

But if we are to be truly mobile, then at times we must be willing to leave well-established works that others can now take care of in order to go to the most needy and the most abandoned. Recently, for example, the Province of Colombia left a seminary in Cochabamba where the local clergy could now staff it in order to staff a seminary in Arauca that did not yet have trained formators and to cooperate in priestly formation in Rwanda. Throughout our family in recent years I am happy to say that there has been a serious reevaluation of apostolic works in order to free our personnel to go to the poorest of the poor.

3. *Our mission is evangelization and service.*

The core of our mission is evangelization, which, in the Catholic tradition, has always been a broad, inclusive concept.¹⁰ As Paul VI pointed out: "Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others."¹¹ In other words, service is an integral part of evangelization. It is the good news in action.

⁶ Mk 16:15.

⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 71-74.

⁸ SV XI, 134.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. Avery Dulles, "Seven Essentials of Evangelization," in *Origins* 25 (# 23; November 23, 1995) 397-400.

¹¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24.

St. Vincent told us that we must first do and then teach. Evangelization, for him, involves not just preaching but action too. Again and again, therefore, he spoke of evangelization by "word and work." He calls both the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity to serve the poor "spiritually and corporally." When speaking to the members of the Congregation, he warned us:¹²

If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the good news to the poor but not to comfort them, to supply their spiritual but not their temporal wants, I reply that we ought to assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works.

First, do. Then, teach. That is St. Vincent's rule for "effective" evangelization. In other words, St. Vincent sees human promotion and preaching as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process.

In light of St. Vincent's teaching, our evangelization will be fully alive when we proclaim the good news:

- a. through the language of works:¹³ performing the works of justice and mercy which are a sign that the kingdom of God is really alive among us: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, helping to find the causes of their hunger and thirst and the ways of alleviating it; staffing schools, hospitals, centers for the handicapped; offering programs for new mothers and their children; visiting the sick in their homes.
 - b. through the language of words: announcing with deep conviction the Lord's presence, his love, his offer of forgiveness to all; proclaiming the dignity of persons, their human rights, denouncing injustice.
 - c. through the language of relationships: being *with* the poor, working *with* them, sharing in some of their privations, forming with them a community that shows the Lord's love for all.
4. *Our mission involves organizing and forming others in the service of the poor.*

St. Vincent was adamant about this. Few saints are as concrete as Vincent de Paul. He realized that effective evangelization and service of the poor would require organization. To accomplish this end, Vincent created numerous lay groups ("The Charities") and founded two communities.

He brought the same organizational skills to the formation of the clergy. He felt that the poor would be served well only if there were good priests to minister to

¹² SV XII, 87.

¹³ Cf. SV II, 4.

them, and, to that end, he organized retreats for ordinands and priests, the Tuesday Conferences, and founded 20 seminaries.

Nor he did not stop there. He marshalled all of the resources he could find in the service of the poor: young and old, men and women, clergy and lay, the rich and the poor themselves. The seeds of his organizational gifts have continued to spread even to this day through the countless lay members of AIC, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Miraculous Medal Association, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups, and the more than 260 institutes founded in St. Vincent's spirit.

II. FOUR "GIVENS" AT THE DAWN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

There are some striking realities that are very important for our family now as the year 2000 approaches. I will not attempt to prove them, since I think you all experience them in your own life and work. I merely mention them here very briefly as a preface to the final part of this talk.

1. The gap between the poor and the rich is growing wider. As Pope John Paul II pointed out in Brazil (1980), Canada (1984), and Cuba (1998), the rich are often richer precisely at the expense of the poor.
2. Poverty has new, and previously unknown, forms. Never has the world known so many refugees. Traffic in arms keeps local wars alive. The international debt creates staggering burdens in poor nations. New diseases like AIDS or new forms of old diseases, like malaria, are of epidemic proportions.
3. We are a huge family that can be a powerful force in the service of the poor – an "army," so to speak, with more than two million members.
4. Rapid, almost instantaneous, communication among us is possible, with means like fax, e-mail and the Internet.

III. SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

What are the principal missionary challenges that face our Vincentian Family in the third millennium? Let me suggest to you a few today. All of you have surely meditated on this same theme and will have other suggestions of your own to add.

1. *The first, and foundational, challenge is that we develop a deeply missionary spirituality.*

Some of you have heard me say this over and over again. It is my deepest conviction. Whatever we do, whatever we say, wherever we go, however we serve, we must be proclaiming in word and work that Jesus is alive and that he presences God's love among us. That is the good news.

Of course, there are different tones to spirituality. All Christian spirituality flows out of the person of Jesus. But if a Carthusian focuses on Jesus' prayer, if an Anchorite focuses on his solitude, if a Franciscan focuses on his poverty, we in the Vincentian Family focus on his practical, effective love lived out in simplicity and humility.

Let me mention briefly five keystones in the missionary spirituality of our family.

- a. Our holiness, our being grasped by God, is intrinsically bound up with our mission to the poor; we pledge to follow Christ as evangelizer and servant of the poor.
- b. Our growth in God's life also flows from the bonds of deep charity forged with one another and with the poor; we serve not just as individuals, but in solidarity with others.
- c. Our prayer, a crucial element in all spirituality, has its own particular dynamic, flowing from and leading to action, as St. Vincent often reminded us. Divorced from action prayer can turn escapist and create illusions of holiness. Divorced from prayer, service can become shallow, addictive, driven.
- d. Our freedom to go wherever the Lord calls us will demand simplicity of life, humility in listening, detachment from whatever holds us back.
- e. Our spirituality is deeply incarnational, rooted in the enfleshed humanity of Jesus. We contemplate the poor in Christ and Christ in the poor.

Today I encourage you who are here and the entire Vincentian Family throughout the world to dig ever deeper roots in this missionary spirituality.

Some challenges:

- 1.) I urge our family, within the next year, to produce a basic book describing the foundation stones and the concrete means for living out a Vincentian spirituality for the laity.
- 2.) I encourage all our groups, especially our lay groups, to continue to develop a well-organized, integral formation program, a real catechesis extending over several years, that will deepen our members in the spirit of St. Vincent.
- 3.) I ask that the formation programs of the priests, brothers, and sisters in our Vincentian Family be reshaped to put greater emphasis on our family and on solidarity in living a profoundly apostolic spirituality.

4.) I urge that in our cooperative family apostolic projects we not only work together but that we pray together too.

2. *The second greatest challenge that I foresee is the formation of our formators.*

I have lived in Rome now for many years, perhaps too many. From that experience I say this to you. There is no call that I hear more frequently or more clearly than the call for formators. I hear it from the provincials of the Congregation of the Mission. I hear it from Daughters of Charity all over the world and especially from the Mother General and her council. I hear it from the AIC. I hear it from the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. I hear it from the Vincentian Marian Youth groups. I have had countless discussions in the last six months about the need for good formation and good formators. Our gift to the poor as missionaries will depend largely on the quality of our formation.

Some challenges:

1.) Can we organize more effective programs, both national and international, for the formation of formators among the Vincentians, the Daughters of Charity, and the other groups represented here? I urge those responsible in every country, and here in the General Council too, to ask the question: how can we better form our formators? We discussed a proposition in this regard recently in the General Council.

2.) I urge that, within the next year, we establish a well-functioning network on the Internet, so that we can distribute formative information and articles once a week or once a month in various languages.

3.) I ask our young members to learn languages so that they will have a genuine missionary flexibility and the capacity to be formators in lands other than their homeland.

4.) I encourage the provincials to train at least some among us become experts in the social teaching of the Church, so that that teaching becomes an integral part of our Vincentian formation.

5.) I ask that, through workshops, we form good mentors who can accompany our candidates in rich apostolic experiences among the poor.

3. *Of course, in a family with a tradition as concrete and practical as ours, one of the great challenges for the third millennium must be collaborative projects.*

These are already taking place in many, even most, of your countries. I encourage you to join forces all the more in the future.

The third millennium will be the millennium of solidarity, of networking. It will also be the millennium of the laity, as Pope John Paul II has already proclaimed on numerous occasions.

Our service of the poor will be all the more effective to the extent that we can channel our energies, which are huge, into collaborative projects. I use the word *collaborate* purposely. Each of us here has a missionary vocation, the lay women, the lay men, the sisters, the priests, the brothers _ each of us. In our family there must be no rivalries, there must be no clerical domination. We must be simple, humble servants of the poor. That is why humility is so important in our Vincentian tradition. "It is the foundation of all evangelical perfection," St. Vincent said. "It is the core of the spiritual life."¹⁴ Humility is the great collaborative virtue. It never seeks to dominate. The humble person looks for God's gifts wherever they lie, receives those gifts, as a steward, and hands them on to the poor.

Recently the heads of some of the principal branches of the Vincentian Family published six collaborative projects, from different contents, as examples to stimulate other similar projects.

Some challenges:

- 1.) Can there be similar collaborative projects in every one of our countries by this time next year? This goal is realizable within a year, I am confident.
 - 2.) Can we envision foreign missions where the missionaries are not just priests or brothers or sisters, but also single and married men and women from all the branches of our family?
 - 3.) Can we develop programs in which the poor work side by side with us, in which they share in our formation, and in our prayer, and so become a living part of our Vincentian Family?
 - 4.) Can we develop a Vincentian justice and peace network within all of our countries, and internationally too, so that we can mobilize our energies, on specific issues, in action on behalf of social justice?
4. *A fourth challenge for our family today is to develop, as a basis for its missionary effectiveness, some clear simple tools for praying as members of the Vincentian Family.*

St. Vincent was very practical about prayer. He gave us some methods for meditating, like the little method that he applied to both preaching and praying. He

¹⁴ *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, II, 7.

offered suggestions about the use of images, about the use of words, about the use of the mind, and the heart, and the will.

Some challenges:

- 1.) Does everyone in the family know about these Vincentian ways of praying, from the 90-year old sister in China to the 15-year old Vincentian Marian Youth group member in Mexico? I suspect not. Can we more effectively teach others to pray as St. Vincent did?
 - 2.) Can we teach one another ways of integrating prayer and apostolic life?
 - 3.) Can we develop some simple daily prayer forms, appropriate to different times of the day or different occasions, that we can offer, especially to young people and to the poor?
5. *A fifth challenge, in our missionary efforts, is to reach out especially to the young in the third millennium.*

I said this recently somewhere and afterwards received a strong letter from a sister saying that we should reach out to the old too! Of course, that is true. The elderly very much deserve our love and attention, but I encourage you to reach out to the young especially.

Is there anything that Pope John Paul II has emphasized more often, both in word and in action? The young *are* the third millennium. It belongs to them. It certainly does not belong to me. I doubt that I will survive beyond its second decade! And many of you can probably say the same.

So I say to you today, St. Vincent left a wonderful gift within the Church. He has placed it, to a large extent, in your hands and in mine. Pass it on to the young. Tell them how St. Vincent, inspired by Jesus' vision, saw the world upside-down. Tell them that the poor are the kings and the queens and the presidents in the Kingdom of God and that we are their servants. Hand on to them a rich gospel spirituality, rooted in the humanity of Jesus. Help them to share in Jesus' love for God as his Father, his trust in God's providence. Accompany them in listening to God's word as did Mary the mother of Jesus and in putting it into practice as she did. Demonstrate for them, especially by your lives, the importance of the truth. Illustrate for them by your example a way of seeing the world with the eyes of the humble so that everything is gift _ everything _ and God is continually reaching into our lives to make us new and whole. Do all this not just as a means of vocational promotion, but as a way of sharing the wonderful gift God has given us.

Our charism is very important within the Church. Can this Assembly challenge the members of our family, wherever they might be in the world, to create youth groups and give them a rich formation?

One of the frequent painful laments that I hear, especially from superiors, is how much time they must spend in *maintenance* and how little they can give to *mission*. Of course, maintenance is necessary. We all recognize that. But I encourage you to find the ways of focusing more and more of our family energy on mission. Jesus asks us to be free, detached, so that we can give of our lives wholly to his service.

As I conclude these reflections, I ask you to picture us standing with Jesus at the end of Mark's gospel. His ministry is over. He now entrusts us with the mission of proclaiming and presencing God's healing, forgiving, nourishing, sacrificial love for others. Jesus turns to us today, as he turned to his followers at the end of Mark's gospel, and he says: "Go. Go into the whole world and preach the good news to every creature." That is our mission. Let us go, my brothers and sisters, members of the Vincentian Family, and proclaim the jubilee news that God is here to set his people free.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General
General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission
July 13, 1998

The International Association of Charity

*by Patricia Palacios de Nava
International President AIC*

You are all acquainted with the history of the AIC and the circumstances of its foundation. Vincent de Paul possessed great intuition when, by a global strategy, he created a network of Vincentians to serve the poor. So we need not dwell on this point, but just limit ourselves to presenting a few characteristics which are essential to our objectives today.

By analysing our charism, our identity and our mission, with a vision of a just, stable and pleasant future we hope to achieve, arise what we consider to be the policies of our association. These policies could be classified a pedagogy, but are actually something deeper, with solid spiritual roots.

1. Bringing up to date the mission of the Charities

Since its inception, the AIC has based its policies on two constant elements: first, a commitment of fidelity to our mission and the project of our founder; and, second, commitment to ongoing renewal in order to respond to the exigencies of the times.

As we have evolved, we have progressed from assistance to development and to auto-development, conscious that our role in this process is not to make decisions for the poor in those affairs that concern their own lives, but to stimulate and support their search for autonomy, until they become active subjects of their human and social development.

In committing ourselves to the auto-development of the poor, we, the AIC volunteers, have found valuable allies among the women in the communities, who have, in general, shown themselves to be sensitive to family and social questions. Solidarity between volunteers and subjects is evident in active participation in community projects. Both groups plan and execute in agreement and, furthermore, many of the women have become AIC volunteers themselves, committed to the auto-development of their communities.

2. Policy of cultural transformation

During the past few years, we have seriously attempted to effect a change of mentality which should lead to a cultural transformation by living our charism and the Gospel.

A cultural transformation requires radical changes of mentality in order to overcome fears, selfishness and disdain for the weak and the different. It calls for a new mind-set, more open and more respectful of others, greater solidarity, capable of recognising and defending the rights of every person to be the author and guide of his/her own life. This goal can be achieved through sensitising society, by diffusion of new ideas through word and documents, by intelligent and ethical use of the mass media, by pressure brought to bear on existing structures and, especially, by a coherent, efficacious testimony of life.

For a Christian, the best and most efficacious form of changing a culture is the proclamation and witness of the spirit of the Gospel. To evangelise a culture is to bring about the internal growth of the values announced in the Gospel; that is, of justice, solidarity, love and respect and, thus, permeate the mentality of a society.

3. Policy of extending and creating new AIC groups; Missionary pedagogy

To achieve this extension, intimately related to zeal, one of the five Vincentian virtues, we have relied on the invaluable assistance of the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, whose support has been a determining factor in our development. Right now, we are desirous, in a special way, of spreading to the countries of Europe and the Orient, and also to certain countries, like Cuba, which have remained outside our evangelising efforts. Thanks to the encouragement and collaboration of the priests and sisters, the AIC has been able to offer a testimony of love by means of lay women who have made a Vincentian commitment.

4. Policy of Liberating Formation

Another undertaking of ours, one which is a constant worry to us, is formation, which must be Vincentian, technical and specific, oriented towards the defence of human rights, that is to say, liberating. This implies liberation from slavery to customs and indifference, seriously analysing reality so as to determine the causes of injustice and acting optimistically to change our mentality and methods, and accepting new concepts with enthusiasm and hope.

Based on the aforesaid, AIC formation aims to create a spirit of discernment in each volunteer so that she may be able to evaluate reality and her own actions in an objective, critical spirit without prejudice. In this method of formation, the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity have a key and, often, transforming role.

5. Policy of Creation of Networks

The AIC is a network of projects against poverty which interact first of all with their network of origin, the great worldwide Vincentian Family. The network has intensified thanks to the interest and the dedication of Fr. Robert Maloney and of those responsible for the different branches and joint plans of action. This network, which is of great interest to us, goes back in its origins to the foresight of St. Vincent de Paul, who established the first foundations to work together harmoniously. In this most recent period, many of the efforts of the AIC, both international and local, have attempted to further this collaboration, considering it to be an important alternative for bettering the quality of life of the excluded and marginalised, and for making God's plan more effective.

6. Policy of Representation

We also form a network of interchange, diffusion and information. One of our objectives has been to bring our works and concerns to the attention of international organisations, so as to use them as sounding-boards and so bring pressure on them to come to the defence of the poor and thus fulfil our role in international affairs. To this end, we now have representatives in several organisations and a consultative voice in UNESCO, the ECOSOC and the European Parliament. AIC volunteer groups, both in their own localities and internationally, exert pressure on people responsible for making political decisions. Furthermore, the AIC takes steps to stimulate the conscience-raising of its members, that they may realise the importance of taking part in public life and in the struggle against the causes of poverty. We also disseminate information on opportunities to participate in big international events, like the preparations for the World Summit in Copenhagen, the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty and the projects of UNESCO.

7. Policy of Ecclesial Insertion

Finally, we must mention the AIC's efforts in relation to the Church's guidelines, which have indicated for us, since the seventeenth century, the standards which should orient our activities. We are inserted in the 1999 preparatory document; "International Year of Charity and the Coming Third Millennium." We have been working on this for several years and are making it a principal axis for our coming Assembly of Delegates. The title of this Assembly, taking place in November, is:

**"AIC 1998: Confronting the Third Millennium
Challenge _ Commitment _ Hope"**

The AIC is alive, in constant motion, in a continual process of adaption. Its development goes hand in hand with integral progress, that is to say, with advances relating to its sphere of influence as well as to its projects and plans of

constructive action, always Vincentian and evangelical, adapted to the rapid pace of the times at the dawn of the third millennium.

***Elections of the Superior General
and the General Council***

Fr. Robert P. Maloney (USA, East) reelected Superior General

Fr. J. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza (Saragossa), reelected Vicar General

Fr. José Antonio Ubillús (Peru), elected Assistant General

Fr. Victor Bieler (Indonesia), reelected Assistant General

Fr. Józef Kapu_ciak (Poland), elected Assistant General

Past Decrees Confirmed by the 1998 General Assembly

Decretum 1. Conventus Generalis declarat Constitutiones, Statuta et Decreta praesentia esse totum ius proprium Congregationis nunc vicens.

Si qua lacuna de facto detegatur, provideri potest ad normam iuris universalis vel, si casus ferat, proprii praecedentis.

Decretum 2. Continuatur fundus pecuniae pro missionibus ad Gentes et pro Provinciis pauperioribus, et Superior Generalis iudicio ipsius incrementum relinquitur.

Decretum 3. Limites pro expensis extraordinariis a Superiore Generali faciendis:

a) Superior Generalis potest facere, ipse solus, expensas extraordinarias usque ad U. S. \$ 25,000.

b) Superior Generalis potest facere expensas extraordinarias usque ad U. S. \$ 150,000, udito suo Consilio.

c) Superior Generalis potest facere expensas extraordinarias usque ad U. S. \$ 1,500,000, de consensu sui Consilii.

d) Superior Generalis potest facere expensas extraordinarias supra U. S. \$ 1,500,000, de consensu unanimi sui Consilii.

Decretum 4. Curandum erit ut Fratrum repraesentatio in Conventu Generali habeatur. Superiori Generali cum suo Consilio relinquitur invenire aptiorem solutionem ad eandem repraesentationem assequendam et ad alios casus solvandos in quibus legitima electio impossibilis evadat et tamen repraesentatio in Conventu conveniens sit”.

* * * * *

1. *The General Assembly declares that the present Constitutions, Statutes, and Decrees constitute the total proper law of the Congregation now in effect. If, as a matter of fact, any lacuna is discovered, provision can be made in accord with the norm of universal law, or, if the situation warrants, of our own previous law.*

2. *The monetary fund for the foreign missions and poorer provinces should be continued. The growth of this fund is left to the judgment of the Superior General.*

3. *The limits for extraordinary expenses that can be contracted by the Superior General:*

a) On his own authority the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US \$25,000.

b) Having heard his council the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US \$150,000.

c) With the consent of his council the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US \$1,500,000.

d) With the unanimous consent of his council the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses over US \$1,500,000.[Q0]

4. *Care must be taken that the brothers have representation in the General Assembly. It is left to the Superior General with his council to find a better solution for achieving this representation and for solving other cases in which representation in the Assembly is important but a legitimate election becomes impossible.*

July 31, 1998

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission throughout the world

My very dear Confreres

May the grace

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representatives of our extended family. The evaluations were most positive. I recognize
that it is difficult to communicate the enthusiasm generated at such a time to those who



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*With the Vincentian Family
we face the challenges of the Mission
at the threshold of the new Millennium*

were not present. But I am confident that if all of us work with the members of our family at implementing the commitments formulated in this document, we will experience the joy and the energy of living in a family whose goal is to be beside the poor in their distress.

I have asked the Visitors to present this document to the members of each province in workshops, perhaps using the video that is being prepared in various languages. I have requested too that it be discussed at a meeting of all of the superiors of the province, at the provincial council, and at the next provincial assembly. I urge each local community to concretize the document as it formulates its local community plan. The world is filled with undigested documents. I encourage you to bite into this one, chew it, and digest it well. I hope that it can then be a source of energy for deepening our Vincentian spirituality side by side with the members of our family, and for formulating with them concrete, practical projects that will be of genuine service to the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

FINAL DOCUMENT

39th General Assembly

Congregation of the Mission

Rome

July 6 - 31, 1998

With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor. (Lk 4:18) In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus unrolled the scroll and proclaimed the words of the prophet Isaiah referring to the “year of grace” and to the establishment of the reign of God.¹ Then he added: *Today, this passage of scripture is fulfilled in your hearing* (v. 21) On the threshold of the new millennium, the Congregation of the Mission, together with the Vincentian Family², wishes to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy by making it a reality today, for it is our motto.

The deliberations of the General Assembly of 1992, which inspired our convictions and commitments over these last six years³, committed the entire Congregation to interprovincial collaboration. They also broadened our horizon toward greater collaboration with the laity and with all those who are committed to proclaiming Jesus Christ and struggling against poverty.⁴ Following the same pastoral path, in this time of transition from the second to the third millennium,⁵ the General Assembly of 1998 promoted, right from its preparation in the local communities and provinces, meetings for interchange and prayer together with members of the Vincentian Family. In this General Assembly, we engaged, for the first time, in a week of discussion, 9-14 July, with 33 leaders and members of various groups of the Vincentian Family. We, the members of the assembly, learned much from them, and recognize how much we need to collaborate in the service of the poor.

¹ Cf. Is 61:1-2; also Is 43:19-20; 65:17-18; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 13 and 51.

² The expression “Vincentian Family,” which appears repeatedly in this document, should not be understood in a juridical-canonical sense, but as a pastoral term. By the expression “Vincentian Family”, we refer to the networking of congregations, organizations, movements, groups, and persons, which, directly or indirectly, extend through time the Vincentian charism. The branches of this network were either founded directly by Saint Vincent de Paul or regard him as their source of inspiration and dedication to the service of the poor. The Congregation of the Mission considers itself as part of this family.

³ The General Assembly of 1992 adopted as its motto the words of Saint Paul: “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). Cf. *New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities*, the working document of that assembly, as well as the letter to the confreres, in *Vincentiana* (1992): 382-88.

⁴ *Vincentiana*, (1991): 507, 511. Cf. *Const.*, 1,3; *Statutes* 7. “For us members of the Congregation of the Mission, the complexity of situations and the challenge of poverty, are they not a call... to collaborate more with the laity, with the Vincentian lay groups, and other Congregations and organisms, and all who accept this challenge? ... How can we better intensify and improve this collaboration?”

⁵ The 39th General Assembly was convoked by the superior general with the theme: “The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium” (Convocation Letter, October 1, 1996). Cf. *Vincentiana* (1996): 433-36; (1997): 65-66.

We now want to share with every member of the Congregation of the Mission, its local communities and provinces, the results of our work: the **challenges** facing the Vincentian mission, our **convictions** concerning our life and mission, as well as a series of **commitments** that will help us respond to the challenges of the coming years.

I. CHALLENGES

Listening, as did Jesus, sent by the Father to evangelize the poor, we recognize as signs of the times⁶ the following four sets of challenges:

1. The circle of **poverty** is expanding ever more. The number of the poor is increasing continuously, under new forms, with new faces (the unemployed, immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, etc.). The gap between poor and rich nations is increasing. Wars and corruption drain national resources. Daily we see more clearly that poverty is caused by unjust structures, even religious ones. These should be investigated and transformed to promote justice and peace. Because of abrupt socio-economic changes, neoconservative economic policies, economic inequality among different continents (giving rise to new political crises, external debts, etc.), changing ideologies and a certain culture of death⁷, the problems become more and more complex, at the very time when new means of mass media bring us closer to one another. At the same time, in our society, a culture of solidarity⁸ is developing, involving persons who do not share our Christian faith. The poor are making progress in organizing themselves to be agents of their own liberation. Likewise, they are learning to help each other even in their poverty.

2. God seems to be absent from some **cultural horizons**. The moral and spiritual richness of many peoples “runs the risk of being torn apart under the impact of multiple trends, among which secularization and the multiplication of sects are prominent.”⁹ At the same time, there are visible signs that encourage us. Among some of our contemporaries, there is a thirst for an interior life, for contemplation and for conversion. Sensitivity is increasing concerning human rights, respect for life, and care for the environment. Women are grasping their dignity and claiming their place of equality in society and in the Church. Many members of the Vincentian Family have committed themselves to these causes.

⁶ *Const.*, 2.

⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 12.

⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 12.

⁹ *Christifideles Laici*, 34.

3. At the threshold of the new millennium, the Church **continues its renewal**. In older Christian communities, as well as in those recently coming of age, there is a challenge for **new evangelization**¹⁰, an explicit proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ as the Savior and Fullness of Life¹¹, and a demand for effective participation in ministry by the laity using their various charisms. There is need for new solidarity with the oppressed, as well as a renewed missionary spirituality, a new relationship between the Church and the world, and with Christian and non-Christian religions. Also needed are the inculturation of the Gospel amid a multiplicity of cultures and the dedication of our best efforts to the evangelization of youth. The Church, despite its weaknesses and inconsistencies, is conscious of being a sign of communion and fraternity, and is growing as “a community of communities” for the service of the Reign of God. In the Christian community, the laity are progressively taking responsibility and asking for new types of formation.

4. In our **missionary vocation**, other challenges present themselves forcefully:

- ☐ to remain in a continual state of renewal in our works and apostolates;¹²
- ☐ to delve deeper into the sources that inspired our charism;
- ☐ to develop, along with the laity, our Vincentian, missionary spirituality;
- ☐ to increase our collaboration with the Vincentian Family in the areas of formation, active and participative evangelization, and concrete responses to poverty;
- ☐ to become more sensitive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit active in the persons of the poor, in our own brothers and sisters among the laity, and in the members of other religions;
- ☐ to cope with a horizon shift in the Congregation of the Mission, which is growing precisely in those places where the needs are the greatest;
- ☐ to prepare our formators adequately;
- ☐ to increase our interprovincial collaboration;
- ☐ to make a significant commitment to the missions *ad gentes*;¹³
- ☐ to revitalize our witness and commitment in a renewed effort toward conversion.¹⁴

II. CONVICTIONS

¹⁰ Cf. *Vincentiana* (1996), 221, where the references to the recent Magisterium of John Paul II on these proposals can be found. They can also be found in: R. P. Maloney, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul*. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995) 146-47.

¹¹ Col 1:19; Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

¹² Cf. *Statutes*, 1.

¹³ *Const.*, 16; *Statutes*, 4, 5, 6.

¹⁴ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 76; *Const.*, 2, 11-12.

In view of these challenges, which take different shapes in different parts of the world, we want to express the following convictions.

1. At the threshold of the new millennium, we are convinced of our responsibility as missionaries in the service of the reign of God.

As the people of God in the service of the reign of God,¹⁵ in following Jesus Christ the evangelizer of the poor, we know that we have been sent to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to work in the service of the reign of God. *“What happiness, my brothers! ... to make God known to the poor, announcing Jesus Christ to them, telling them that the Reign of Heaven is at hand, and that this reign is for the poor.”*¹⁶

Together with the other members of the Vincentian Family, we experience the call to actualize the forms of the mission for our own times, when the relationship between evangelization and human promotion is especially important.¹⁷

2. We are convinced of the prophetic power¹⁸ and the dynamic vitality of the Vincentian charism.

Attentive to life events, Saint Vincent de Paul, beginning at Folleville and Châtillon (1617), discovered and experienced the presence of Jesus Christ, the evangelizer and servant of the poor, and he responded in prophetic and creative ways to the cries of the marginalized of his time. Today, in the light of this charism, we are called to evaluate our apostolic projects and our community structures, and to seek conversion and greater fidelity.

The vitality of the Vincentian charism does not belong exclusively to the Congregation of the Mission. Solicitude for the poor, in the following of Christ, belongs to the very heart of the Gospel and is a sign of Christian authenticity¹⁹ and of belonging to the community of Jesus’ disciples. Many persons and groups that are part of the Vincentian Family give expression to this prophetic power today.

3. We are convinced that throughout the world, the Vincentian Family shares the same desire to live faithfully in the following of Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor.

¹⁵ The ecclesiastical documents in Latin America and Europe prefer the term “People of God.” The documents of Africa speak of the “Family of God.” And those of Asia use more frequently, “the community of the disciples of Jesus.”

¹⁶ SVP XII, 80. Conference 195, 6 December 1658.

¹⁷ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29, 30, 31.

¹⁸ Cf. “The Visitor in Service of the Mission,” n. 8. *Vincentiana* (1990): 38-39.

¹⁹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 82.

During the course of our assembly, we experienced this joyful reality. Together with us, the members of the Congregation of the Mission, many other persons and groups are working in the Church, the Family of God, and are on fire with the same enthusiasm and the same zeal which animates us. In the spirit of communion and participation, we in the Vincentian Family, like the Church as a whole, are convinced that the central role of the laity is irreplaceable in the process of evangelization.²⁰

The needs of the poor are enormous. All members of the Vincentian Family have to proclaim the Gospel together and work against all forms of poverty.²¹

4. Moved by the power of charity, we are convinced that we should work for human promotion and justice.

Vincent de Paul discovered that the love of God is expressed in action: *“Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms, and the sweat of our brows.”*²²

The power of effective love creates habits of love and of service, beginning with personal contacts with the poor. Once we have come to know the poor, and are interested, as was Saint Vincent, in sharing in their joys, their sufferings, and their needs, we will want to love the poor, and express our love by way of creative work. Thus, as he assures us, in turning the medal over, and seeing them in Christ and Christ in them, we recognize them as our brothers and sisters.²³

In our work of prophetic evangelization, we should keep these characteristics in mind: attention to the reality of human society, above all to the causes of the unequal distribution of the goods in the world; participation in the life and conditions of the poor; cooperation with associations established to defend human rights and to promote justice and peace.²⁴

When, together with other members of the Vincentian Family, we share in the life and goals of the poor, we will discover the presence of the Spirit of the Lord who renews

²⁰ A new ecclesiology is developing: the laity are moving from passivity to responsibility. Cf. *The Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church* (1987), and the postsynodal exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988).

²¹ Cf. AIC, *Documento de Base. Contra las pobrezas, actuar juntos*. [Basic Document: Acting together against all forms of poverty.]

²² SVP XI, 40. Conference 25.

²³ Cf. SVP XI, 32. Conference 19.

²⁴ Cf. *Const.*, 12; *Statutes*, 9, 2.

us to speak with them, listen to them, and consider them as the agents of their own way to liberation. Then we can let ourselves be evangelized by them.²⁵

III. COMMITMENTS

These convictions, which should energize our life and our missionary vocation, move us to undertake the following commitments.

1. To collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family

If we work in unison with the other members of the Vincentian Family, we can be a more effective force for evangelization and works of charity and justice in today's world. We will also strengthen the bonds that link us to one another. As we work together we also wish to respect the autonomy and identity of each group and individual within the Vincentian Family.

We recognize, as members of the Congregation of the Mission, the need for a change of heart if we are to collaborate generously with other members of the Vincentian Family and so recognize the gifts and talents of others in promoting the reign of God. For these reasons we commit ourselves to:

a) create the conditions for collaboration with members of the Vincentian Family by:

- ☐ listening to one another
- ☐ getting to know one another
- ☐ sharing experiences of working with the poor
- ☐ praying and reflecting together;

b) set up structures to coordinate what is already taking place, or will take place at local, provincial, interprovincial and international levels, so that the different levels complement one another and subsidiarity is respected.

2. To respond together to the cries of the poor

The prophetic teaching of Saint Vincent that the poor are “our lords and masters”²⁶ challenges us once more as we enter a new millennium. Also, the increasing gap between

²⁵ Cf. *Const.*, 12, 3.

²⁶ SVP XI, 328.

rich and poor speaks to us with new urgency. Since charity and justice are two sides of the same coin, we commit ourselves to:

a) collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family in consecrating more of our time, our resources and our personnel to the evangelization of the poor, so as to contribute more to both their spiritual and human development;

b) plan specific projects at local, provincial, interprovincial and international levels to respond to the cries of the poor in our day in partnership with other members of the Vincentian Family and with the poor themselves;

c) address the causes of poverty in our different situations by participating with other members of the Vincentian Family in the work of Justice and Peace Commissions, both inside as well as outside Church contexts, and by creating specifically Vincentian forms of collaboration where the occasion calls for it;

d) support the movement for the cancellation or reduction of the international debts of poor countries to mark the Jubilee Year²⁷, in partnership with other members of the Vincentian Family.

3. To collaborate in formation

To enfold Saint Vincent's charism in the new millennium, it is essential that the members of his family be well rooted in his spirit. This is especially true for those just beginning on Vincent's way, but is also important for those who continue to let themselves be shaped by his spiritual experience.

Vincent's call to evangelize the poor was broad enough to include persons of all ages, all walks of life, and all vocations in the Church. Today, the many branches of the Vincentian Family draw from this common heritage and so are able to nourish one another in their efforts at formation. At the same time, each group in the family has understood him from its own experience and so has a unique wisdom about him to hand down to its own members. The formation program of one group can enrich other groups while still continuing to form its own members in its individual tradition. The Congregation of the Mission desires to collaborate in common formation projects, while respecting the autonomy of the different branches as they go about forming their own.

In the following three commitments, the Assembly affirms the principles already set down in our various Community documents on formation. Here, it concentrates

²⁷ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51.

mainly on the additional values and practices which arise from a new consciousness of our membership in the wider Vincentian Family.

A. Formation of Our Own: Initial and Ongoing

1) Each province or group of provinces will make every effort to incorporate into its initial and ongoing formation programs elements which reflect our relationship with the worldwide Vincentian Family. These programs should:

- a) convey a real interest in the spirituality, history, and charism of each of the family groups present in the region;
- b) emphasize the necessity of teamwork and collaboration with the members of the wider family and provide training in the skills needed for this;
- c) instill an overall sense of belonging to the family.

2) We should promote a certain integration of our formation programs with those organized by the members of the wider family in the region. To do so demonstrates our willingness to be of service to the other members of the family and in turn to be formed by them.

3) Because a sense of solidarity with the poor is essential to our charism, our members should strive to identify and address the forms and causes of poverty in the world and especially those nearest to us.

4) We will promote, especially for our students, the learning of other languages, sensitivity to other cultures, and a firm foundation in the social teachings of the Church.

5) The Visitors should encourage the confreres to take part in the CIF program and, where possible, organize similar programs on regional levels.

B. Formation of Our Own Formators

1) Because formation is so important and decisive a means for personal and community renewal, each province should show a special concern to provide the best possible preparation for its future formators. In particular, it should work to secure adequate financial support for the integral formation of its members.

2) The provinces should have a sense of their co-responsibility for formation and be open to interprovincial cooperation by:

- a) encouraging and facilitating the mobility of their formators,
- b) sharing their economic resources,
- c) welcoming confreres from other provinces who need specialized training in formation.

3) The Superior General and his council should study the possibility of creating in one or more places:

- a) an international center for the formation of our formators,
- b) an itinerant team of formators who would offer their services to formators in different provinces.

These programs should train the participants in Vincentian spirituality, teaching methods, and multicultural sensitivity so they might work effectively in different parts of the world.

C. Formation of the Wider Vincentian Family

Each province or group of provinces will willingly respond to appeals from the different groups in the Vincentian Family for assistance in formation by:

- a) collaborating in the initial and ongoing formation of their members;
- b) helping to revitalize groups that are weak, and offering spiritual assistance to those that are alive and active;
- c) establishing a formation team from both the Congregation of the Mission and the wider family to design the elements of a common formation program and promote gatherings for the purpose of deepening Vincentian spirituality and strengthening the sense of belonging to the Vincentian Family;
- d) opening our existing programs for ongoing formation to the rest of the Vincentian Family where possible.

4. The international missions

“Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians and the

missionaries and the young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.”²⁸ All of us are invited to contribute to the preparation of the new Christian springtime by being docile to the action of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Since the Holy Spirit has already opened the way to new forms of collaboration in some of our international missions and in other already established ones, we commit ourselves to:

a) encourage broad participation of the members of groups within the Vincentian Family, as well as of individual Vincentian collaborators, in both the established missions *ad gentes* founded by the provinces and in those under the direction of the Superior General.

b) establish a commission to develop a “*ratio missionum*” (guidelines for our missions), concerning: inculturation and north-south collaboration, criteria for accepting new missions, the process for selecting missionaries and for admitting candidates to the Congregation, relationship to the Vincentian Family, international support for already existing missions in individual provinces, procedures for regular evaluations, and funding.

c) recommend that the superior general study the possibility of establishing a secretariat for the new international missions for reasons such as: facilitating the relationships among the provinces, the branches of the Vincentian Family, other mission organizations, and himself; coordinating the gathering of information; searching out funds and other resources.

5. New means of communication

We are entering into an era of information technology which brings with it unrecognized, and therefore even more insidious, new forms of poverty. If the poor remain without access to information technology, they will be further marginalized and locked into a cycle of poverty.

Today the mass media continue to develop. A major issue is whether the poor will be able to participate in information technology so as to break out of the cycle of poverty and sit at the table with others, making their voice heard; and whether the Congregation of the Mission will use these new means in the service of mission.

²⁸ *Redemptoris Missio*, 92.

²⁹ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18.

The Internet is a powerful vehicle which can unite people. When used well it can foster human relationships and solidarity. As such it can be used for formation, collaboration, advocacy on behalf of those who have no voice, and for evangelization.

The Congregation of the Mission, through its members and structures, commits itself to:

a) take initiatives in fostering access by the poor themselves to the mass media so that they may participate in the benefits of communications technology;

b) establish a worldwide communication network and actively foster its use, providing economic and technological assistance where necessary;

c) seek actively the involvement of the wider Vincentian Family in accomplishing these objectives, and especially encourage the mutual distribution of publications through the Internet.

CONCLUSION

At the threshold of the new millennium, our commitments spring from our determination to try to understand deeply the evangelical maxims and to make them real in our lives.³⁰

As we gather these commitments together, we look toward Mary. She occupies a special place in the spiritual experience of the Vincentian Family.

- ☐ Contemplating on Mary's role in the mystery of the incarnation, we strive like her to be open to the transforming power of the Spirit, so that the image of Jesus Christ might be formed in us and so that we might always be able to fulfill the will of the Father in our lives.
- ☐ With Mary, missionary and pilgrim, we set out eagerly on the road toward the new millennium to bear the message of the gospel of charity to the poor.
- ☐ With Mary, in her Magnificat, we join in a song of thanksgiving to the God of history, because God has given us the grace to see ourselves as a Vincentian Family and to be able, like Mary, to renew our charism of following Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor.

³⁰ Cf. *Const.*, 49.

Closing Address General Assembly 1998

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
General Superior*

I have always loved a wonderful passage from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat; and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures (Act 4, Scene 3).

As we end this Assembly, my brothers, I encourage you to seize the tide. Seize this time of grace. Seize the momentum that is building up in our Vincentian Family to move forward as a peaceful army, uniting our energies in concrete works of charity and justice in the service of the poor. "Grace has its moments," St. Vincent tells us (SV II, 453). Can we together seize this moment to grow as a family in a profound Vincentian spirituality and to formulate collaborative projects in which we stand with and work with those who are most abandoned, for their own integral human development?

Today I ask four questions about this General Assembly.

I. First, what have we learned from the members of our extended family, who joined us for a week during this Assembly? How have they evangelized us?

Let me suggest some very simple, initial responses. You yourselves can add others, I am sure.

From AIC, we have learned the importance of advocacy for the poor, of calling out for justice and human rights, of making our Vincentian voice heard at important international organizations like the European Community and the United Nations.

From the Daughters of Charity, we have learned the perennial importance of service to the sick poor, a work of huge importance in today's world; in fact, it is one that never seems to diminish. We have learned too from the Daughters of Charity the fundamental choice that they have made to reach out to women and children, the poorest of the poor in almost all countries.

From the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we have learned the importance of attacking illiteracy, of teaching children and adults how to read and write. We have learned too the importance of the personal home visit which characterizes the Society's approach to the poor.

From the Vincentian Marian Youth groups we have learned the importance of developing programs of good initial formation, a real catechesis that roots young people in Christ the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.

From MISEVI, we have learned of the courage and adventure that lies in the hearts of so many young people. On the last day of the presence of our guests here at the Assembly, Virginia Alfaro came to tell me that after spending seven years as a missionary in Honduras, she has now decided to go to a new mission in Bolivia, where she hopes to continue giving her life to God in the service of the poor.

From Ubaldina Morales, who came to us from Panama, I am sure that all of us who listened to her learned the deep faith of campesinos, who hear the word of God as it breaks into the lives of the poor and believe in it deeply as good news.

From the Association of the Miraculous Medal, we learned about simple devotion to the Virgin Mary, whose Magnificat sings of the liberation of the poor and envisions a day when the mighty are cast down and the lowly are lifted up. We also learned of the growing apostolic potential of his huge organization whose members in Spain last year made pastoral visits to more than 500,000 families.

II. What calls did we hear from the various branches of our family?

The members of our family presented us with 20 recommendations. I will not repeat them all here, since everyone has copies. Let me mention four calls that I heard in these recommendations.

1. I heard a loud call for mutual help in formation. The members of our family want to deepen their spirituality. They want to understand St. Vincent better and his vision of Christ and of the world. They judge that this is one of our family's greatest needs and they recognize that we can help each other in satisfying that need.
2. I heard a call for coordination on local, regional, national, and international levels. Different words are used to describe the coordinating structure. Sometimes it is called a team, sometimes a committee, sometimes a secretariat. But there is a clear call to create coordinating instruments for channeling our common energies.
3. I heard a call for greater communication within the family, through sharing publications that already exist, through creating new ones perhaps, through the use of media like the Internet.
4. I heard a loud call, even a cry, for collaborative projects, for discerning together what are the greatest needs of the poor in various parts of the world, for formulating concrete projects to attack those needs, for working together as a family in missions *ad gentes*.

Those are some of the clearest calls that I heard. I am sure many of you heard others as well.

III. What is our response as an Assembly?

As an Assembly, in our final document, we have expressed to the confreres throughout the world our vision of the challenges of the mission, we have stated our convictions, and we have made a number of commitments. It seems to me that the commitments we have made are a good initial response to the calls of the members of our extended family. Our commitments speak explicitly of the formation of our extended Vincentian Family. They speak of the need for coordination on local, regional, national, and international levels. They urge us to use modern media for fostering better communication within our family in the service of the poor, and they speak of concrete, collaborative projects in which we can channel our huge energies toward the most abandoned both within our provinces and in missions *ad gentes*.

May I suggest to you one other theme that does not appear very prominently in our commitments and that I judge to be most important for our future service of the poor as a family; namely, youth. I encourage you as you go forth from this Assembly to form

our Vincentian Marian Youth groups wherever you go. See this as one of the great challenges of the third millennium. The future servants of the poor are the young. They are the evangelizers of the third millennium. They are the people who will visit the poor in their homes, who will carry out practical, concrete projects for the integral human promotion of those who are destitute. It is they who will teach people to read and write. It is they who will attack the causes of poverty. If we can offer young people a deeply Christian, Vincentian formation our Vincentian Family will continue to grow as a powerful instrument in the service of the poor.

We have a precious gift to offer the young: a vision of Christ as the evangelizer and the servant of the poor. To the extent that we can offer that gift generously to them, our family will be fully alive in the third millennium.

IV. What is the next step to be taken?

I ask you to go and spread the news of this Assembly, its enthusiasm, and its results. Go, tell the confreres confidently that with the members of our family we can be an enormous force in the service of the poor.

Concretely, I ask the following:

1. That as soon as possible (for example in October or November), all the Visitors hold workshops with all the confreres of their provinces in which you study the document of this Assembly. In those meetings, challenge the confreres to come up with concrete ways of implementing the commitments that we have made in the Assembly document. The video that Fr. Mika is preparing will be sent to you within a month. Use it as a means of communicating to the confreres the experience of this Assembly.

2. Having heard the confreres of the province, I ask that each Visitor discuss with his council how the recommendations of the Assembly might be implemented in your province.

3. In a meeting of the superiors of the province with the Visitor and the members of the provincial council, brainstorm about how the commitments might be concretized.

4. Ask each house to concretize in its local community plan, which must be eventually be approved by the Visitor and his council (Statute 69, 5°), how the house intends to concretize the commitments.

5. Make the implementation of these commitments an important agenda item at your next provincial gathering or provincial assembly.

This Assembly is now finished. I am very grateful for all your labors during a long, hot, tiring month. I hope that the days ahead bring you rest and refreshment. Then I urge you to go forth with renewed vigor, filled with the conviction that God is calling our family to deepen our commitment to follow Christ as the evangelizer and servant of the poor, to sink deeper roots into his person, to resonate with his passion for the truth, to listen humbly with him to the cries of the poor and the calls of the Church, and to formulate and carry out concrete, practical, collaborative projects that will really make a difference in the lives of the most abandoned.

Go forth, my brothers, with peace and joy. There is a tide in our Vincentian Family. Seize it as a moment of grace.