

VINCENTIANA

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Commentary on the RATIO FORMATIONIS

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

The theme of this issue is a follow-up to the *Ratio Formationis*, published in December 2014. This is an important document, treating all aspects of initial and ongoing formation. With the General Council, the Vincentiana Editorial Board believed it would be helpful to have confreres with experience in formation offer commentary on each of the eight sections of the *Ratio*.

What you read in this issue is the result of their efforts. I express my gratitude for their contributions, into which they have woven their own ideas, insights, and experiences as formators, thus giving us a rich and rewarding explication of the meaning of the *Ratio Formationis*. While the reflections on the Ratio are important, so too are insights of confreres who have spent much of their lives involved in formation ministry. Fr. Barry Moriarty is such a person. He has served as the Director of the Internal Seminary for many years, with the unique experience of doing so in two provinces and on two continents! His article on "Good Purposes" is an overview of the historical and theological rationale for this uniquely Vincentian phenomenon.

An emerging reality in providing proper formation for both confreres and laity is that of mentoring. Good mentors can instruct, inspire, admonish, and assist those they serve to develop competencies in ministry and for life. In his article, Fr. Robert Maloney reviews the subject of mentoring from the era of the classics, in the Gospels as Jesus mentors his disciples, through the life of St. Vincent, and over nearly four centuries since his followers have mentored his charism of charity to evangelize and serve the poor. Fr. Maloney concludes by offering core values and practical actions to promote a method of mentoring reflecting the way of Jesus and St. Vincent.

Earlier this year, the Congregation of the Mission was buzzing with news of the naming of a new cardinal from our ranks. Our confrere from Ethiopia, Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M., the Archbishop of Addis Ababa, was notified via Vatican Radio that he was to be created cardinal at the February 2014 consistory. This honor bestowed on him by Pope Francis was not given to him for his own benefit, but as a gesture of respect for the Catholic people of Ethiopia. Thus, our newest Vincentian Cardinal is the subject of this issue's "Spotlight Interview." The life story of Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M. is an illuminating and moving one.

Finally, on a personal note, I write to inform you that this is my final issue as the Editor of *Vincentiana* and Director of Communication and Publications at the General Curia. After laboring four years, I am returning to my home province in Philadelphia, the Eastern Province USA, for a new assignment. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve in this capacity, and a rare opportunity to view the Congregation from both international and historical perspectives. This has been challenging and enriching experience, one for which I will always be grateful.

I wish to offer my thanks to Fr. G. Gregory Gay, Superior General and the General Council for this opportunity, along with the Editorial Board of *Vincentiana* for their ideas and support. I also wish to pay tribute to our previous editor, Fr. Julio Suescun, C.M., who was a wise mentor as I learned the many details of producing *Vincentiana*. One last group I want to pay particular tribute to is our translators, who have been so incredibly generous in their service to *Vincentiana*. There have been times when the prospect of getting out a given issue on time seemed doubtful, but the translators always came through, due to their skills and generous service. A translator's work is often tedious and exhausting. Yet, the selfless example of confreres, Daughters of Charity, and laity in the Vincentian Family who generously gave of their time and talent to translate is the real success story behind *Vincentiana*.

I leave the editorship grateful for this opportunity (although slightly exhausted!), and I thank you, our faithful readers and subscribers for your interest and patronage of *Vincentiana*. As for my own words of farewell, Lacordaire, a French priest and contemporary of Frederic Ozanam, said it best: "All I know about tomorrow is that God's Providence will rise before the sun."

* * * * *

**Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents of St. Vincent de Paul
EXTRA VOLUMES NOW AVAILABLE**

After forty years, the Vincentian Translation Project in the United States has completed its work. With the publication of the final volume of the English Edition of Pierre Coste's 14-volume series on the writings of St. Vincent de Paul, the VTP offices are closing. Extra copies of volumes are available (in English) at the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As there is no charge for the volumes, those requesting them are asked to pay postage and shipping charges. If you wish to obtain volumes of the series, *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, please contact:

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FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

Meditation Moment: The Vow of Chastity

“Oh, Gentlemen, let us ask God unceasingly for this virtue of purity. If we possess it, we shall draw down on ourselves many others, but if we do not possess it we are lost, the Mission is lost.”

St. Vincent de Paul

When speaking about the vow of chastity in his conferences, Saint Vincent seemed to prefer the term “purity.” Distilled in the quotation of Saint Vincent above is the heart of his teaching on the topic. The saint refers to purity as a virtue so basic and important that if attained, by God’s grace, it will bring other virtues to us as well.

Thomas Aquinas wrote that to love is “to will the good of the other.” To make this choice requires us to deny ourselves. This choice is at the heart of a chaste relationship. There is no room for the ego. When we habitually make that choice “to will the good of the other,” we learn to love after the manner that Jesus taught. However, the moment that the other becomes a potential means for our own gratification, corruption enters the equation.

Jesus taught his disciples to choose the lowest place. This is not an easy choice in a “me first” world. But when the choice becomes habitual, the virtue grows within us almost without notice, but certainly by God’s grace. The choice becomes part of the fabric of one’s life. Eventually, to choose otherwise becomes an alien and unacceptable option.

This is the kind of choosing that St. Vincent saw as necessary for his confreres and for their mission. If his followers were to grow in this virtue of purity, they must learn to make the choice to live a chaste life in their relationships by practice and repetition. At its heart, it is the choice to love. Our Constitutions frame the vow of chastity in the context of a committed prayer life (both personal and communal), an engaged apostolate and local community, and the willingness to grow in self-discipline and integrity:

“Intimate union with Christ, true fraternal communion, zeal in the apostolate, and asceticism supported by the experience of the Church will enable our chastity to grow strong. Through a continual and mature response to the Lord’s call, it is a living source of spiritual fecundity in the world, and contributes greatly to the attainment of human maturity” (*Constitutions*, # 30).

Many might define chastity for a vowed celibate simply as sexual abstinence. However, this definition both fails to capture the virtue Saint Vincent recommends, or the love as Saint Thomas defines. Our relationships cease to be chaste the moment the other becomes an object and means for our ends. It is perhaps more obvious that seeing the other as a potential means of our sexual gratification violates chastity. However, so does seeing the other as a potential means to achieving position or power. How easy it is to befriend the wealthy when there is the possibility of enjoying the goods of this world through them. How easy also to stand near powerful people that we might be seen as powerful ourselves.

Shortly after my arrival as pastor at Our Lady of the Mountains, I undertook the task of creating more office space for the pastoral staff. One of the first orders of business was to make sure each of the offices had a clear window in the door. This ensured that while conversations within would be private, they would also be visible to others from the hallway.

The installation of the glass in office doors was one of many changes made in the wake of the scandals resulting from clergy misconduct in the United States. In fact, nearly every place that a priest might meet privately saw some redesign, including many confessionals. These changes stirred the memory of an old Vincentian admonition that, when a confrere meets with a woman, the door should always remain open. For a time, many viewed this admonition as old-fashioned or outdated. However, recent clergy scandals help us to see the wisdom behind this precaution.

The purpose of these simple practices in themselves will not necessarily deter misconduct or promote chaste living. Rather, they help to defend us as ministers from potential false accusation. Moreover, they are a not-so-subtle reminder that others can see our actions as ministers. For the sake of the mission, our relationships with others need to be pure and transparent in the eyes of others as they are to eyes of our Savior.

Transparency is also key value in financial administration. The business practice of having our financial accounting and records audited by an accredited company serves the same function as the clear glass in the door to pastoral offices. An audit serves to call those responsible to good financial practice and reassures others that the figures on the page and those who prepared them are reliable. In a similar way, transparency in our relationships provides similar assurances.

The transparency of our relationships is basic in the practice of this virtue of purity. One attains the virtue of purity, like any virtue, only by the intentional choosing a particular behavior until it becomes so habitual that it is ingrained in our very being. The glass in the door,

in itself, does not ensure us of attaining the virtue; it is only a helpful reminder of the choices we make regarding relationships.

By way of example, Pope Francis made several memorable choices after his election. He chose to take the bus back to the Casa Santa Marta rather than the papal limousine. He chose to live in a simple two-room apartment rather than in the papal palazzo. Some might see this as a calculated choice for the sake of public opinion. However, those who knew Jorge Bergoglio also knew just how consistent this choice was with the many choices he had made during his life prior to his election. For him it was the natural choice.

One could see this pattern of choosing clearly when John Paul II named Bergoglio a Cardinal. He came to Rome alone, received the red hat without fanfare, an entourage or celebration, but almost in a penitential manner. Even his red robes were hand-me-downs from his predecessor. Thus choosing to take the bus required no deliberation. The choice was natural to him. He had made it habitual. In a similar way, our habitual choice should be transparency in relationships so as not to arouse suspicion in others and remain above reproach.

If the practice of being transparent in our relationships makes one's life visible to others, then the practice of mortification puts boundaries upon the senses. Both of these practices help one to achieve virtue in our practice of chastity. Mortification was one of the virtues that Saint Vincent hoped would be present in the congregations he founded. He said that, "*Mortification of the appetite is the A, B, C of spiritual life. Whoever cannot control himself in this, will hardly be able to conquer temptations more difficult to subdue.*" This disciplining of our choices regarding chastity will necessarily begin with our eyes.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori wrote, "*The devil first tempts us to look, then to desire, and afterwards to consent.*" In this age of the internet, pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry. Today one can access pornographic images by a simple click on an electronic device. Countless people have become addicted to these materials. Most confessors know the damage this has caused to the relationships of those ensnared in this way. Therefore, the first sense one needs to discipline is sight. What we choose to gaze upon must assist us to attain the virtue of purity. This is the age-old practice which spiritual writers once called modesty or "custody of the eyes."

Therefore, let us put the vow of chastity in practice in such a fashion that the virtue of purity to which Saint Vincent exhorts us grows within us. May our love for the other may be without the blemish of self-interest. By loving the other in this virtuous manner, with God's Grace, other virtues will certainly follow as St. Vincent indicated. Most importantly, the work of our mission of evangelization will more effective.

Tempo Forte Circular

March 1-8, 2015

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

A full agenda: Our March Tempo Forte held a full agenda, so much so that we extended our meeting an extra day! We begin with a retreat day on the vow of chastity, presented by Fr. Joseph Geders, Econome General. A summary of our reflections on this vow will appear in the this Vincentiana. We also held our first domestic assembly in preparation for the General Assembly, with another in June to discuss Assembly documents.

Visits from new Visitors: We met with some confreres in leadership positions. These included Fr. Franz Kangler, Visitor of the new Province of Austria- Germany, Fr. Bernadin Yoka-Mongu, Visitor of the Province of Congo, Fr. John Prager, Visitor of the Province of Ecuador, Fr. Bernard Shoepfer, Director General of the Daughters of Charity, and Fr. Wlodzimierz Malota, former superior of the mission in Papua New Guinea.

General Assembly, 2016: We continued preparations for our General Assembly, setting up a committee to oversee submitted postulata. Chaired by Fr. Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel, Procurator and Postulator General, it includes Fr. Arkadiusz Zakreta, former Visitor of the Province of Poland, along with other confreres yet to be named.

Working with San Egidio: We decided as a house to participate in a project of the Community of San Egidio to assist homeless people, which involves providing a place to reside on the property of a religious house in Rome, giving them a mailing address and access to medical care and social services. We received Marek, who lives in his trailer on our property, and uses our bathroom facilities. On occasion, he joins us for Mass and a meal. This is an effort of San Egidio to address the problem of the homeless living in Rome. Pope Francis also affirmed this program as a practical way for religious houses in Rome to assist the poor. We welcome Marek.

Vincentian Family Commission: We approved a recommendation from the Vincentian Family Collaborative Commission to have a presentation at the General Assembly on the Vincentian Family. It will be

done as a video showing experiences of collaboration among the Vincentian Family, including the Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program.

Vincentian Bishops: We prepared for our first gathering in Rome with confreres-bishops. We have almost half of thirty-five Vincentian bishops attending this three-day meeting. We welcome a chance to exchange ideas on living the Vincentian charism in the episcopacy; to provide insight on interacting with our Congregation; and discussions on spirituality and our Vincentian identity.

Reconfiguration report: We then resumed our discussion of reconfiguration, with updates from the Assistants General of the status of efforts in Italy, Spain, France, CLAPVI-North (Northern Latin America and the Caribbean), CLAPVI-South, and Asia-Pacific (the Province of Oceania and the Solomon Islands). We met with Fr. Franz Kangler, Visitor of the new Province of Austria-Germany (as of January 1), who gave us a report on integrating two provinces into one.

General Curia Personnel: Fr. Mario Di Carlo, house superior, experienced health problems in early February, resulting in a triple by-pass operation and rehabilitation. We are most happy to have him back among us. Fr. Vincenzo Zontak will complete his year of service in June. We are grateful for his many contributions, and we look forward to the arrival of Br. L'ubormir Zemla as a replacement. We are also glad to have Br. Gerardo Fajardo of the Province of the Philippines.

General Curia reconstruction: Fr. Joe Geders presented the cost of repairing the center and side stairwells outside the Curia building, a problem discovered while resurfacing and repainting of the external building surfaces. Due to steady structural deterioration over the years, both stairwells need significant outside repair, and window replacement. This unexpected problem will be a major added expense. We will be asking provinces for assistance in covering the cost.

Communications Office: We received our quarterly report from Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications. We are happy to accept the recommendation of Fr. Maher to appoint Fr. Aidan Rooney to succeed Fr. John Freund as Coordinator of the Vincentian Family web site (i.e. "FamVin"). We asked them to work out a transition plan. We see this website as being the charge of the new Vincentian Family Office to maintain and update the many social media facets of the FamVin Project such as Facebook, Pinterest, etc. Its "URL" is: (<http://famvin.org/>)

Fr. Maher will finish his four-year term in June and return home to the Eastern Province, USA. As Director of Communications, he has served as Editor of *Vincentiana*, chair of the Editorial Board, secretary to the SIEV Commission, as well as assisting the Superior General.

Fr. Jorge Rodriguez, who edits NUNTIA, will become Director of Communications upon Fr. Maher's departure. He offered us a communications plan with enhanced use of social media. We seek a confrere for editor of Vincentiana to work with Fr. Jorge after Fr. Maher's departure.

CIF Program: We received a report from Fr. Stanislav Zontak, Assistant General responsible the CIF program, (Center for International Formation) who informed us that the next CIF session begins April 10 in Paris. Fathers Dan Borlik and Adam Bandura serve as CIF co-directors. They sent us a list of the CIF programs for the coming year, including one on the Vincentian Family. This is very timely as we prepare for the "Year of Collaboration with the Vincentian Family."

Vincentian Solidarity Office: We had a report from Fr. Miles Heinen, Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office. (VSO) We are in the final fund-raising phase of the Patrimonial Fund Project (PFP), which ends in 2016. For successful completion of the campaign, we have asked provinces that can contribute to do so, and provinces that benefit from the PFP to contribute. The response has been very positive. We are half a million dollars away from our goal of five million USD, needed to receive a matching grant. We spoke about continuing the work of the VSO after its funding ends in 2016. The Franz Foundation and USA Provinces have generously assisted the VSO. We considered seeking funds from a wider range of sources. Lastly, we stressed a need for donations to VSO "micro-funds" to promote projects for missions and developing provinces.

Special Projects for 400th Anniversary: The Superior General presented two special projects for the General Council to consider for discussion at the General Assembly. They are geared to help celebrate the 400th anniversary (in 2017) of St. Vincent's inspiration to found the Congregation. The first project involves formation of African seminaries for mission in the Congregation. We hope this project will be carried forward with the accompaniment of the Eastern Province, USA.

The second project is to consider an expansion of the Congregation into Muslim areas such as North Africa or Turkey. The Daughters of Charity serve in North Africa, as do two confreres in our Tunis Mission. Fr. Claudio Santangelo will undertake a research project on the feasibility of taking on a ministry in Muslim areas. He once served at St. George's School in Istanbul, staffed by confreres from Germany and Austria, a possible entry point for this work.

Union of Superior Generals: We discussed matters concerning the Union of Superior Generals, particularly a report from Fr. Shijo, who attends the Union's Commission for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity

of Creation. From this report, we are reviewing human rights issues in West Papua New Guinea, with help from Fr. Robertus Wijanarko, Visitor of the Province of Indonesia

United Nations Report: We received a report from Fr. Joseph Foley, NGO representative at the United Nations, who gave us an update of activities he and other religious undertake to keep a presence in a large, bureaucratic organization. Fr. Foley has a good working relationship with NGO representatives of the Daughters of Charity and Sisters of Charity, USA.

Econome General Report: We went over the report of Fr. Joe Geders, Econome General, of his March meeting with the Financial Committee. This group includes two laymen from the USA; Tom Beck and Aric Clelan, and three confreres, Fathers George Busieka, Treasurer of the region of Kenya, Fr Raphael Eloriaga, Province of the Philippines, and Fr. Philippe Lamblin of the Province of Paris. Other business discussed included ways to use the vacant house on the Curia grounds, and provide additional training for provincial economies.

International Missions Report: We received a report from the mission in **El Alto, Bolivia** from Fr. Aidan Rooney, with news that the mission raised funds to purchase new vehicles for the mission. We congratulate Fr. Rooney for obtaining the needed funds, and Fathers Cyrille de la Barre de Nanteuil and Diego José Plá Aranda. The confreres are hoping for another missionary.

We had a report from the **mission in Papua New Guinea (PNG)** from Fr. Jacek Tendej the acting superior and seminary rector in Bomana. He reported that Fr. Justin Eke, is concluding his studies in Rome and will soon return to Bomana. Fr. George Maylaa, who served in the Waitape section of the PNG mission, is finishing his term and will return to his Province of the Orient. He will be a formator in a new interprovincial ministry of the Conference of European Visitors. We thank Fr. George for his service in the mission, and wish him well in his new ministry.

Fr. Homero Marin, a long-serving missionary in PNG, has returned to the Diocese of Alotau-Sideia, after a well-deserved sabbatical. Fr. Marceliano Oabel has also returned there after working in formation for a year. Fr. Emmanuel Lapaz now serves in a parish in Bomana. The newest arrival to the PNG mission is Fr. Neil Lams of the Province of Oceania. He works with Fr. Jacek as Prefect of Students. Fr. Malota of the Province of Poland will take a sabbatical to renew his missionary spirit. The PNG mission will soon receive two new confreres from Poland.

Fr. Mathew Kallammakal, Assistant General for the PNG mission, visited there February 17-23. He met with the Apostolic Nuncio, the

Archbishop of Port Moresby, and diocesan bishops of Bereina and Alotau-Sideia. They spoke about the vast improvement in Holy Spirit Seminary in Bomana since our confreres took over. They believe the atmosphere has greatly improved under our administration. As proof of their approval, the Nuncio and Bishops asked for more confreres! Although the life in this mission is difficult, all confreres in the PNG mission are truly dedicated.

We had a report on the **mission in the Solomon Islands**. The Council agreed with the recommendation that the confreres appoint Fr. Varghese Ayyampilly as parish priest and formator for our Vincentian candidates. Fr. Raul Castro has been named by the Bishops as the Rector of Holy Name of Mary Seminary. Fr. Thomas Christiawan, mission Econome, is now the moderator of the Vincentian Marian Youth. Soon to arrive in the mission is Fr. Antony Punnoth.

We received an urgent request from confreres in the Solomon Islands made to the Asia-Pacific Visitors' Conference. (APVC) They need confreres qualified to teach philosophy and theology. The Superior General and Council have requested the Province of Oceania take over administration of this mission. The request is under review by APVC. If Oceania assumes its administration, the General Curia will still provide financial support. The mission is open to all.

We received a brief report from the **mission in Angola**. The newest addition is Fr. Marcos Gumieiro of the Province of Curitiba. He joins three other confreres at this mission: Fathers Roberto Perea Martinez, Jose Ramirez Martinez, and Jason Cristian Soto Herrera. We are grateful to the Province of Curitiba for sending Fr. Marcos, and we thank the Provinces of Mexico and Central America for sending Fathers Roberto, Jose, and Jason to serve in Angola. This mission was established to support the Vincentian Family and Daughters of Charity there. The VSO has provided a car, yet we still need funds for "mobility in mission."

We received a report on the **mission in Chad**, which will be discussed after the visit of the Superior General and Fr. Stanislav Zontak. They will meet with the bishop of the Diocese of Moundou, who has requested confreres for formation and parish ministry. We had a report from the international **mission in Punta Arenas**, awarded a \$12,000 USD grant in a project of the Congregation for Vincentian missionary parishes. The confreres in this mission are Fathers Angel Ignacio Garrido, Margarito Severino Martinez Gonzalez, and Pablo Alexis Vargas Ruiz.

We had an update from our **newest Mission in Anchorage, Alaska USA**. Deacon Arnold Hernandez from the Western Province, USA has been in Alaska since January, preparing for the arrival of Fathers Pedro Nel Delgado Quintero and Jesus Gabriel Medina Claros from the Province of Colombia. Their entry visas are being processed and they should

soon be in Alaska. The confreres will be there to meet the pastoral needs of a growing Hispanic community. Deacon Arnold is formulating a pastoral plan for the Archdiocese of Anchorage to develop lay leaders.

Volunteers for International Missions: We studied offers from confreres who have volunteered to go to the missions. A major concern now is to assist the **Vice Province of Mozambique**. To staff all their ministries, they need 29 confreres, according to the Visitor, Fr. Jose Luis Azevedo Fernandes. Currently they have 19 men. Thus, we asked four of the six men who volunteered for the missions to go to Mozambique. We also invite other confreres to consider serving there.

Vincentian Family: We studied a large volume of material on the Vincentian Family after the meeting of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC) in January. A major issue discussed was a proposal to create a Secretariat of the Vincentian Family. We have proposed it be the *Office of the Vincentian Family* and temporarily located in Philadelphia at the Provincial House of the Eastern Province. They have offered free use of a large renovated space with staff to make it a fully functioning office. A confrere will serve as Coordinator of the Office. The final approval will be made by the VFEC. We hope the location of the office outside of Rome will encourage better coordination and participation by commissions of the VFEC. Eventual plans include moving the Office of the Vincentian Family to places where the Family is active.

Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative: We reviewed a report by the Coordinator of the Vincentian Family Haitian Initiative (VFHI). Things are moving ahead. They have several major projects, including a fish farm to bring food and income to the poor; improving the quality of education in elementary schools; and sponsoring programs to empower women through education. At their request, we reviewed the VFHI Statutes and those of their National Advisory Council.

Vincentian Family Collaborative Commission: We had a report from the Vincentian Family Collaborative Commission (VFCC), coordinated by Fr. Joe Agostino. They are coordinating the celebration of the “*Year of Collaboration of the Vincentian Family*” starting Pentecost Sunday May 24, 2015 through Pentecost May 15, 2016. Ideas on observing this “*Year of Collaboration*” have been sent to Visitors and leaders of Vincentian Family branches in two of my recent letters.

Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change: We had a report from Fr. Giuseppe Turati, Coordinator of the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change. They sent us their ideas on the Vincentian Family Office and recommendations on the future composition of the VFEC.

FamVin Web Site: The website for the Vincentian Family (<http://famvin.org/>) will be under the newly established Office of the Vincentian Family. As Superior General, I am most grateful for the work that Fr. John Freund has pioneered over the last two decades. I congratulate Fr. John and his associates for their innovative achievements in making our Vincentian charism a digital and accessible presence worldwide. As Fr. Freund steps down, I am pleased to report that Fr. Aidan Rooney will become the Coordinator of the “FamVin” website. Fr. Aidan serves in the mission in El Alto, Bolivia and will continue to do so. They have a transition plan for continuity and increasing social network outreach on this quality, multi-language web site.

Islam-Christian Dialogue: We discussed the shape and form of a working group on Christian and Islam dialogue. This group will be under the Superior General and the Congregation. It will raise consciousness in the Vincentian Family on practical questions of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, to offer a means of responding in a Christian way to current conflicts.

One way to accomplish this goal is by workshops. It was also suggested this working group expand beyond Islam to become more inter-religious. The Superior General named Fr. Claudio Santangelo as coordinator of this working group. Fr. Claudio will draw membership from confreres interested in this area. Fr. Claudio was appointed to represent the Superior General on the Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue, sponsored by the Union of Superior Generals.

Conferences of Visitors: We moved into a discussion on the Conferences of Visitors, and began with the **Asia-Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC)**. Fr. Mathew Kallammakal attended their February meeting in India, with the Superior General, who was there for the opening. Among the topics discussed was the international Missions of Papua New Guinea, under the responsibility of the General Curia and the APVC. They spoke about their program of ongoing formation and they evaluated the effectiveness of their integration of the “Lines of Action” from the 2010 General Assembly. Finally, they spoke about the structure of the APPC and ways of reformulating it.

We received a letter from the President of the **European Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission (CEVIM)** asking the Superior General to write a letter of encouragement to members of CEVIM, so they might move forward and work cooperatively as provinces in Europe. Fathers Eli Chaves, Stan Zontak, and J. Alvarez will participate in the April CEVIM meeting in Barcelona.

We had a report from the Southern part of the **Conference of Latin American Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI-South)** regarding the process of reconfiguration between the Provinces of Argentina and Chile. They also described their activities common among CLAPVI-South,

such as shared personnel for popular missions and co-sponsoring the Internal Seminary. We received a report **CLAPVI-North** on their recent meeting in Guatemala, where they discussed the inter-provincial internal seminary. They also discussed reconfiguration among their provinces.

The **Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar (COVIAM)** meets in April to discuss the possibility of a common theologate. From the **National Conference of Visitors, USA (NCV)** a reconfiguration between New England and Eastern Provinces is being considered. The Superior General was asked to make a video to assist this process. Also, the NCV is making plans for celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Vincentians in the USA.

Council Calendars: The following is the calendar of the Superior General for the next three months. In March, he and Fr. Stanislav Zontak visit the International African Missions of Benin and Chad. He will go to Paris to participate in the Vow Renovation of the Daughters of Charity.

For Holy Week, the Superior General will be in Bolivia on the Daughters of Charity "Evangelization Boat." Easter week, he will join in the spiritual exercises of confreres in Bolivia. After this, he will gather with the Vincentian Family in Bolivia. He will then go on to Guatemala to visit the inter-provincial Internal Seminary, the Daughters of Charity and confreres of the Province of Central America, where he was Visitor before election as Superior General.

In early May, the Superior General will visit the Province of Madagascar. From mid-May until mid-June, he will participate in the General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, and attend a meeting of the Union of Superior Generals in Rome. Then he will open the meeting of Vincentian Bishops. Afterward, he will visit the International Mission in Punta Arenas, Chile.

I pray this Easter Season will deepen in you a gratitude for the gift of our Vincentian vocation, with a renewed zeal to serve Christ as he reveals himself in our Lords and Masters, the poor!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Lent 2015: Walking the Way of Reconciliation, Peace, and Humility



Rome, 18 February 2015
Ash Wednesday

My dear Brothers and Sisters of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

The season of **Lent** is a time ripe for reflection on the mysteries of our faith. Once again, we are invited join Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, to accompany him to Calvary, to wait quietly at the Tomb, and to know the glory of his Resurrection, which he shares with us. The Gospel for Ash Wednesday reminds us that, underneath the rich outward symbols of this season of grace, Lent is an inward journey: *“But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you”* (Mt. 6:6).

My theme for this Lenten reflection centers on **reconciliation, peace, and humility**, which I chose after insights I gained in pastoral visits

I made to apostolates of the Daughters of Charity in South Korea, Nagasaki, Japan, and Mauritania and Tunisia, Africa. Amidst the worries, tensions, pains, and sufferings we experience for our world and in our own lives, Lent provides us with many occasions to enter the 'inner room' of the soul to encounter and embrace a concert of consolations that come to us through *reconciliation, peace, and humility*.

Reconciliation

When I visited the Daughters of Charity in South Korea, they brought me to "Reconciliation Park," a strip of land between South and North Korea. Built after the Korean War in a collaborative effort between government and citizens, Koreans come there to reflect and pray for reconciliation on a peninsula made up of two nations, but one people who share the same history, language, and culture. The Daughters made our visit like a pilgrimage, as we walked slowly through the park, meditating and praying. This experience relates to Lent, which calls us to seek reconciliation in our own lives, starting with **inner reconciliation**, as we realize we are God's beloved children. Only then can we reach out to our families, neighbors, religious communities, work, ministries, and associations we belong to with gestures of reconciliation. In doing so, we deepen our bonds as brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we allow this spirit of reconciliation to permeate our lives, we can identify with the Lenten story of the Prodigal in the Scriptures. We who were dead "come to life again"; we who were lost "are now found" by our Father who wants to "celebrate and rejoice" with us (Lk. 15:32). Saint Vincent de Paul, whose life was given over to bringing about reconciliation between peoples of all strata of society, said: "The blessing of peace and reconciliation... is something so great and pleasing to God that He says to each of us: *"Inquire pacem et persequere eam"* (Search for peace and seek to attain it) (CCD: Vol. I, Letter 150, p. 214, 16 September 1633).

This Lent, let us we pray for reconciliation between nations (i.e., North and South Korea), regions, countries, and in our families and communities, so we may be people whose lives and actions mirror the reconciling love of Christ. Only through the person of Jesus can we truly achieve an authentic reconciliation with a lasting effect upon our Church and society.

Peace

A fruit of reconciliation is *peace*, which brings me to my second pilgrimage in Kobe, Japan, when visiting my Vincentian confreres and the Daughters of Charity. We went to Nagasaki, a city with the largest number of Catholics in Japan. As history records, Nagasaki endured

the atomic bomb on August 9, 1945. After this horrific experience, Japan, along with people of good will, sought a visible way to promote peace amidst this tragedy. They constructed a “Peace Park” that we visited, one filled with symbols of peace donated by nations and people across the world.

The central symbol that caught my attention was the statue of a man, who sits with one arm outstretched, and the other arm raised to heaven, which is meant to be a call for peace. With one foot on the ground and the other crossed over his knee, it is meant to symbolize that seeking peace entails a need for contemplation (a crossed foot), and action (a foot on the ground). The outstretched hand also symbolizes the need for all people to be peacemakers, and the hand reaching upward points to the need for divine assistance in bringing about true works of peace.

The root of reconciliation is peace, necessary for each of us, and it begins in our hearts. Only then can it take root in our families, religious communities, neighbors, work, ministries, and the associations to which we belong. As a Vincentian Family, we must strive to cultivate peace and promote it in any way possible. Saint Vincent reminds us that, “Charity demands that we strive to sow peace where it does not exist” (CCD: Vol. V, Letter 2054, p. 602, 23 April 1656).

This Lent provides an ideal time to pray for **peace**, as we live among a backdrop of constant threats of war, terrorism, and violence in our world. A movement toward reconciliation, whose fruit is peace, comes about in practicing the virtue of humility. I saw this virtue in action in a very powerful way during my visit to the Daughters of Charity in Mauritania and Tunisia.

Humility

To exercise their ministry of service to the poor in these countries, the Daughters of Charity must do so in an unassuming, humble way. In Mauritania, which claims to be 100% Muslim, the Daughters work with religious communities of Christian descent which are not recognized as visible entities in that country. In these countries, the Daughters practice great humility, both as individuals and as a community, because they work in secular service associations that serve the poor. They are not in charge, and they must work with others who direct their activities.

To live and work in such an environment demands reconciliation and inner peace with one’s status in life. Most of all, it calls forth a real humility, a “kenosis” to empty oneself. To live in an environment where you are not recognized nor acknowledged is difficult. It is more challenging when there is not the ability to make a public witness to the Church or to our Vincentian charism.

In so doing, this exercise in the virtue of humility is possible only by a strong interior life of prayer and mutual support in community. Letting go of the human ego needs for control and to seek approval and recognition is never easy. The presence of the Daughters in the Province of North Africa is a quiet, but firm witness to the virtue of humility. It enables the continuance of our charism in serving the poor, especially those living on the margins. These are God's and St. Vincent's poor, the little ones whose personal dignity is often discounted and even negated.

Daughters of Charity and members of the Vincentian Family, serve in similar situations across the world today. In their humble, often hidden service, they become one with the poor by their intentional witness. Saint Vincent said that "Humility consists in emptying ourselves completely before God, overcoming ourselves in order to place God in our heart, not seeking the esteem and good opinion of others, and struggling constantly against any impulse of vanity... Humility causes us to empty ourselves of self so that God alone may be manifest, to whom glory may be given" (CCD: Vol. XII, Letter 211, p. 247, 22 August 1659).

From my own experience, to work for reconciliation and gain *peace* in one's heart, we must acquire and practice the *virtue of humility*. This is best done by examining oneself with total honesty and openness before God. It leads us to what Saint Paul called a 'kenosis', an emptying of oneself. Our model is Christ, who "*although he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself, becoming a slave, coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance*" (Phil. 2:6-7). The humbling experience of 'emptying oneself' in the Christian life is not only an individual endeavor, but a core part of our identity as Church. Lent calls us to personal and communal conversion of heart.

A heart filled with mercy

Pope Francis' 2015 Lenten Letter is titled "*Make your hearts firm*" (Jas. 5:8), a fitting theme for our reflection. Only by practicing humility, peace, and reconciliation can our hearts become firm and be grounded in the mercy and love of Christ. Lent is the time to seek interior renewal in prayer, immersion in Scripture, the daily Eucharist, and living our Vincentian charism of service of the poor. All this calls for a firm heart. Listen to these words of our Holy Father:

A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong, steadfast heart closed to the tempter, but open to God. A heart that lets itself be pierced by the Spirit, to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And ultimately, a poor heart, one that realizes its own poverty

and gives itself freely for others. During this Lent, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord, “*Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum—Make our hearts like yours*” (Message of His Holiness, Pope Francis for Lent, 2015, p. 3).

May this Lent help us grow in love of Christ and our Vincentian charism, as we walk the way of reconciliation and take the path of peace, with “humbled and contrite hearts” (Ps. 51:19).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Announcement of Year of Collaboration for the Vincentian Family

Rome, 30 January 2015

Dear Leaders of the international Vincentian Family,

Each year, we invite the Vincentian Family to focus on a special theme allowing us to deepen an understanding of our shared Vincentian charism. We wish to make 2015 the “*Year of Vincentian Collaboration.*” Our theme will be “*Together in Christ we Vincentians make a Difference.*”

During the course of the year, we ask that the local, regional, and international levels the Vincentian Family explore ways to celebrate, connect, learn, and serve together. Our efforts will be coordinated by the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission (the VFCC). The Year of Collaboration will begin on the Feast of Pentecost, May 24, 2015, and end on the Feast of Pentecost, May 15, 2016.

We all know how collaboration is rooted in our charism as a Vincentian Family, especially in the example of the lives of our Founders. We also know that we will most effectively serve those who live in poverty only as we collaborate with them and one another in this ministry. We are offering three objectives to guide the events for this year.

1. **Celebrate:** a letter to the Vincentian Family which will be published soon will include suggestions for celebrations, on the two Feasts of Pentecost and around Vincentian Family feast days. There would be no international gatherings. The celebrations will take place on the local and regional levels.

We also plan to include under this objective the creation of a worldwide Day of Prayer on Sunday, September 27, 2015. The Vincentian Family will be invited to post their photos and prayers on the *Vincentian Collaboration* Facebook page as well as in *Famvin.org*.

2. **Connect and Learn:** we also plan to collect and share stories of collaboration in service posting them on Facebook and on *Famvin.org*. Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission members will also invite specific groups to post their work.

We will take this opportunity to learn more about each other, highlighting weekly a different branch of the Vincentian Family.

3. **Serve:** The testimony by Eli Chavez dos Santos, CM on collaboration will be posted. Family members will be invited to share their own stories of collaboration in service.

The previously mentioned VFCC oversaw the development of a formation experience on collaboration. The Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program (or VFCAP) was held in Paris in 2013 and 2014. Over 70 members of the Vincentian Family participated. They will also be asked to offer their own follow up or feedback (on video) regarding both their personal and their branch's efforts at collaboration. These will be posted online to help promote collaboration.

As you can see, we have a wealth of activities planned to mark this special year for the Vincentian Family. Thank you, in advance, for your assistance in promoting these activities among your branches and with your collaborators. And thank you, most especially, for the ways in which you model this virtue which gives our charism its special nature and impact.

As we continue our preparations for this yearlong celebration, I would also like to invite you to offer your reflection on collaboration. If you wish to participate, please send me a brief reflection on the following questions:

- a) What is your feeling about collaboration in the Vincentian Family?
- b) How are you collaborating with other branches of the Vincentian Family?
- c) What is your dream of the future for Vincentian Family Collaboration?

Please send me your thoughts by May 1, 2015. I also hope to invite national Vincentian Family leaders to make the same reflections and share them with their VF membership.

Sincerely,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Second Reflection by the Superior General on the Year of Collaboration

Rome, 15 March 2015
Feast of St. Louise de Marillac

Dear Members of the International Vincentian Family,

The following letter reiterates some ideas in my last correspondence of January 30 regarding the “Year of Collaboration,” but with more details on how to implement this yearlong plan. Our theme is *“Together in Christ we Vincentians make a Difference.”* We know that collaboration is rooted in our charism as a Vincentian Family, especially in the example of the lives of our Founders. We also know that we will most effectively serve those who live in poverty only as we collaborate with them and one another.

The Year of Collaboration will begin on the Feast of Pentecost, May 24, 2015, and end on the Feast of Pentecost, May 15, 2016. During the course of this year, we ask that the local, regional, and international levels of the Vincentian Family explore ways in which they may celebrate, connect, learn, and serve with one another. Our efforts will be coordinated by the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission (the VFCC). This letter contains recommendations from the VFCC for the coming year. There are three components relating to the events for this year:

- A. Celebrate
- B. Connect and Learn
- C. Serve

What follows are some ideas and resources to assist you as a member of the Vincentian Family in commemorating the Year of Collaboration.

A. CELEBRATE

We would like to highlight three special days to celebrate during the year: May 24, 2015 (Pentecost); September 27, 2015 (St. Vincent’s Feast); and May 15, 2016 (Pentecost). Here are suggestions for each of these days of celebration.

1. Thanksgiving: May 24, 2015: Gather with members of the Vincentian Family to give thanks to God and to celebrate together. Below are three readings of St. Vincent that you may include with your

prayer service or Mass of Thanksgiving. You may want to include time for testimony or a celebration of what has been done by the local Vincentian Family.

Options for readings of St. Vincent:

- a) TO JEAN DE FONTENEIL August 29, 1635; Coste, Vol. I, #204:
“I am also overwhelmed by the charity you have extended and keep on extending to my poor brother. Because you have done all this for the love of God, and because gratitude for so many kindnesses is beyond our power, I beg Our Lord, Monsieur, to be Himself both your thanks and your reward.”
- b) TO JEAN DE FONTENEIL December 7, 1634; Coste, Vol. I, #189:
“Now, for all that, Monsieur, I thank you most humbly and beg Our Lord Himself to be your thanks and reward and to shed upon you more and more abundantly His graces and blessings. O Monsieur, how my heart is filled with consolation every time the above-mentioned M. de la Salle writes to me about your zeal for the salvation of souls, your diligence in winning them over, the blessing Our Lord is bestowing on you, and the solid virtue you possess! I assure you, Monsieur, all that gives me a joy I cannot express to you and a very special fidelity in asking God to be pleased to continue for you and to increase the same graces within you.”
- c) TO ETIENNE BLATIRON February 14, 1648; Coste Vol. III, #1017: “The graces God is showering on your labors are the result of His pure mercy and not of our wretched prayers. We are poor people, more liable to turn aside His blessings than to draw them down. I thank His Divine Goodness for the zeal and fidelity He gives your heart and those who are with you. In fact, Monsieur, I am so touched by the use you make of these virtues and of many others that, when the opportunity arises to animate the Saint-Lazare community to its own perfection, I relate to it the examples that yours gives us of this. I tell them of your long labors, despite the weaknesses of some of your men, your patience in difficulties, your charity and support for one another, the gracious welcome, courtesy, and consideration outsiders find in each of you. So you see, Monsieur, that honey from your hive flows even into this house and serves as food for its children. O Dieu! What a source of consolation for the whole Company, but also what a motive for our little family to humble itself before God and to do ever better and better, since He is pleased to extend and multiply in this way the good it is doing even in places where it is not present!”

2. Reflection: September 27, 2015: This “24 Hours of Vincentian Prayer” is a time to reflect. Please include the *Vincentian Family Prayer* in your time of prayer. We suggest that you set time aside per-

sonally as well as with other members (branches) of the Vincentian Family to reflect on the present reality of the local Vincentian Family, being mindful of the emerging needs of those living in poverty in your region.

3. Action: May 15, 2016: Ask the Holy Spirit to bless us and move us into action locally as the Vincentian Family. We request that you use this quote of St. Vincent in your celebration, “May God be pleased to strengthen you and to establish great union among you; for you will be even stronger if you are all closely united” (VII: 473). Take time to reflect on the scripture readings of the day and these quotes from the AIC publication, “To Be a Prophetic Member of the Vincentian Family” and Sister Julma Neo, DC’s article “Remembering Vincent and Louise Two Great Prophets of Charity”:

- a) “In this world which is going awry, full of contradictions, the prophets are all those men and women who have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Kingdom, proclaiming the truths of our faith, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near and is promised to the poor, speaking out against all injustices which prevent God’s plans being fulfilled” (<http://www.aicinternational.org/pdf/publications/cahier5en.pdf>).
- b) “...If Vincent and Louise were in our midst today, how would they read today’s situation in the light of the Christ they wanted to follow? What word would they speak to us? How would they respond to the new situations that confront us today? What choices would they make?” 350th Anniversary Monthly Reflection (Reflection # 1) – by Sr. Julma C. Neo, DC (<http://vinformation.famvin.org/vincentian-formation-resources/prayerscelebrations-seasonal/350th-anniversary/350th-anniversary-monthly-reflection-1>).
- c) “Ours is a world radically different in many ways from that of Vincent and Louise. New questions force themselves upon us. In a world that has generated new forms of poverty, new faces of the poor, what and who should be our priorities? Vincent and Louise were constantly attentive to events as ‘locus’ for encountering the Spirit. In a world obsessed with the ‘instant’ and the ‘super fast’, how do we continue to be truly attentive and discerning?...” 350th Anniversary Monthly Reflection (Reflection # 1) – by Sr. Julma C. Neo, DC (<http://vinformation.famvin.org/vincentian-formation-resources/prayerscelebrations-seasonal/350th-anniversary/350th-anniversary-monthly-reflection-1/>).
- d) **Forging Ahead... Together:** “We are heirs of a great legacy, sons and daughters of two great prophets of charity. In this common heritage, we take pride. Our bonds are strengthened. With a vast membership in all the continents, we as Vincentian Family have

a great potential for making a difference in our time as did Vincent and Louise in theirs. We have the 'genes' of Vincent and Louise. We have their heart and their spirit. Fidelity to their legacy urges us to forge ahead together to be prophets of charity in today's world... to be prophetic and to generate hope..." (<http://www.aic-international.org/pdf/F-1-EN.pdf>).

4. Please post photos and/or videos of your celebrations to *Vincentian Collaboration* Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Vincentian.Collaboration>) and send them to *famvin.org* (<http://famvin.org/en/contact-us/>). There will be no international gatherings, apart from the meeting of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family in Rome (January 2016). These celebrations will take place on the local and regional levels.

B. CONNECT AND LEARN

It is very inspiring to discover more about our Vincentian Family, especially those branches that are not well known internationally. Learning more about each other will create a better environment for collaboration. Follow the Vincentian Family on the *Vincentian Collaboration* Facebook page and on *famvin.org* (as cited above). During each of the 52 weeks of the Year of Collaboration, we will highlight a branch of the Vincentian Family and thus get to learn more about each other. Once a month, we will publish stories of collaboration, highlighting how the Vincentian Family is working together. Through the same Facebook community and *famvin.org*, you are also invited to post your own experience of efficient collaboration in the service of the impoverished, within or beyond the Vincentian Family. There is so much happening and we could do so much more together!

C. SERVE

The previously mentioned VFCC oversaw the development of a formation experience on collaboration. The Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program (or VFCAP) was held in Paris in 2013 and 2014 (cf. <http://tinyurl.com/VFCAP>). Over 70 members of the Vincentian Family participated. We are asking them to post three-minute videos about what they learned during their time in Paris and how it has helped with their own efforts to promote collaboration in their respective regions or countries. We are also inviting participants from the 2015 and 2016 regional VFCAP experiences to do the same. These videos will appear on the *Vincentian Collaboration* Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Vincentian.Collaboration>) and on *famvin.org* over the coming months. Please visit and comment on what is there. We have much to learn from each other.

As you can see, we have a wealth of activities planned to mark this special year for the Vincentian Family. Thank you for all you do in collaboration with the Vincentian Family and for those living in poverty. Thank you, most especially, for the ways in which you model this virtue, which gives our charism its special nature and impact.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

From Vincentian Confrere to Vatican Cardinal

Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M.



John T. Maher, C.M.

Sunday, January 4, 2015 started out as a typical day for the Archbishop of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. After celebrating Sunday Mass, he enjoyed a midday meal with several of his resident diocesan priests, then settled down for a quiet afternoon of reading and prayer. This was the perfect time for **Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M.** to relax and nap, which he learned from his student days in Rome, in the daily “*buon riposo*.”

His time of rest ended shortly as his priest-secretary frantically knocked at the door. “We are getting calls from priests who say they heard on the radio that the Holy Father has named you a cardinal.” The Archbishop shrugged, told him not to believe what was on the radio, and began to read... and pray. “I thought perhaps I should re-read the story of Samuel and Eli in the first Book of Samuel, since it is either the Lord or the Holy Father who disturbed my sleep,” he said. Minutes later, his secretary returned saying, “We can confirm that you were named a cardinal today by Pope Francis at his weekly angelus address.” It was a truly surprising moment for the new Cardinal-

designate, as he reflected on what had brought him to this point in his life.

It began with his grandparents, fervent members of the Eastern Catholic Ethiopian (Ge'ez Rite) Church who moved from central to eastern Ethiopia to escape religious persecution. "They set an example for my parents and the ten of us children," Berhaneyesus said. "Their strength of conviction in putting our Catholic faith before all else stayed with my parents and all of us." Berhaneyesus' nine siblings today include four brothers and five sisters. All but one still live in Ethiopia. His first contact with the Vincentians came in a primary school run by the Christian Brothers. "A Vincentian, Fr. Fikre-Mariam Ghemetchu, (later, Apostolic Vicar of Nekemte Vicariate) gave a vocation talk on priesthood. Right away, I knew it was something I had to try."

The Lazarist School in Addis Ababa, staffed by Vincentians of the Netherlands, was where Berhaneyesus came to know the Congregation of the Mission. After graduation, he entered the novitiate, living in a rural area, experiencing a simple, prayerful community life and direct service to the poor. After taking vows, he studied philosophy and theology in London's Land Missionary Institute and Kings College. He returned to Ethiopia, and Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M. was ordained to the priesthood in the Congregation on July 4, 1976.

His first years of priesthood found doing pastoral work. It was a time of great upheaval in the world, and Ethiopia was no exception. Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia since 1930, had been deposed in a coup in 1974. The "Derg," a group of Marxist ideologues with military support came to power, and ruled until 1991. They sought out religious leaders for persecution. Berhaneyesus was a target, so they imprisoned him, along with other Ethiopian religious leaders.

"It was seven of the longest months of my life," he said in reflecting on his imprisonment. "It occurred in 1979-80 at the height of their power. First, they accused me of being a CIA agent, then, a Vatican spy. Finally, they charged me with being a parasite on Ethiopian Society." The most difficult part of prison was a month in solidarity confinement. "It was a perilous time for a couple of reasons", said Berhaneyesus. "First, it was known that putting one in solitary was often used as a cover to kill him, since the person was isolated from the prison population. Also, the guards would often take a prisoner out at night, simulate killing him, and return him to the cell."

"Secondly, the experience of being in solitary confinement was a terribly lonely one, as there was no one to talk with or anything to read. You had only yourself, and no human contact, light, or exercise. In retrospect, it was easy for me to see how people in solitary can end up having nervous breakdowns. You can lose all sense of time, place, and perspective in such a situation." So how did Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel endure this precarious time?

“Despite the horrors of prison and solitary confinement, I found it transformative. It led to a spiritual rebirth for me. I had nothing, literally nothing, in solitary, so I cried out to the Lord from the depths of my being. I truly felt the presence of Jesus in those dark days. When I returned to the prison population, they cheered. I was told that prisoners had often chanted my name so the guards would know I was not forgotten. This, I believe, was what kept me alive. So I resolved to be an example of service to my fellow prisoners. I started a garden to grow vegetables for the prison population. I made efforts to help serve the elderly and sick prisoners, so they would not be neglected in getting the very limited amounts of food and water that were given us.”

After release from prison, Berhaneyesus was forced to leave Ethiopia, so he went to Rome to study. He returned to Ethiopia determined to serve, and did so generously. His efforts to live the Vincentian charism and model leadership were noticed by Rome. In 1994, he was appointed the prefect of the Diocese of Jimma-Bonga. In 1997, he became Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Addis Ababa. In 1998, he was ordained Bishop, and in 1999, he became Archbishop of Addis Ababa. Sixteen years later, Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, C.M. was created Cardinal for Ethiopia, the second such, after His Eminence, Paulos Tzadua, who served from 1977-1998.

Ethiopia is a country of over 95 million people, with less than 1 percent Roman Catholic. The majority religions are Ethiopian Orthodox at 44 percent, Muslims at 34 percent, followed by Protestants at 18 percent. While Catholics are the smallest of all religious groups, there is a unique significance due to past and present events. The origin of Christianity in Ethiopia owes itself to a Church Father, St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. Today, with a small Catholic population, the Church has a major impact in Ethiopia. “Although Catholics are less than 1% of the population, we run over 400 schools and 43 health centers. We just started St. Thomas, the first Catholic University in Ethiopia. In fact, the one public university in the country until ours was started by Canadian Jesuits,” Berhaneyesus noted.

As one involved in Church leadership for over two decades, Berhaneyesus has experienced Ethiopia in rural and urban areas. He has seen it evolve from a place of chaos to one of stability. “Finally now we have economic growth. That has helped to create jobs and will a better environment for our people,” he noted. The relocation of the headquarters of the 34 country African Union to Addis Ababa is also a major step forward for Ethiopia, its people, and hopefully, the Church. Berhaneyesus serves as Chair of the Association of Members of the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA). He has two immediate goals. The first is to have the AMECEA admitted to membership in the African Union as an observer, akin to the Vatican’s status at the UN. The second is to have Pope Francis invited to address the African

Union. He is hopeful he can achieve both goals in his role as Cardinal of Ethiopia.

When asked about pressing social issues of the day in Ethiopia, Berhaneyesus mentioned several: human trafficking, which affects young women taken from rural areas to cities and out of the country; arms trading, where illegal weapons are sold to neighboring countries (such as Somalia) to destabilize governments and promote civil war; child soldiers, emerging in far rural areas for neighboring countries; and care for the influx of refugees. "They are approximately 200,000 Sudanese, 100,000 Somali, and 80,000 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. We are simply unable to receive and care for such a great number of refugees." He said the Church is working with government and charitable (NGO) agencies to assist these refugees.

In terms of other issues affecting the Church in Ethiopia, Berhaneyesus has two key goals: provide Catholic education to lift people out of poverty, and keep young people in the country, instead of past migration to other African nations. "This is why I started the Catholic University (St. Thomas) in Ethiopia, and why I am aligning it with established universities in Eastern Africa and the United States. I want our young people to learn the culture of Ethiopia and contribute to our society. Education is the key to making this possible. Besides our primary and secondary schools which serve Ethiopians regardless of religious creed, I want to provide our young people with an academic and professional university education to impact them throughout their lives."

What does this new Cardinal want for the Catholic people of Ethiopia? "Faith is a gift, one that we must pass on. Although we are small (.07% of the population), we exist to proclaim the God's reign on earth by our words and deeds. I believe in the efficacy of Jesus' parable of the mustard seed in Gospels. Jesus tells us that, *'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches'* (Mt. 13:31-32). The Church in Ethiopia has been and will continue I pray to be that mustard seed, enabling all to grow in grace and faith as disciples of Jesus."

Berhaneyesus Demerew Cardinal Souraphiel, C.M. has held many roles in his 66 years. They include son, brother, grandson, student, seminarian, Vincentian confrere, priest, pastor, professor, provincial, and member of the Catholic hierarchy. But the two most important roles he undertook were largely unknown – until now. They are **agent of reconciliation** and **life-saver**.

When Berhaneyesus returned to Ethiopia after studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, the "Derg" Marxist movement which had imprisoned him and killed so many, had been overthrown. Eventually,

a new constitution was written and an elected government prevailed. The “Derg” party members were jailed and sentenced to death for killing, torture, and jailing of many Ethiopians. Berhaneyesus received a request from the Deng group leader who had jailed him, asking to meet. This man, and other officials, had been condemned to death for crimes against the Ethiopian people.

Berhaneyesus went to the same prison where he had been held and met his former persecutor, who asked forgiveness. Berhaneyesus told him he had forgiven him long ago. “When he asked how this was possible, I looked at him and said, ‘If I did not forgive you, I could not live with myself, so I had to do it.’ The man broke down and cried, so we prayed together. Then he told me that he had many others to ask forgiveness of, and asked what to do. So I said I would bring religious of other denominations to meet with him and those who were guilty of these actions.”

When other religious leaders who had been imprisoned agreed to meet, Berhaneyesus set it up. It was a powerful encounter. As they were leaving, one of the condemned men said to him, “This may be too much to ask, but could you ask them to spare our lives?” He spoke with the religious leaders in private and they agreed to write the Ethiopian government and ask that these men not be executed, but that their sentences be commuted to life in prison. Eventually, the government relented, and their lives were spared.

So, besides the parable of the mustard seed, perhaps a scripture story more worthy of the new Cardinal is the ‘parable of the lost sheep’: *“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance”* (Lk. 15:7).

OF CURRENT INTEREST

Good Purposes, Bons Propos

A Developing Practice in our Vincentian Tradition

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Preliminary Remarks

Vincent de Paul initiated the tradition of pronouncing Good Purposes in the Congregation of the Mission in the 1640's, almost twenty years after its foundation. Centuries later, the practice continues. This essay will examine the history of Good Purposes and the development of this unique Vincentian tradition. Today, Good Purposes functions very differently in our process of formation, as a richer and more vital part of one's journey to commitment in the Little Company.

Out the outset, a few presuppositions need to be stated. The practice of pronouncing Good Purposes is known to everyone who has undergone Vincentian formation since the time of St. Vincent. However, the expression itself and their intent have little or no recognition outside the confines of the Congregation. Even those who know us well (such as the Daughters of Charity), have little understanding or awareness of our practice of making Good Purposes.

Furthermore, the experience and understanding of the role of Good Purposes has significantly changed over the last few decades. The practice has developed significantly, but not devolved into a different reality. However, no one consciously initiated the development, and most members of the Congregation are unaware of the transformation that has occurred.

Finally, though the focus of this essay on Good Purposes, there is an inseparable link between Good Purposes and Vincentian vows. Since Good Purposes are a stepping-stone or pathway to vows, the nature and distinctiveness of the vows must be examined.

Vincent de Paul's Insight

The main reference to Good Purposes in Vincent's writings is found in a letter to Fr. Louis Lebreton of November 14, 1640. "He was sent to Rome at the beginning of 1639 to further the affairs of the Company at the Roman Court, especially the question of vows" (CCD, Vol. II, 1, p. 17). Vincent tells him:

“Work patiently with your shepherds: what you told me about them thrilled me with pleasure because you can say with good reason *pauperes evangelizantur*. In the midst of that, labor at our other little affairs as we are doing here on our little Rules, which we are adapting as much as we can, to the ones mentioned to me. I think we shall decide to make the Good Purposes of living and dying in the Mission, the first year in the seminary...” (CCD, Vol. II, #496, p. 155).

Additionally, an unpublished document in French published in 1652 entitled “Rules of the Director of the Internal Seminary” alludes to the practice of taking Good Purposes:

“At the end of the first year, he will have them make a **firm commitment** to observe poverty, chastity, obedience and stability at the end of their retreat that he will have them make. His primary concern is to raise the seminarists in the spirit of humility, obedience, simplicity, mortification, cordiality, and devotion, and will show them the example of these as much as he can.”

For centuries, novices in the Congregation pronounced Good Purposes on the completion of the first of the two-year Internal Seminary program. It was a formal declaration of intent at midpoint of one’s Internal Seminary. Our present Constitutions articulate this practice: “One year after admission into the Congregation a member, according to our tradition, manifests by means of Good Purposes his intention of dedicating himself to the salvation of the poor for his entire life in the Congregation according to our Constitutions and Statutes” (C. 54 §2, p. 249).

From the time of St. Vincent, candidates were admitted into a two-year Internal Seminary. As his letter to Fr. Lebreton proposes, the custom of pronouncing Good Purposes happened on the completion of the first year. This cycle of expressing Good Purposes followed pronouncing perpetual vows one year later was the practice in the Congregation until the 1954 Constitutions (161, §4) were promulgated. From that time on, Good Purposes were still taken at the end of one’s first year in the Internal Seminary. However, on completion of the second year of the Internal Seminary, three-year temporary vows were introduced as a universal congregational practice for the first time. Unlike the changes that occurred with the vows, the taking of Good Purposes remained unaffected and was pronounced at midpoint in the Internal Seminary.

Interestingly, the taking of temporary vows had already been initiated in some provinces before the constitutional change of 1954 due to the obligation of military service by seminarians. The Congregation in France, as well as other European countries that fell under similar military obligations introduced the previously unknown tem-

porary vows, which became a standard practice in those provinces (See: RYBOLT, *General History V*, p. 80).

Another reason why pronouncing perpetual vows after the second year of the Internal Seminary was discontinued was because many seminarists were not 21 years of age at the conclusion of their Internal Seminary, as required by Canon Law.

Furthermore, the 1918 Revised Code of Canon Law sought standardization of vow processes of all religious communities. The Congregation acceded and introduced the practice of having seminarists pronounce three-year temporary vows before taking perpetual vows. Braga noted, "The text is presented in a very juridical form and spirit and in it a schema of 'religious life' prevails in which the Congregation is seen compelled by the mentality of the Roman organisms, which tend toward an often unwarranted standardization" (BRAGA, p. 14).

Yet again in the 20th century, the taking of vows has undergone considerable transitions and even upheaval. However, pronouncing Good Purposes remained unaffected because the juncture at which they are taken has never changed. However, certain ambiguities about Good Purposes, especially now, necessitate interpretation of their meaning. Our experience and understanding of their significance has undergone some important developments.

The Development of Good Purposes

As noted, for centuries, seminarists in the Congregation pronounced Good Purposes on the completion of the first of a two-year Internal Seminary. It was a formal declaration of intention at the midpoint. The seminarist expressed his intention through a formula similar to this:

"Lord, my God, I, NN. declare my intention of faithfully dedicating myself in the Congregation of the Mission, for the whole time of my life, to the evangelization of the poor, after the example of Christ evangelizing. Therefore, I propose to observe, with the help of your grace, chastity, poverty, and obedience, according to the Constitutions and Statutes of our Institute" (Statute 21, §1).

Today the practice and understanding of Good Purposes have developed in a number of ways:

- Good Purposes are no longer pronounced at the midpoint of a two-year Internal Seminary program.
- The Internal Seminary is now one year. On being received into the Internal Seminary, one becomes an admitted member of the Congregation of the Mission. Good Purposes are now taken at the completion of the Internal Seminary year.
- Because of formational and structural changes within the Congregation introduced by the 1984 Constitutions and Statutes,

Good Purposes now take on a different perspective and experience in one's life in the Congregation of the Mission.

On completion of the Internal Seminary, admitted members in most provinces begin their formal theological training to prepare for diaconate and priestly ordinations. Brother candidates often are asked to start specialized training for work in the mission. For the next few years, they live out their proclaimed intention of faithfully dedicating themselves to the salvation of the poor for their entire life in the Congregation of the Mission.

Currently, admitted students live for several years with Good Purposes, and not for a year as they did in the past. Good Purposes has shifted into a time of maturation of their lives in the Congregation and of discerning and preparing for incorporation and vows.

To further describe this reality and our understanding of the meaning of Good Purposes, a comparison can be made to what the admitted man's peers in the world are going through. There is a custom in society that parallels the experience of Good Purposes namely, it is similar to the engagement experience of couples preparing for marriage. The period of engagement is about fidelity to a relationship, exclusivity, furthering one's knowledge, deepening the commitment, realigning values, furthering an identity. It is when inner commitments are reshaped in the light of a relationship. This parallels what the time of Good Purposes is meant to be for the seminarist.

Good Purposes: A Declaration of Intent

Good Purposes are a declaration of intent, but they are not vows. The formula is faithful to the centuries old tradition of taking Good Purposes in the Congregation. The first sentence describes a desire to perpetually dedicate one's life in the Congregation in fulfillment of following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. The words describe the content and meaning of the vow of stability. The second sentence articulates intention of the admitted member to observe chastity, poverty and obedience *as these vows are described and understood in our Constitutions* (Italics added).

The formula of Good Purposes first addresses stability. Why stability? One of the troubling realities of the Congregation of the Mission in its initial years was the retention of membership. Many men zealously labored in the Congregation for a number of years, but when difficulties arose, they became overwhelmed and drifted away. Others had parish obligations from their bishops that they had to attend to (although they were free enough to give occasional missions). These constraints kept them from leaving their dioceses. An additional number were, apparently, less interested in community life. Vincent intuitively perceived that some construct to stabilize and perpetuate a

commitment to follow Christ the evangelizer of the poor for the whole of one's life was lacking. In time, he was able to put a name to that dynamism, the vow of stability.

It is thought-provoking to browse the literature written today on institutional planning and development and see the term "institutional stabilization" used as a hallmark of a successful organization. Vincent saw this challenge and need almost 400 years ago. How could the drifting away of members be reversed? Vincent believed that vows would be the means to bring about institutional stabilization, but not religious vows. As our Constitutions state: "In order to accomplish in a more effective and enduring manner the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, the members of the Congregation takes vows of stability, chastity, poverty and obedience according to the Constitutions and Statutes" (C. 3.3).

When the admitted member pronounces Good Purposes, at the close of his Internal Seminary year, he declares his intention to continue in the Congregation for the rest of his life, to seek permanent incorporation, and to pronounce vows in the Congregation of the Mission. The 1980 General Assembly also believed that a heightened awareness that the Vow of Stability is a commitment to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the poor (in word and deed). It is a missionary vow, a vow to embrace the end of the Congregation. The perspective is clear in the Constitutions, but definitely highlighted in the *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission* (p. 13).

The Distinctive Reality of Vincentian Vows

Through the years, a variety of different terms has been used to describe our vows. They were termed simple, reserved, not public, privileged, perpetual, and even private. The Constitutions and Statutes (1984) definitively state that the vows of the Congregation of the Mission are non-religious, perpetual, and reserved. When the Code of Canon Law deals with the topic and issue of vows, it states that there are two kinds of canonical vows, public vows and private vows. A vow is public if a legitimate superior accepts it in the name of the Church. Otherwise, it is private. Any legitimate authority, e.g., a pastor, can dispense private vows (CCL, 1196).

We describe our vows as non-religious because they are not accepted in the name of the Church, as are religious vows. Our vows are made directly to God, and are not mediated through the Community as are public vows. Our Constitutions simply state, "The taking of vows must be done in the presence of the superior or of a member appointed by him" (C. 58 1). This confrere is merely witnessing the taking of vows, and not receiving them. Our present Constitutions and any Vincentian

documents referring to vows never use the verb *profess* in reference to our vows.

Our members “take” vows, “embrace” vows, or “pronounce” vows. The words ‘profess’ or ‘profession’ are terms used exclusively for religious vows. Profession is an act by which a person publicly dedicates oneself by permanent commitment to religious life. In addition, these vows are formally received or acknowledged by the Church. The expressions “profess” or any of its derivatives are not used in our present Constitutions. However, in our 1954 Constitutions, in the chapter entitled “The Nature of the Vows,” those expressions were used nine times in five paragraphs. They incorrectly refer to us as professing vows, as professed, as making a three-year profession, etc. (1954 Const. 160-164). Our 1984 Constitutions eliminated all such expressions.

In Vincent’s time, the notion of a religious profession had two basic dimensions: “leaving the world” and “tending to perfection” (SCHNEIDERS, 1986, 99). Today, there is a new, transformed understanding of religious profession. Schneiders observes that, “religious attempt to structure their lives in such a way that they have the necessary liberty to relate prophetically to the world” (100). But in the 17th Century, religious vows meant a renunciation of the world, or even a flight or separation from society. In addition, for women religious life was presumed to be a cloistered existence. Vincent saw the purpose of the Congregation as not fleeing the world, nor to be in an adversarial relationship with society. He saw us as ‘secular;’ to be in the world, part of the world, with a readiness to go to any part of the world to evangelize the poor.

Another traditional notion saw religious profession as attending to one’s own sanctification. Even today, Canon Law continues to affirm that tending to perfection is what religious life is about: “Contemplation of divine things and assiduous union with God in prayer is to be the first and foremost duty of all religious” (CCL, 663.1). Establishing the Congregation of the Mission as an organization of professed religious did not harmonize with Vincent’s vision of our identity. Our non-religious Vincentian vows were meant to both embrace and enhance our end, namely, to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. We, too, are called to holiness. As our Common Rules and Constitutions state, we are to “make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself” (CR I, 1) “in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation” (C. 1.1). The holiness that we attain is not only for our own sanctification, but to enhance the Mission.

We describe our vows as perpetual. Historically, the only vows in the Congregation were and are now perpetual. However, from the 1954 Constitutions to the revised ones in 1984, an anomaly occurred, and the Congregation took on the practice of having men who completed

the Internal Seminary pronounce three-year temporary vows. The 1984 Constitutions have returned us to our original practice of only pronouncing perpetual vows in the Congregation.

The Code, in describing Societies of Apostolic Life, states that we are not religious, and as such, we do not profess religious vows. It notes, “among these there are societies in which the members embrace the evangelical counsels by some bond defined in the constitution” (CCL, 655). Our own proper law is the unique source for defining and explaining Vincentian vows. Our vows are exclusively perpetual.

Finally, our vows are reserved. Following the constitutional assemblies of 1968-1969 and the General Assembly of 1974, the “transitional” Constitutions and other materials published (see Fr. Braga’s essay, “The New Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Notes”), our vows are described as private vows. “The Community found itself before the need of questioning itself concerning some points, including fundamental ones, about its structure and its life, and to define itself in new juridical terms, as outlined by the new Code. For example, how should the nature of its ‘secularity,’ the nature of its simple vows, private but privileged, some structures of its organization be interpreted? Does its ‘secularity’ place it securely from being incorporated among the real religious institutes? Or does it allow it to be placed among the societies without vows?” (BRAGA, 2002, 16)

However, with the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983, the Congregation was able to find its proper place within the appropriate section under the title of Societies of Apostolic Life. As mentioned, the new code now only recognizes two types of vows: “A vow is public if it is accepted in the name of the Church by a legitimate superior; otherwise it is private” (CCL, 1192, 1). Private vows can be dispensed or commuted by the local ordinary or a pastor. Vincentian vows are reserved, and only the Pope or Superior General can dispense them (C., 55.1.). The classification of reservation prevents us from calling our vows simply private.

When the admitted member takes Good Purposes, he declares that he intends to observe stability, chastity poverty and obedience *according to the Constitutions and Statutes of our Institute* (Italics added). And these vows are non-religious, perpetual, and reserved.

Conclusion

Good Purposes historically were a declaration of intent taken before beginning the second year of the Internal Seminary. The novice stated that he intended to dedicate his whole life to the evangelization of the poor, by following Jesus Christ, and observing chastity, poverty and obedience according to our Constitutions and statutes. Twelve months later the novice pronounced vows confirming his intention.

Good Purposes addressed one of the most difficult problems the nascent Congregation was facing. Confreres continued to withdraw from the community because of fatigue or other factors. Vincent saw the need for creating a bond in the form of vows to stabilize the Congregation. Good Purposes, which were pronounced by the youngest members of the Congregation after completing their first year of formation, made it emphatically clear that one intended to make a lifetime commitment to the Mission.

The practice of taking Good Purposes now in formation continued until the promulgation of the 1984 Constitutions. One of the structural changes the revised Constitutions implemented was the reduction of the Internal Seminary from two full years to one. This intended structural change was happily received, but it had an unintended or unanticipated outcome. Good Purposes were no longer a formula pronounced at the midpoint of one's Internal Seminary, but were expressed as the culminating event of one's spiritual year. The length of time that one would be living with Good Purposes could be two or three years or longer.

This development of Good Purposes and its change had little effect on the average confrere working in the provinces. However, the admitted member, those accompanying him in formation and the formation community to which he is attached are aware of the change. The admitted confrere has declared to the community and others his intention of faithfully dedicating the rest of his life to the evangelization of the poor and following Christ. In a few years, he will become an incorporated member of the Congregation and pronounce vows. In his dedication, behaviors and fidelity, he will live out what he has said when he pronounced Good Purposes. They guide and challenge his formational growth for the immediate future.

The analogy of engagement is applicable here. If one (or both of the engaged couples) is unfaithful to the relationship, doesn't see the engagement as a priority, refuses to deepen their mutual commitment, or are unwilling to change or reshape things in the light of this relationship, perpetual commitment is not possible.

If a formator is observing similar responses in an admitted student in post Internal Seminary years, the same is true. If the admitted member manifests a variety of behaviors including a lack of fidelity to community life, prayer, and to the service of the poor, or if his vocational life is marked by indifference, or he's ambiguous about his identity, and if there are questions about his honesty, or if he's become reluctant to commit, then perpetual commitment is not an option. The years in Good Purposes need to give concrete affirmation and attest to his declared intention to perpetually embrace stability and the evangelical counsels.

Good Purposes have undergone a significant change in our present formational process. The practice and the tradition has not merely been developed; it has been transformed. However, as can happen, one modification can have unintended or inadvertent impact on something affiliated with it. This is what happened to Good Purposes. Today they function very differently in our process of formation. They are now a richer and much more vital dimension of one's journey to commitment in the Congregation of the Mission.

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A Model for Mentoring in the Vincentian Family

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Homer recounts that Odysseus, as he left for the Trojan War, placed his son Telemachus under the tutelage of an old friend named Mentor. Since then, countless “Mentors” have held a special place in human history. They have prepared princes and princesses to be kings and queens. They have trained artists and musicians. They have guided students at schools and universities and in novitiates and seminaries.

The first modern use of the now commonly employed term “mentor” can be traced to the French Sulpician theologian-bishop François Fénelon, who was tutor to the son of King Louis XIV. In 1699, he published *The Adventures of Telemachus*, whose lead character was Mentor. The book became immensely popular, one of the most frequently reprinted publications in the 18th century. The modern-day meaning of “mentor” stems from Fénelon’s work: a guide in life, usually a more experienced person, a trusted friend, a counselor, a teacher, a spiritual director.

The book is actually a thinly-veiled allegorical attack upon the absolutism of Louis XIV. It aimed to instruct Louis’ heir in the duties of royalty. Fénelon takes his hero, Telemachus, through a series of adventures which illustrate the author’s thesis that an ideal monarch should be a man of peace, wisdom, and simple ways of life.

The Adventures of Telemachus so angered Louis XIV that he banished Fénelon from Versailles, confining him to his diocese, where he remained, with few exceptions, for the rest of his life. Yet, a few years later, people were hailing the young successor, King Louis XV, as a new Telemachus and flattering his tutors as new “Mentors.” Fénelon’s book set the standard for future works about the education of leaders. It became a favorite of Jean Jacques Rousseau and of Thomas Jefferson.

Actually, Mentor in Fénelon’s book is a much more developed wisdom figure than Mentor in *The Odyssey*. In *The Odyssey*, it is really Athena, disguised as Mentor, who is the wisdom figure.¹

¹ *The Odyssey*, XIII, 256-310. Actually, Mentor sometimes flubbed the job, but Athena, the goddess of wisdom, assumed the lead role in guiding Odysseus’ son. Taking on Mentor’s appearance, she gave Telemachus sage advice on how to escape from danger. Finally, she revealed herself to Telemachus as a beautiful woman and told him: “You did not know me, Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus: she who is ever by your side to protect you in all your adventures.”

Mentoring today

I often thank God for some wonderful mentors who have helped me throughout life, sharing with me the time-tested wisdom they had acquired:

- my parents, who transmitted to me so many core values;
- several theology professors who taught me to analyze and reason;
- a teacher in high school and another in college who made good literature come alive for me;
- two other teachers who communicated to me their enthusiasm for art and music;
- a Provincial Superior who, by example, modeled for me and others what servant leadership is about;
- a Spanish confrere whose competence and intellectual curiosity sparked in me a deeper interest in Vincentian studies.

Sometimes mentors enter upon our life's stage suddenly and exit from it rapidly, quite unaware of the impact they have had. When I was a young priest, I taught a course on Social Justice at Attica, a maximum security prison in upstate New York. I was told that nine of the fourteen students in my class were murderers. I carefully prepared 15 3-hour sessions, but in the first session there was so much lively discussion that I got only halfway through my material. As I was leaving the prison, I found myself walking beside a much older professor, who, probably noticing that I was young and nervous, asked me how it had gone. "OK," I said, "but there was so much discussion that I didn't cover all the material I wanted to treat." He replied: "Let them talk. It's probably the only opportunity they have for reasonable debate. Guide the discussion, but encourage it." Looking back, I think that my semester at Attica was the best teaching experience I ever had. And I never saw the older professor again.

All readers, I'm sure, have had mentors like that. In this article, I will focus on how important good mentoring is, especially for the young, and will offer several suggestions about the mentoring process. Mentors guide us on the human journey. They share with us not just "content" or specialized knowledge, but something of themselves. They draw us forward on the road to authenticity.

Mentoring on the Road to Authenticity

The great 20th-century philosopher/theologian Bernard Lonergan states that authenticity on the human journey involves fidelity to five fundamental imperatives in being human:

- be attentive;
- be intelligent in sifting through life's experience;

- be reasonable;
- be responsible; and
- be in love with God and God's creation.

On the journey, we can get stuck at any one of those five steps. Often, a good mentor can help us break through.

To discern where the grace of the moment lies requires attention. But some remain habitually inattentive; they fail to observe. The contemporary world's multiple stimuli diffuse their attention. The many sounds surrounding them deafen them to the deepest voices of reality. As the gospels put it, they see, but do not see; they hear, but do not hear.

Some, though attentive and observant, do not sift through life's varied experiences intelligently. Their framework remains narrow. They fail to understand the broader context for events or to distinguish between experiences people have in common and experiences in which they differ. They neglect to analyze commonalities and different experiences rigorously. Socrates states that their lives are useless, that the unexamined life is not worth living.

We have all met people too who, while attentive and intelligent, are, unfortunately, not reasonable. Rather than judging on the basis of the data that lies before them, they react out of prejudice. Already sure of their own opinions, they cling to them, denying the data that lies before them and refusing to enter into the dialogue and exchange of ideas that leads to wise conclusions.

Beyond that, there are others who, while they are reasonable and know precisely what ought to be done, simply resist doing it. For one reason or another, they refuse to act responsibly.

The fifth step – falling in love with God and God's creation – is, for everyone, a challenge worth facing. It can knock us off our feet at times, but, if we struggle forward again and again, we find ourselves entering into an unpredictable but life-giving journey. As we discover that God loves us and gives us the gifts of creation – and that we had nothing at all to do with it – we begin to experience life with gratitude.

When we fall gratefully in love, everything changes. Being in love fulfills our deepest longings. It brings "a deep-set joy that can remain despite failure, privation, pain... It brings a radical peace..."²

Mentoring is companionship someone on his or her journey through the five steps Lonergan describes. Finding a good mentor is a great grace. Since the initial relationship of Jesus and his disciples, it has been a special grace in the Church, which has a rich tradition of mentoring.³

² BERNARD LONERGAN, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 105.

³ Reading the gospels, it is clear that Jesus does not just "teach" the twelve, though, in fact, he instructs them constantly. Beyond that, he "mentors" them.

A wise mentor may take on various mentoring roles; for example:

- a soul friend or spiritual guide;
- a listening ear / a sounding board;
- an expert on a particular subject matter;
- a coach and confidence builder;
- a role model in a profession;
- a networker.

Mentoring in the Vincentian Tradition

The word “mentor,” in its modern sense, did not exist at the time of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, though, in fact, they mentored many followers and developed effective mentoring techniques.

Vincent teamed young missionaries up with experienced ones so that the latter might model for the former how to preach to the poor in the countryside. He also wanted missionaries to be attached to seminaries, so that those preparing for the priesthood might learn from those who had labored for years in active ministry. He wrote tens of thousands of letters over the last 35 years of his life. Many of them are good examples of mentoring, offering wise advice to priests, brothers, sisters and lay men and women.

There are few letters that mentor more beautifully than the one Vincent wrote in 1656 to Antoine Durand, a young new superior at the seminary in Agde:⁴

“The direction of souls is the art of arts. It was the work of the Son of God on earth; it was the reason why He came down from heaven, was born of a Virgin, gave every moment of His life, and, in the end, suffered a very painful death. That’s why you must have a very high esteem for what you’re going to do..

...neither philosophy, nor theology, nor discourses can act in souls; Jesus Christ must be involved in this with us – or we with Him – so that we may act in Him and He in us, that we may speak as He did and in His Spirit, as He himself was in His Father, and preached the doctrine He had taught Him; those are the words of Holy Scripture.

So, Father, you must empty yourself of self in order to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ. You know that ordinary causes produce the effects of their nature: a sheep produces a sheep, etc., and a human another human; likewise, if someone who directs and forms

Mark 3:13-14 tells us: “He appointed twelve whom he also named apostles that *they might be with him* and he might send them forth to preach.”

⁴ SV XI, 342 ff.

others and speaks to them is animated with only a human spirit, those who see him, listen to him, and strive to imitate him will become totally human: no matter what he says and does, he'll inspire them with only the appearance of virtue, and not the substance; he'll communicate to them the spirit with which he himself is animated, as we see that masters impress their maxims and ways of acting firmly on the minds of their disciples.

On the contrary, if a Superior is filled with God and with the maxims of Our Lord, all his words will be efficacious; virtue will go out of him that will edify others, and all his actions will be so many beneficial instructions that will bring about good in those who are aware of them.

...adopt this holy maxim – acting toward those with whom you're going to live *quasi unus ex illis* (like one of them) – telling them from the outset that you haven't come to lord it over them but rather to serve them; do that inside and outside the house, and you'll do well."

Louise, too, throughout her life, mentored the young, often poorly educated, women who entered the Daughters of Charity. While Vincent gave frequent conferences to the growing community of Daughters in Paris, it was Louise who was the sisters' daily mentor, living with them, educating them, guiding them, and offering them spiritual direction. Louise, like Vincent, also mentored countless sisters by her letters. She realized how difficult it was to be in charge. In a letter remarkable both for its evangelical tone and its frankness, she told a Sister Servant:⁵

"Enter upon this charge in the spirit of him who said that he had come not to be served but to serve. Listen to him willingly when he tells us that those who humble themselves shall be exalted, and that the one who would be the greatest must begin by becoming the least, so as to be great in the sight of God. Finally, my dear Sister, look upon yourself as the beast of burden of the house."

While both Vincent and Louise did abundant group formation, they also fostered, over the years, a number of personal mentoring techniques that perdure in the Vincentian Family to this day:

- placing the inexperienced with a wise, experienced person, particularly during the early years of service;
- sending people on mission two by two;
- urging them to engage in regular spiritual direction;
- assigning mature, well-rounded people as directors of the internal seminary and schools of philosophy and theology;
- writing frequent letters to those seeking counsel.

⁵ SW 118.

The mentoring tradition did not end with Vincent and Louise. There are other outstanding examples in the history of our Family.

I have enormous admiration for Rosalie Rendu, whose grave I visit whenever I go to Paris. Besides being a prodigious worker who initiated extraordinary projects for the marginalized, she was also a wonderful mentor. The house where she lived became, informally, a “formation house,” to which her superiors sent young sisters. From Rosalie they learned firsthand how to serve the poor. Twenty-two postulants lived with her over the years. Eighteen sisters prepared for vows under her direction. At the time of her death, 12 sisters lived in her community; half of them had been sisters for less than four years.

Among those whom she mentored was Frederic Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Admirably, the Society continues to this day its original mentoring practice of sending members to visit the poor two by two. Ozanam, like Vincent de Paul, was a wonderful letter-writer and mentored many by that means. He writes about topics as varied as marriage, family difficulties, church and civil politics, and the newly-formed Society of St. Vincent de Paul. A good example is a letter he wrote to a friend in 1852:

“Truth must be within the reach of the lowliest, and religion must rest upon evidence accessible to the most insignificant. After experiencing many doubts, after having drenched my pillow many and many a night with tears of despair, I rested my faith upon an argument which any mason or coal digger may take hold of. I said to myself that since every people have a religion, good or bad, it is clear that religion is a universal, perpetual, and consequently legitimate need of humanity. God, who created this need, has consequently pledged Himself to satisfy it; there must, therefore, be a true religion.”⁶

Mentoring Core Values to the Young

I suggest below a series of core values which, I trust, mentors in the Vincentian Tradition, will transmit to new members. Sometimes mentors will teach these values explicitly through words, but much more often they will communicate them by the way they relate to the poor and to their companions in the service of the poor.

1. *Recognizing and affirming the sacred dignity of all; treating them with reverence and respect as valued human persons*

Central to St. Vincent’s spirituality was his affective and effective love for the most marginalized in society. He acknowledged that those on the margins are sometimes difficult to love, but he saw them as the

⁶ Letter to M.H., written on June 16, 1852; cf. *Œuvres Complètes* de A.F. Ozanam (Paris, 1865) XI, 385.

icon of the suffering Christ and urged his followers to love them as they would love Christ or as they would want to be loved themselves. For Vincent, all had a sacred dignity as children of God. At the same time, he saw that each had a unique story, unique life circumstances, and a unique calling in the world. It was this conviction that gave birth to the multiple works that he and Louise de Marillac initiated for so many marginalized people.

In that same spirit, the Vincentian Family is committed to creating an inclusive, welcoming environment in which the most marginalized feel genuinely respected as persons – regardless of race, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, employment, economic status, health, intelligence, achievement or any other differentiating characteristic. It is not what individuals do or what they have that gives them a claim on respect; it is simply being human that establishes their dignity.

2. Attending to the whole person

St. Vincent loved to say that we minister to the poor “spiritually and corporally.” He used this phrase in speaking to the three principal groups he founded: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. He tells the Daughters of Charity that they should tend not only to bodily needs, but also share their faith with the poor by their witness and their words.⁷ And he warns the members of the Congregation of the Mission that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms. Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, even the most abandoned.⁸

So, Vincent encouraged his followers to examine various elements in the lives of the poor to determine what their most urgent needs were: education, job opportunities, nourishment, health care, and spiritual care. He focused on the whole person and urged his followers to treat the person holistically.

Those who work with young people know, perhaps better than anyone else, that, though schools have a special focus on academics, human growth is much more complex than intellectual development. It involves value formation, religious experience, service-learning, cultural development, and the give-and-take of daily living. Those who successfully journey along life’s many various streets acquire broad human experience. Those who have walked on only a few streets are likely to be narrow.

⁷ SV IX, 59 and IX, 593.

⁸ SV XII, 87.

Attending to the whole person is a very varied challenge. It involves helping young people choose their own personal vocation, their mission in life, their career. It involves counseling them about moral and health-related issues like the norms that govern responsible sexual behavior or the use of alcohol or drugs. Today it presents the relatively new challenge of helping them work out a reasonable, healthy, disciplined use of the media.

3. *Building community, valuing relationships, modeling an ethic of social responsibility*

Vincent knew how to gather people together. He built communities in the service of the marginalized. He knew how to network. He became famous as an organizer. He brought together rich and poor, young and old, clergy and lay, men and women. He had the ability to recognize and call forth people's gifts. He saw that collaboration was the key to success in serving the poor. So, he forged bonds, built bridges, and fostered unity among very diverse groups of people.

He knew how to draw these people into his captivating vision of life. On his one side was Anne, the Queen of France, a woman of broad culture and also of political intrigue; on his other side was Marguerite Naseau, a peasant girl who did not know how to read or write. He drew together women and men of every rank in society, by sharing his vision with them and getting them excited about it.

Critics of contemporary society note how prominent individualism is. But, contrary to the persistent tendency toward self-absorption, the human person is essentially social. Human flourishing demands that young people have a sense of mission that transcends themselves, that they be connected relationally with others, and that they build with others communities of life and interest.

4. *Valuing transparency, living with integrity*

Simplicity, or what today we call "transparency" or "authenticity," was central for St. Vincent. He said: "Simplicity is the virtue I love most."⁹ "It is my gospel."¹⁰ He tells us again and again that people are attracted to those who speak and live simply, who are transparent in what they say and do.

How wonderful it would be if we were able to say consistently of the members of our Vincentian Family: "She is so integral in her values." "He is so transparent in what he thinks and says."

⁹ SV I, 284.

¹⁰ SV IX, 606.

One of the fundamental characteristics of good mentors is that they have developed the ability to listen to others, to speak with them simply and transparently, and to encourage them on the road toward authenticity. Douglas Steere, an influential ecumenical observer at Vatican II, once stated: "To 'listen' another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service any human being ever performs for another."

5. Practicing the wise stewardship of resources

Through his life, Vincent negotiated detailed contracts and wrote precise rules as he set up all the groups he founded. He wanted those groups to be firmly established so that their service to others would be long-lasting. The contracts provided for the financial stability of the groups. The Rules conveyed the structure and described the charism and the spirit of the groups he founded. Both the contracts and the Rules played a foundational role in preserving these groups into the future. It is helpful to note that Vincent saw no conflict between trusting in Divine Providence and providing for the future by laying firm financial foundations and setting up structures that would make his projects sustainable.

Social critics tell us that materialism, like individualism, is one of the prevailing temptations of modern society. Recently, the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace issued a remarkable document entitled "The Vocation of the Business Leader – a Reflection".¹¹ It outlines six practical principles of business, based on respect for human dignity and pursuit of the common good. Can we mentor young people to use the gifts of creation as responsible stewards, channeling them toward the common good?

Mentoring Leadership Skills to the Young

Besides mentoring values, we can also mentor skills. Of course, prior professional training is essential for acquiring certain skills: being a treasurer, offering psychological assistance, becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a theology professor – all require professional preparation. But having a wise mentor is often the key to growth in the exercise of those skills.

Young people can develop leadership skills by working side by side with competent leaders. In recent years, for example, universities have been providing mentoring programs for prospective presidents. Care-

¹¹ The document can be found online at: <http://www.pcgp.it/dati/2012-05/04-999999/Vocation%20ENG2.pdf>

fully chosen candidates “shadow” a good president to see how he or she exercises authority.

Could the same be done for Provincial Superiors? For national and international leaders in AIC or the Society of St. Vincent de Paul? For treasurers on all levels?

Within our many branches, could mentoring programs be set up that will foster good future leadership? In July 2012 the Society of St. Vincent de Paul offered a National President’s Training Program in which 27 Presidents took part. “Role playing” occupied a significant place on the agenda, so that the Presidents learned from each other’s experiences.

Fr. Greg Gay, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, has established a “Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission” to design a leadership formation process that will assist the various branches in their service of those living in poverty.

An Action/Reflection Model for mentoring in the Vincentian Tradition

Years ago, I worked with a very insightful priest. Often he reacted critically to phrases that people used. When they said that someone was “very experienced,” he might respond: “Yes, but he never learns anything from his experience.” When people spoke of the courses or workshops that they had engaged in as part of their “ongoing formation,” he might remark: “It’s not courses and workshops that change us; it’s reflecting on and learning from our experience.”

Today, there are many tools for reflection, especially in service-learning programs at schools and universities. Let me propose, for the use of mentors, a simple, straightforward model that flows from our Vincentian Tradition. It involves four steps:

1. Engaging in Service

Especially for new members, the choice of an appropriate service placement is very important. Some service placements may require careful previous preparation and training. Placing young people with wise mentors is a gift not only to them, but also to the poor whom they will serve throughout their lives.

2. Reflecting on Experience: What did you see and hear as you went through the experience?

Here, the focus is on the member’s reaction to the experience. Often, several people have a common experience, but see and hear things differently. Therefore, in this second step, simply reflect about what you experienced as an individual.

Take some quiet time. Use your mind and imagination. Write in a journal, or converse with an individual or a group. Describe objectively: What happened? Where? When? Why? Who was involved?

3. *Articulating What You Learned: As you saw and heard these things, what went on inside you? What did you feel? How was your heart touched?*

The focus here moves to a new, internal level. Here it is important not to talk merely about what you “think” with your head, but also about what you *feel with your heart*. Even beyond that, what was God saying to you as you went through this experience? Where was God in the experience? Here again, we move to another level, a level that deals with the relationship between you and God. In light of this experience, what is God asking of you for the future? Areas to explore might be:

- Personal Growth Learning – my strengths and weaknesses, my assumptions, my personal skills, the effect I have on others, the things I need to change...
- Service Improvement Learning – how did things turn out? might other approaches be possible and/or better? could there be a more systemic approach to this situation?
- Academic or Professional Enhancement Learning – how does this experience apply what I have learned previously? do I need further academic or professional training?

4. *Engaging in Renewed Service*

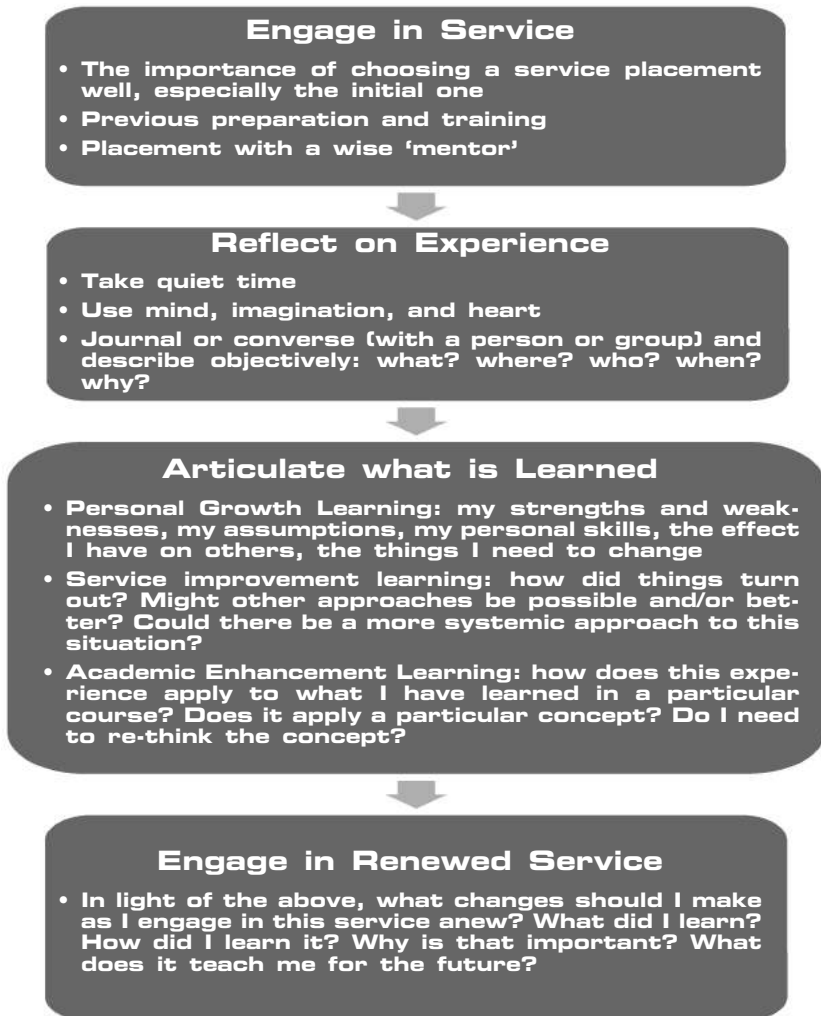
In light of the three steps above, what changes should you make when you engage in this service anew? What did you learn? How did you learn it? Why is it important? What does it teach you for the future?

I encourage readers to use all four steps as you mentor young people. I have noticed at times, in our Vincentian Family, that some are reluctant to ask the “God question” in the third step. But I want to encourage those who mentor young people: do not hesitate to speak of God. Our Family serves within the Catholic and Vincentian tradition. We should witness to that tradition unabashedly, while respecting those who do not share it.

As I trust is evident to the reader, I am suggesting to mentors a simple method that is related to the method of prayer that St. Vincent suggested to the first members of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity. The Vincentian way of praying has its own particular dynamic, flowing from and leading to action. The documents of the Vincentian Family say that we are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. Like St. Vincent and St. Louise, the founders of almost all religious congregations were incredibly active men and women. But almost all who were also known by their contemporaries as persons of deep prayer.

It is clear that Vincent felt that the vitality of the groups that he founded depended on their fidelity to active service of the most marginalized and prayerful reflection on our action. Holding action and reflection/prayer in tension lies at the heart of our tradition.

What I have described above is a mentoring model which is easy to use and almost universally applicable. I hope that it will be of service to all the branches of our Vincentian Family, especially as we initiate new members into the wonderful charism that St. Vincent has left us. Below, in conclusion, I offer it in outline form.



THEME:

Commentaries on the Ratio Formationis

Preamble and Chapter 1

General Reflections and Directives for Formation

Corpus Juan Delgado Rubio, C.M.

Province of Zaragoza

After a lengthy process of writing, reflection, and dialogue, the Superior General and General Council has authorized publication of the *Ratio Formationis* for the Congregation of the Mission. This was done in response to a proposal approved during the 2010 General Assembly, namely, “to revise to *Ratio Formationis* and develop a practical guide for formation”.

Responding to the requests of the delegates at the various General Assemblies, the Congregation of the Mission developed a *Ratio Formationis* for the Internal Seminary (1982) and a *Ratio Formationis Vincentianae* for the Major Seminary (1988). Those documents contain guidelines as a basis for the development of formation plans on the provincial and interprovincial level. Confreres responsible for the ministry of formation have valued those documents, which grounded the formation of the younger generations of our Congregation in the Vincentian life.

In recent years, at both meetings of confreres dedicated to the ministry of formation and at Visitors’ meetings, a desire was expressed to see a revision of the *Rationes* of the Congregation for four basic reasons:

- A number of years had passed since their initial redaction, and it seemed that now there was a need to gather together more scientific findings in this area of study along with recent documents of the Church on this topic;
- In recent years, the reality of the candidates and seminarists had changed, in particular, their personal, cultural, social, religious, professional realities;
- It seemed opportune to define more clearly the responsibility of each of the protagonists in the process of formation (seminarist

or student, spiritual director, formation team, local community, province;

- And finally, from the perspective of general principles, convictions, and lines of action, it also seemed opportune to highlight formation of the whole person, thus expanding the established confines of the previous *Rationes*.

During the Visitors' Meeting in 2007, it was requested that the Congregation develop a document for the on-going formation of the confreres. It seems to me that this new *Ratio Formationis* has as its starting point these shared desires of the Congregation. I was asked to write on the Preamble and the first chapter of the *Ratio (General Reflections and Directives for Formation)*, I decided that I wanted to highlight the fact that we are dealing with a **new Ratio**.

1. The *Ratio Formationis* and the *Practical Guide for Formation*

The General Assembly of 2010 asked for "a revision of the *Ratio Formationis* and the formulation of a practical guide for formation". The *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation of the Mission offers us the contents that are proper to a *Ratio* and at the same time proposes elements that are more appropriate to be included in a *Practical Guide for Formation*. This is one of the primary novelties that we discover in this document.

The *Preamble* presents the *Ratio* as a **vision** and a **plan**. It is also presented as a **guide** intended to help the provinces develop their own *Ratio*.

- The *Ratio* contains the insights of the Congregation and the Church regarding formation, present and past ideas whose primary sources are the Congregation and the Church.
- Its' starting point is the experience and the on-going reflection of the Provinces.
- As a goal, it proposes living **the Vincentian missionary life** in an authentic manner, and it highlights the characteristic elements of our identity.
- For each stage of the formation process, the *Ratio* offers precise guidelines for the formators, candidates, seminarists, confreres, and the local communities.
- The *Ratio* illuminates the path that must be traveled, and presents in each stage of the formation process, a profile of the candidate, seminarist, or the confrere.
- It gathers together broad outlines of Vincentian formation, and suggests a manner to inculturate formation in a way attentive to new realities of person, place, and present era.

The formators, local community, and Congregation have a defined formational plan that is to be followed by candidates, seminarists, students and confreres in formation.

2. Formation in the Congregation of the Mission as a following of Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor

In the first chapter, the *Ratio* explains and gives precision to the proper objective of each stage of formation, one that is discovered in living as missionaries who follow Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor. The affirmations in our Constitutions are quite demanding: “*Our formation... should have as its purpose that the members, animated by the spirit of St. Vincent, become suitable to carry on the mission of the Congregation. They should therefore grow daily in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the center of our life and the rule of the Congregation*” (C. 77.1, 77.2).

The path of formation is one of following Jesus Christ, who gives a dynamic to the formation process. Its goal is Christ, who becomes alive and takes form in us. Thus, we reveal the fullness of Christ: “*The time of formation, as well as our whole life, should be so ordered that the charity of Christ urges us more and more to attain the purpose of the Congregation. As disciples of the Lord, members will attain this purpose by self-denial and by continual conversion to Christ*” (C. 78.1).

Vincent de Paul places before us the activity of Jesus Christ as a point of reference. In various chapters, the Common Rules and the Constitutions invite us to encounter in Christ as the reason for our existence, our way of life, our different relationships, and for evangelizing the poor as a way of prolonging the mission of Christ.

The first chapter of the *Ratio* places before us the purpose of the Congregation, *to follow Christ evangelizing the poor* (C. 1). Our Vincentian vocation is constituted as **the axis** which sustains all other dimensions of formation. Like the hinge on a door, **the axis** (the Vincentian charism) creates a dynamism, among the multiple dimensions of formation.

3. Formation, a life-long journey

The *Ratio* utilizes the image of the life cycle of a tree to highlight the unity of the formation process, and the movement from one stage to another. It presents a conviction based on human and social sciences, the documents of the Church, and our own experience. Formation is a process or a journey that continues throughout one’s life in order to *refine the candidate’s values and growth* (Chapter 1, section 3A).

To make Jesus Christ the Rule of our life and activity, to participate in the same spirit as Christ, to clothe oneself in the same attitudes and sentiments as Christ; these are lifetime tasks that involve every dimen-

sion of the human person and all the varied circumstances and stages of one's existence. Our Constitutions reiterate the conviction that formation is a journey continuing throughout life: "*Our formation is a continuous process*" (C. 77.1); "*the time of formation, as well as our whole life*" (C. 78.1); "*the formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life*" (C. 81).

The principle of on-going renewal (Cf. Constitutions, #2) demands that all Vincentians maintain attentive to this reality throughout their lives, and do so with an attitude of discernment. In this way, they will be able to respond in an adequate manner to the urgent needs of the Church and the world. In this dynamic of fidelity and on-going renewal, formation is a path that one travels along throughout the whole of one's life.

4. The stages of formation in the Congregation of the Mission

The *Ratio* is qualitatively **new** because it integrates all the various stages of the formation process. Up until the time of the publication of this document the Congregation had a *Ratio Formationis* for the Internal Seminary and a *Ratio Formationis Vincentianae* for the Major Seminary. The new *Ratio*, as stated in the Preamble, *can be viewed as comprising seven Rationes with one introductory chapter*. Examining the index of the *Ratio* enables one to appreciate the introductory character of the first chapter (*general reflection and directives for formation*) and the seven stages of formation that are addressed in the following chapters: chapter 2 (*vocation ministry stage of invitation, inquiry and discernment*); chapter 3 (*formation at the stage of the pre-internal seminary*); chapter 4 (*formation at the level of the internal seminary*); chapter 5 (*formation during an internship year*); chapter 6 (*formation of brothers at the post-internal seminary level*); chapter 7 (*formation at the level of the major seminary*); chapter 8 (*ongoing formation*).

The image of the life cycle of a tree that helps us to understand the unity of the formation process at the various stages should also remind us of the following:

- The Provinces (through their Formation Commissions) or a group of Provinces that share the same Formation Plan are invited to concretize the stages of formation in accord with the reality of the individuals, cultures and various situations.
- The proposal with regard to the various stages of formation responds to multiple realities in the Congregation of the Mission and provides a well-defined content that addresses various situations in which our Formation Plans are to be developed.
- In the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission as well as in the *Ratio* there is a clear distinction between the two types of

individuals who are journeying along the path of formation: the **candidates** (sometimes called aspirants, postulants, and discerners) and the **missionaries** or confreres (admitted seminarists and students).

The *Ratio*, as it takes up the request of the Visitors of the Congregation, dedicates a chapter to the theme of ongoing formation (chapter 8). Our Constitutions, grounded on the general principle that formation must be continued and renewed throughout the one's whole life (C. 81), do not make an explicit reference to ongoing formation. Statute 42 entrusts the responsibility of ongoing formation to a Commission: "*Individual provinces, through the help of their formation commission, should organize and promote both common and personal continuing formation*".

In order to serve as a guide for formation in the Congregation of the Mission, the *Ratio* dedicates specific chapters to *formation during an internship year* (an experience valued by many Provinces) and the *formation of brothers at the post-internal seminary level* (a request made by the Brothers during their meeting in Paris (2010) and included as a line of action (III.1) of the 2010 General Assembly. Before addressing the issue of the formation of our members (which begins with admission to the Internal Seminary), there are two chapters: one for vocation ministry and the other dedicated to the time of invitation, inquiry and discernment.

The Constitutions make a clear distinction for formation of our candidates that occurs during those stages prior to admission into the Congregation of the Mission. Our Constitutions view the time of discernment and accompaniment and stages prior to admission into the Internal Seminary as part of the vocational discernment process. This clear, precise distinction in our Constitutions and Statutes differentiates formation plans of the Congregation of the Mission from formation plans of Institutes for Consecrated Life. As a result of the mixing of our "religious language," we often use imprecise language when referring to them as candidates, seminarists, or students.

Statutes 38-39 state there is a process that occurs before candidates are admitted into the Congregation, and begin what is properly termed the formation of our members. The distinction between candidates and admitted members is not based on the type of studies they are engaged in (philosophical, theological or professional), but on their commitment to the Congregation.

Beginning with the first chapter, the *Ratio* distinguishes between candidates and confreres (admitted or incorporated members, seminarists, and students). The fact that the stage of discernment and the stage prior to the Internal Seminary require participation of the individual in the life and the apostolate of the community (cf. S. #39),

should not lead us to forget the essential difference between the situation of candidates and that of confreres. The wording in each chapter of the *Ratio* has been carefully chosen¹ – and it intentionally avoids that which is utilized by the Institutes of Consecrated Life.

5. The center of formation: the person on a journey

The *Ratio* points out the fact that the human person is the primary agent in the formation process. That affirmation, which we find in this chapter, is further concretized in chapters that follow and which refer to specific stages of the formation process. Therefore, at the end of each chapter we find a profile that describes what is expected of the candidate or confrere when that particular stage of formation is completed.

As confreres come together to share their thoughts on formation, certain questions arise: how do we form true missionaries for today's world? How do we engage in this ministry of formation so that the future Vincentians remain faithful to what our Constitutions describe as our proper spirit? The *Ratio* gives us a profile that can be used to verify the quality of the formation that candidates or confreres have assimilated during the various stages of formation.

In several articles, our Constitutions and Statutes refer to the person and process of personal growth and maturity. They are consistent in highlighting the need to adapt the process to the individual: “According to his level of formation and ability” (C. 78.4); “pedagogical norms should be applied according to the age of the students in a way that, while gradually learning self-discipline, they become accustomed to using freedom wisely and to working with initiative and diligence, thus reaching Christian maturity” (C. 78.5); “in accordance with their age” (St. 39); “in special circumstances, and with regard for the degree of human and Christianity maturity of the seminarists, the provincial can make suitable adaptations” (St. 44).

6. Formation in community and for community

The Constitutions point out that we Vincentians “live in common as brothers by following their own rule” (C. 3.1). “Community life has been a special characteristic of the Congregation and its usual way of living from its very beginning. This was clearly the will of St. Vincent...

¹ Our Constitutions refer to those individuals who have not been admitted into the Congregation as “candidates”. When referring to the formation of our members we are referring to those who have been admitted into the Congregation: “seminarists” during the stage of the Internal Seminary and “students” during the stage of the major seminary.

This fraternal life together, continually fostered by the mission, forms a community which promotes both personal and community development, and renders the work of evangelization more effective” (C. 21).

Since the common life is proper to members of our Congregation, and as it fosters personal growth and development and our service for the mission, formation among us can only be achieved in the community and as a community. The words that we find in our Constitutions and Statutes are to be understood precisely from the perspective of the common life:

- Participation in pastoral ministry should occur, *“especially in association with their moderators, including going to the poor and experiencing their condition. In this way, each will be better able to discover his own specific vocation within the Community in accord with his own personal talents” (C. 78.4).*
- Formation for community life enables individuals to respond to God’s call and to do so from a perspective of the richness of each person, as we see, *“members, responding to the call of God within the Community, should learn to live a Vincentian community life during the time of formation. The community should foster the personal initiative of each one throughout the whole process of formation” (C. 79). “In houses of formation a family lifestyle should flourish and a fraternal spirit should be fostered among students of the same province” (St. 45.3).*
- Responsibility for the members of the community in formation demands, *“seminarists should be an integral part of the provincial and local community in which they live, where their formation is a common responsibility under the direction and animation of the director of the internal seminary” (C. 86).*
- Care with regard to community life when formation is done outside the province: *“Care should be taken that they [our students] lead a common life according to the customs of the Congregation and that they receive a suitable Vincentian formation” (St. 45.2).*

In the introductory chapter, the *Ratio* highlights the role of the local community in the process of formation and offers detailed proposals as it describes the formation for community life that corresponds to each stage of formation.

7. Formation in the mission and for the mission

As a Society of Apostolic Life, the Congregation of the Mission exists for the mission. (cf. C. 3) The Constitutions point out the characteristics of our participation in the ministry of evangelization: *“A clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor; attention to the realities of present-day society; some sharing in the condition of the poor;*

genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works; readiness to go to any part of the world; 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..." (C. 12).

The general principle of continual conversion and renewal demands attention to the signs of the times and the mediation of the poor: *"The Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and places. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal"* (C. 2).

That principle is concretized in the Constitutions and the Statutes when referring to formation of our candidates: *"Going to the poor and experiencing their condition"* (C. 78.4); *"acquire a suitable and concrete understanding of people, especially the poor, of their needs, their desires, and their problems"* (C. 85.1); *"the formation of our students should not lose sight of the reality of society, so that their studies will lead to the acquisition of a vision of the modern world and critical judgment of it. Students, through a conversion of heart, should begin to involve themselves in Christian work for the restoration of justice; more and more they should become conscious of the roots of poverty in the world and lay bare the obstacles to evangelization"* (C. 88).

The *Ratio*, in accord with recent methodological findings, as well as with the spirituality of systemic change, emphasizes that *"those who live in poverty are significant and active agents in our formation, mediating the presence of the Lord as we journey through Vincentian life and ministry"* (Ch. I, Sec. 2f).

8. Formators and moderators for the formation process

The Constitutions and Statutes make reference to the participation and the responsibility of formators and moderators in the formation process. Several articles outline their various contributions to this process (cf. C. 93-95; St. 49-50).

The *Ratio* presents the formation team and its specific ministries: director of formation; spiritual director, director of apostolic formation, professor, director of human formation², local superior. The experience of the individual province will be crucial when entrusting these ministries to various Vincentians: wherever possible a team of forma-

² Because of differences with regard to cultural sensitivity, some will certainly find it difficult to accept the presence of so many individuals who have the title "director". In my experience of accompanying young men I have found it more helpful to use the word "ministry/minister" and/or "service".

tors, structured as outlined above, would be ideal (certainly the number of available formators and those being formed must also be taken into consideration). In those situations where the group of formators and the number of candidates/confreres is smaller, it is very probable that the director will have to assume ministries that the *Ratio* assigns to others.

The *Ratio* offers a detailed profile of the formator. I believe that this profile can be used by the formator for self-reflection, so that those entrusted with this ministry will clothe themselves in the characteristics that are presented. This profile should also be used by the Visitor when assigning confreres to engage in the ministry of formation. This profile will be useful for those confreres who are preparing for this ministry and confreres already engaged in this ministry.

9. Formation Plans and Formation Commissions

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission point out the need to coordinate the various formation plans for our members, thus guarding the organic unity between successive stages, so that the pastoral purpose, proper to the Congregation, might be achieved.

The Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission demand that each Province develop a formation plan *“which will be in conformity with the principles already established, with the documents and directives of the Church and of the Congregation of the Mission, and which are more in accord with their abilities”* (St. 41.1). The Statutes ask the Visitor to *“establish a formation commission to draw up and revise the formation program and to deal with all those things which pertain to the entire course of training”* (St. 41.2). It is taken for granted that those Provinces that cooperate in one or more stages of the formation process will develop such a plan together and will establish joint meetings of their Formation Commission.

In the first chapter of the *Ratio*, it is clear that an invitation is being extended so that each Province or group of Provinces might adapt and integrate this material into their own formation plan. In the *Preamble* we see the *Ratio* is presented not as the final word, but *as a guide to the Provinces as they work out a Ratio particular to their own circumstances and cultures.*

* * * * *

The 2010 General Assembly established the following as one of its lines of action for the next six years: *“To create formation programs that strengthen our fidelity to the vocation and our response to the needs of the twenty-first century”*. The *Ratio* provides a foundation that enables the Congregation, its local communities, and the Provinces to engage in such a task.

My initial reading of the new *Ratio Formationis* created feelings of profound gratitude to those confreres who were directly involved in writing this document. That gratitude includes the Superior General and the members of the General Council who animated that work. Indeed, we have been presented with a most valuable instrument for the formation of Vincentians for the twenty-first century. The *Ratio* provides much material that formators, candidates, and confreres in formation should reflect upon. Many thanks!

Translated by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Chapter 2

Vocational Promotion Ministry in the Congregation of the Mission

Carlos Albeiro Velásquez Bravo, C.M.
Province of Colombia

1. Reason for the second chapter of the *Ratio*

The recently revised second chapter of the *Ratio Formationis* deals with the theme of the ministry of vocational promotion. In fact, the chapter is entitled: *Vocation Ministry Stages of Invitation, Inquiry and Discernment*. Because of the importance of this theme for the whole Congregation it should be viewed in all seriousness as a commitment of every confrere and as a service (ministry) of those who have been requested to promote vocations to the Vincentians.

What we have continually called *Vocational Ministry*¹, like every other form of pastoral ministry, has an underlying theology. Such a ministry can only be understood and adequately promoted if it is grounded in a Christology, an ecclesiology, and in a theology of mission.

I believe that here we must say something about the meaning of this pastoral ministry for the life of the Congregation of the Mission. Every historical era demands a specific methodology to extend an invitation to one who wishes to follow Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. For example, we recall that Vincent de Paul, despite the increase in the number of works, was not concerned about the number of aspirants to the community. His firm trust in Providence led him to affirm in a very clear manner that “*it is for God alone to choose those whom he wishes to call... we have a maxim, namely, never to urge anyone to embrace our state... one Missionary given by his fatherly hand will do more good by himself than many others who would not have a true vocation*”².

¹ This ministry has been referred to in various manners: vocational promotion, vocational cultivation, vocational pastoral ministry... this last phrase is broader highlights those aspects of discernment, accompaniment and directing the call of God toward some specific way of following the Lord and serving in order to build up the Church.

² VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM

Therefore, such unwavering trust in Providence is necessary. The Congregation, similar to the Church, has learned how to cultivate vocations, and is aware that a helping hand must be extended to the Lord of the harvest. Such assistance consists of not only prayer and witness, which later we affirm as irreplaceable, but a need for an organized and serious pastoral ministry.

Vincentian vocations are in function of the fulfillment of the proper purpose of the Congregation and thus, if one loves the Congregation, then one must accept the responsibility of inviting new members, but not in the sense of self-preservation, but rather from the perspective of an evangelizing heart. In other words, the ministry of vocational promotion which we undertake is not done for the purpose of survival, but rather so that we might be faithful to the mission that God has entrusted to us... *evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. Evangelization of the poor demands evangelizers. I believe that throughout its history the Congregation has never lacked admirable witnesses who have made explicit the invitation to join the ranks of the evangelizers of the poor. The apostolic zeal of Vincentians has fascinated and attracted many. A vocation is an eminently communicative event. Therefore, no confrere should excuse himself from the commitment to extend to others an invitation to follow Jesus Christ, the evangelizer.

2. The journey of the candidates (missionary disciples)

The evangelizing activity of Jesus was not limited to calling and sending forth those persons who followed him. His mission was evangelical and vocational. The *Aparecida Document*³ has a focus that gives a unity to the whole document, namely, “*disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that our peoples may have life in him*”. The formative journey of the missionary disciples proposed in that document high-

(Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume VIII, p. 342; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD: VIII: 342.

³ Here we refer to the final document of the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (June 29, 2007).

lights five fundamental aspects that appear in diverse ways in each step of the journey, aspects that are intimately related to and nourish one another. I believe that these five aspects need to be emphasized even before an individual formally enters into the formation process. Indeed, these aspects should be highlighted during the process of inviting, discerning, and accompanying a candidate who aspires to the Congregation:

- a) **The Encounter with Jesus Christ:** *Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him* (cf. John 1:38), *but it is the Lord who calls them: "Follow me"* (Mark 1:14; Matthew 9:9). This encounter must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, proclamation of the kerygma, and the missionary action of the community. The kerygma is not simply a stage, but the leitmotiv of a process that culminates in the maturity of the disciple of Jesus Christ.
- b) **Conversion:** It is the initial response of those who have listened to the Lord in wonder, who believe in Him through the action of the Spirit, and who decide to be His friend and go with him, changing how they think and live.
- c) **Discipleship:** The person constantly matures in knowledge, love, and following of Jesus the master, and delves deeper into the mystery of His person, his example, and his teaching.
- d) **Communion:** There can be no Christian life except in community: in families, parishes, communities of consecrated life, base communities, other small communities, and movements.
- e) **Mission:** "As they get to know and love their Lord, disciples experience the need to share with others their joy at being sent, at going to the world to proclaim Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make real the love and service in the person of the neediest, in short, to build the Kingdom of God" (Aparecida, 2007, N. 278).

I mention those aspects because today we meet many young people who are seeking to discover their vocation but have not had sufficient experience of the Christian life. They have been influenced by the epochal change and historical turn of events characterized and defined by profound and rapid change. These changes have, in turn, "impacted in a cultural manner the subjects of our vocational pastoral outreach. Here we refer to those individuals, especially young people and those institutions that mold and form their life, for example, family and school. The movement behind those events is the extraordinary and formidable advance of social networks"⁴. Therefore, the Ratio refers to situations that should be analyzed, known and accepted.

⁴ GABRIEL NARANJO, CM, *Second Continental Congress on Vocations* (2011), *Working Document*, p. 23.

The vocational experience begins with that which we would call “amazement”. Paraphrasing the famous expression of Benedict XVI, we could say that “embracing a specific vocation is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Deus Caritas, 2005, N. 1).

Those persons who encourage and promote vocations (and that includes us as members of the Congregation), ought to be grounded in Jesus Christ. This is not just another theory. This means that we share our personal experience of Jesus Christ with those who are searching for their vocation. We should not be afraid to speak with the candidate about the person of Jesus Christ, about an encounter with Jesus Christ who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Pope Francis refers to this reality of a personal encounter with the Lord in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

“It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize. A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigor and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, No. 266).

3. Awaken, discern and accompany

The validity of our charism for the today is undeniable, not only because it responds to the needs of the Church and of our people, but also because many continue to feel called to incarnate that charism and to live it with enthusiasm in a radical commitment on behalf of the liberation of the poor. Some years ago, in order to renew this ministry on the level of the Church, a process was proposed that is composed of three elements: awaken, discern and accompany. This triad coincides with the phases of the discernment process that are set form in the *Ratio: initial invitation, active discernment and application for admission*.

a) To awaken: Here, we can speak about planting the seed in an initial invitation. The vocational pastoral ministry is initiated with the action of planting seeds. Such activity must be situated in the context of general pastoral ministry and to be developed throughout the various stages of an individual's growth in faith. This activity of planting seeds creates the conditions that allow the seed of a vocation to be sown in the good soil that exists in the heart of all people. This seed is called the vocational kerygma⁵.

Vocations are awakened by:

- Living that which is proper to the Vincentian vocation with joy and integrity and authenticity. Witness ought to attract and create an enthusiasm in young people;
- Creating an interest in vocations in those places of mission where we and the Daughters of Charity minister. In many places, Daughters often collaborate in vocational promotion;
- Offering without fear our charism to the larger Church;
- Proclaiming in an explicit manner the person of Jesus Christ;
- Making a direct and personal call to the young person, inviting that person from the start to reach out toward those who are poor and to enter into a relationship with them. Our charism should be presented in a clear manner, and not as just another nice theory;
- Entering into the various cultures of young people;
- Creating an awareness of this ministry among the laity and integrating them into this ministry of vocational promotion (we will refer to this matter later in this presentation);
- Organizing events that promote vocations (retreats, days of prayer, vocational weeks, visits to the houses of formation, times for reflection, etc.).

b) Discernment: Planting seeds for a vocation should lead to a concrete invitation. In fact, the ministry of vocational promotion should always include that element. Through means of the activity of inviting and motivating an individual in a direct, personal and explicit manner, it is hoped that the person will show himself to be listening and willing to embrace the Lord's call. All of us should be spokespersons who present this call to another individual. This task consists of inviting people to reflect on their life from the perspective of this call, and to show how the Lord is present in their own life. We must give them guidance that helps them give meaning to their life. The invitation extended to another must be clear, and made in a respectful manner.

⁵ Cf., *Second Continental Congress on Vocations, Final Document*.

At the same time, we must be willing to engage in dialogue once the invitation has been made.

- During this phase, it is important to be attentive to the motivations that the candidate expresses. In every struggle to come to know one's vocation is an underlying motivation which requires dialogue for a person to have clarity. Some motivations are valid, and others will have to be purified and clarified. The same could be said when speaking about the mission: a vocation is incarnated in individuals with human limitations.
- In all of this, a prayerful providential attitude should be assumed. Every local community and each candidate should be invited not only to pray "for" vocations but should also pray "about" their vocation. The Congregation has a precious jewel in its prayer for vocations, the *Expectatio Israel*⁶ which has biblical, Vincentian and vocational roots. There are other prayerful practices that should be taken into consideration.
- Personal on-going dialogue with the candidate is most important, as is dialogue among the members of the vocational promotion team and formation team.

c) Accompaniment: Once the seed of a vocation has been planted, we need to cultivate the seed. This cultivation is accomplished through a process of personalized accompaniment, beginning with acceptance of the proposal. It concludes when a vocational decision is made. Vocational accompaniment is a ministry that consists of pedagogical assistance (instrumental and time oriented) that an elder brother in the faith and in ministry offers to a younger brother so that he, after initially hearing the invitation, might be able to clarify, discern and respond to that call in a free and responsible manner.

- What is said in regard to discernment can also be applied to this stage of accompaniment.
- Accompaniment has to address three questions: *the clarity of the vocational awareness of the candidate* (recognize the authenticity of one's vocation); one's authenticity (prove rightness of intention and the validity of one's vocational motivations); one's suitability (show that one has the gifts and the abilities that enable one to respond to the call in a coherent and faithful manner). In the *Ratio* this element is mentioned in the last section of chapter two, in the *profile of discerners acceptable for admission to a pre-internal seminary program*. Each Province can enrich this process

⁶ Father Antoine Fiat (1878-1914), in his letter dated June 13, 1909, established the obligation to recite this prayer for vocations (cf. *Circular Letters of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, vol. V, pp. 771-780).

with the selection of other more specific criteria. *“Despite the scarcity of vocation, today we are increasingly aware of the need for a better process of selecting candidates to the priesthood. Seminaries cannot accept candidates on the basis of any motivation whatsoever, especially if those motivations have to do with affective insecurity or the pursuit of power, human glory or economic well-being”* (E.G., N. 107).

- Accompaniment can be done by one individual or by a team that is sufficiently prepared and secure in their own vocational experience, and utilizing auxiliary sciences, which enables one to measure the candidate’s personal growth and vocational affirmation.
- The family, the first planters of the seeds of vocation, ought to be a point of fundamental support in the process of accompanying the young person. Therefore, members of the family should be involved in this process in a very active manner.
- The process of accompaniment should have times in which both the personal and the community dimension are emphasized. Therefore, weekends for apostolic activity, sharing experiences with other young men from the same area, community celebrations, popular missions, are all important because they often create an interaction that enables us to know the candidate on a deeper level. It should be noted here that our communities must have houses whose doors are open to those who desire to enter into our midst.

4. To create the possibility for Vincentian vocational ministry

I do not pretend to offer here an instant remedy. Rather, I want to communicate some aspects of our experience in the Province of Colombia with regard to this ministry, which has been a priority since we were established as a province. For example, in those early chronicles and in the written material that has been preserved one can read about the efforts of the first Lazarist Missionaries who arrived in Colombia to cultivate native vocations. This concern led to formation structures that have been reflected upon and cultivated and developed with much zeal.

Convictions: in addition to continual prayer for vocations and to an awareness of and a commitment to promote vocations, we would add here the following convictions:

- *There are vocations and God continues to call people* (cf. National Congress on Vocations – 2012). Today one frequently hears in ecclesiastical circles the followings complaint: *there are no vocations today!* The lack of vocations is without a doubt conditioned by the new cultural situation that has become a reality is various

places, by fragile relationships that develop as a result of the so called “liquid society”, by the family crisis, by models of the church, by the many options in the religious marketplace, and numerous other factors. As these factors are taken into consideration, we must not lose hope in promoting vocations. I cannot resist citing the words of Pope Francis: “*Many places are experiencing a dearth of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is often due to a lack of contagious apostolic fervor in communities which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness. Wherever there is life, fervor and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise*” (EG, N. 107).

- “No one is better suited to evangelize young people than young people themselves. Young students who are preparing for the presbyterate, young men and women who are undergoing formation as religious or as missionaries, personally and as communities are the first and most immediate apostles of vocation in the midst of other young people” (Pastoral Guidelines for Fostering Vocations to Priestly Ministry [2012] published by the Congregation for Catholic Education). It has been beneficial and fruitful to involve the individuals who are in formation in direct ministry on behalf of vocations.
- The fruitfulness of vocation promotion ministry depends on unity and communication among members of the vocation ministry team and the formation team.
- Here we are not only dealing with pastoral strategies, but also with a spirituality that nourishes and gives life to all our activity on behalf of the promotion of vocations. This element is central to the life and the mission of all members of the various teams involved in this ministry. Such a spirituality is biblical, and grounded on prayer for vocations, one offered so that the Word might be heard and wholeheartedly embraced. This, in turn, will enable people to enter into a process of vocational discernment.
- We can refer here to a great risk that we see in many cases in which the process of invitation, examination, and discernment culminates when the young person is approved and enters for the first time into one of our houses of formation. In such situations, we must be careful about maintaining the bond between the responsible person (or the responsible team) of the vocational promotional ministry and the responsible person (or team) who accompanies the person in this initial stage of formation. In our experience this collegiality has been a very important element.

The local community and the promotion of new life: The *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* clearly states that the superior as well

as the other members of the community are to engage in this ministry of promoting vocations to our way of life:

“The superior and the members of the local community should concretize how they will promote vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood and help in the formation of candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. Mindful of the corresponsibility of all the members of the province in this regard, the local community plan should specify such matters as:

- *how the confreres will search out and encourage vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood in the Congregation (Statutes, #37.1);*
- *how they will provide ongoing guidance and support to interested candidates (Statutes, #37.2);*
- *who, among the members of the local community, will have a special responsibility for coordinating vocational promotion;*
- *when the community will pray together for vocations (Matthew 9:37; cf. Statutes, #36);*
- *how interested young people might participate and be accompanied in the mission of the local community (Statutes, #36, 37.1);*
- *how, if the Visitor should send to the local community some of those who are already in initial formation, they will be integrated into and accompanied in our life and mission” (Practical Guide for the Local Superior, 2003, N. 109).*

The role of the local community is key because it is the visible face of the Congregation that creates a *culture of Vincentian vocations*. In our houses of formation in Colombia there are vocational committees that make real the words of the *Guidelines for Fostering Vocation to Priestly Ministry*, namely, “that young students preparing for the presbyterate, young men and women undergoing formation as religious or as missionaries, personally and as communities are the first and most immediate apostles of vocation in the midst of other young people”.

The Vincentian Family and Vocational Ministry: Moving beyond the environment of the natural family and the parish we encounter, the Vincentian Family constitutes another element in vocation promotion. Experience has shown us that we must move from a vocation ministry developed and carried out from a perspective of “recruitment” to a ministry that involves discernment, accompaniment, and channeling the call of God toward a specific way of following the Lord and building up the Church. We must also minister on behalf of lay vocations. Often we are asked by youth groups in our Vincentian Family to accompany them in a process of vocational discernment. Indeed, our pastoral ministry must take on a vocational dimension.

To utilize adequate structures and means: The *Ratio* reminds us that this ministry supposes the utilization of those means that are available to us. Today the electronic media provide us with a marvelous opportunity. Yet, we must be careful here, since the virtual face is no substitute for the real face of the person. It is true that as a result of various search engines, many young men find the Congregation of the Mission and are encouraged to knock on our doors. Nevertheless, there are also human means that must be utilized. Some forty years ago the Province of Colombia created a local community that was dedicated to the ministry of vocational promotion⁷. This community continues to move throughout the country, animates the ministry of vocational promotion throughout the province, promotes communication, organizes and leads workshops and vocational gatherings, encourages the group of “vocational godfathers”, stimulates prayer for vocations and accompanies and advises the Vincentian Family.

May this *Ratio* help us renew the gift of vocation to those the “Vincentian trenches” and enliven the heart of everyone with a missionary commitment to awaken, discern, and accompany those who experience the Lord’s call! We entrust our ministry to the Lord of the Harvest, to the One whom we request to send laborers into the harvest. We also pray that the Lord may preserve those who have been called in his name and that they may be made truly holy.

Translated by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

⁷ Actually this local community is referred to as the house of Vocational Pastoral Ministry – Ministry on behalf of the Vincentian Family and the house is organized like any other local community. Its seat is in the Motherhouse and is composed of four members. As a result of the 1998 General Assembly the Province integrated the ministry of vocational promotion with that of ministering as advisors to the larger Vincentian Family. This enables the members of this house to minister on two apostolic fronts. At the same time this new organization confirms less clerical and more ministerial vision of vocations and also provides greater ecclesial significance to the Vincentian charism which is sown and planted among the laity.

Chapter 3

Formation at the Stage of Pre-Internal Seminary

Basil Thottamkara, C.M.
Province of India-North

Evangelization of the poor is the focal point of Vincentian Charism. St. Vincent gave equal importance to formation of clergy because he realized that, without holy and committed priests, the work of evangelization would not be effective. So his creative mind thought out ways and means of forming the clergy of the time. Besides the Tuesday Conferences meant for the clergy, and retreats for the ordinandi, he developed a program of formation for young candidates who would be future priests of the Mission. Vincent took up the directives of the Council of Trent for priestly formation, and made necessary modifications to meet Mission requirements. Thus, he passed on to posterity a rich legacy of priestly formation, which he considered as one of the most important priorities of the Congregation of the Mission.

Today, the work of evangelization is being carried out in different parts of the world by members of the Congregation who come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, our formation program is being reviewed and updated to be relevant and effective.

First, we must take into consideration the human maturity and educational level of candidates aspiring to become members of our Congregation. This may vary from country to country. In many of the Asiatic and African countries, the “Pre-Internal Seminary” stage is operative where aspiring young men are brought together and guided to discern their vocation and strengthen their values and convictions.

The goal of this stage of formation is to help candidates discern their vocation from convictions based on Christian values, and to lay the foundation for a Vincentian way of priestly life. This should be in concert with their academic pursuit. Both need to go hand in hand and contribute to the all round growth of candidates. The structural details are well worked out in the *Ratio Formationis*, which allows for adaptations and variations.

Section 2A gives detailed directives with regard to the six-fold objectives of this orientation phase of Vincentian Formation and the strategies for achieving these objectives. These six-fold objectives for formation: Vincentian, human, spiritual, intellectual, apostolic and

community, are not to be compartmentalized, but integrated so as to contribute to the overall development and character building of the candidate. Practical means are suggested for a gradual progress in this direction.

As tools we have at our disposal biographies of St. Vincent De Paul, the Common Rules, and characteristic virtues of the Congregation, self awareness programs, which lead to psychological and emotional insights, Christian virtues marked out in the Gospels, the search for God through prayer and sacramental life, and compassionate consideration of the poor in a lived-in community context. The methodology to be followed consists in information gathering through personal reading and classes, programs of exposure to these realities, followed by personal and shared reflection, and integrated assimilation, which will be duly translated into an appropriate life style. This is also a time for developing relational skills and absorption of varied cultures and learning of new languages, which will facilitate apostolic work among various ethnic groups.

Section 2B speaks of an associate phase of Vincentian formation. The purpose of this phase is to further widen knowledge and deepen convictions of candidates in all six aspects mentioned above, enabling them to make a mature decision of petitioning for acceptance into the Internal Seminary. At this phase, secondary level of schooling will be completed, which will serve as a basis for further academic studies. Candidates should also have a fair knowledge of modern tools, such as information technologies, so that they will fit into the society they will serve.

The objectives to be achieved and the strategies employed remain more or less the same at the initial stage, but the range of observation becomes wider, reflection gets deeper, and application goes to a higher experiential level, keeping pace with the transition that is taking place in the growing youth with the passage of time.

Section 3 deals with the agents of Formation. Neither the formators nor the candidates should forget the fact that the initiative comes from God and that God is the prime agent of formation. The effort of both the formation team and the candidates should be to discover the plan of God and to cooperate with the Lord in its faithful fulfillment. Like Eli and Samuel of Old Testament times, the formation team should enable the candidates to discern the voice of God in the midst of confusing voices coming from all corners.

The candidate has the most vital role in the whole formation program. Not only should he co-operate with God and the formators, but he should also transform himself gradually making the best use of all means made available. By the time he completes the orientation phase, he should have acquired a basic understanding of the life of St. Vincent and Vincentian charism, an adequate standard of self discipline and a

spiritual foundation, an ability to be flexible and adjust to community life, a willingness to learn and to be guided by the formators, and a sincere love for the poor and readiness to help them.

The provincial administration has to be involved in the process of formation. It should provide a general framework of the formation program, provide competent and exemplary formators, be familiar with candidates, and with occasional visits and interact with them. Together with the formators, they have to properly evaluate each candidate at every stage before promoting them further.

The complexity of formation ministry and the need for a firm foundation at the initial stage demand competent and committed team of formators at this important initial stage of formation. It should be headed by a formation Director, who co-ordinates and closely collaborates with his team members. Both the initial and associate phases can be combined or separated according to the availability of place and personnel.

Right in the midst of sweeping changes taking place in the world today, formation of priests has indeed become a very challenging task. The sincere and committed work of our formators can contribute to lasting results in the long run. The candidates thus formed can confidently continue through the next stages of their formation and be effective evangelizers in the footprints of St. Vincent who faithfully followed Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor.

Chapter 4

The Internal Seminary

Corpus Juan Delgado Rubio, C.M.

Province of Zaragoza

Chapter four of the *Ratio Formationis Congregationis Missionis* is dedicated to the formation that occurs during the time of the Internal Seminary. The purpose of the *Ratio*, well-articulated and coherent, is to organize and develop the content of the Constitutions (#83-85) in three sections:

- Finality and content.
- Objectives and strategies.
- Profile of the seminarian who completes formation in the Internal Seminary.

It seems to me that the desired result provides a very good roadmap to concretize the provincial and interprovincial *Formation Plans* that deal with this decisive stage of formation and that concerns the life of a Vincentian. In these pages, I propose to highlight some elements that appear to me as important from my own personal experience in the ministry of formation.

1. To initiate the Internal Seminary at the opportune moment

The *Ratio Formationis*, in chapter 3, section 3B, outlines *the profile of the candidate upon completing the entire pre-internal seminary program*. The Congregation understands that there is a process that the candidates must engage in (cf. Statutes, #38-39) before they can be admitted into the Congregation.

Thus the words that Vincent wrote to M. Deville (January 6, 1657), who had sent three candidates from Arras to become members of Congregation, are clarified: “*The two years of probation are not for discerning whether they have the requisite dispositions – this should have been done beforehand – but to strengthen them in them, to build on this foundation the virtues that make a good missionary*”¹.

¹ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC

The phase, time, or program prior to the Internal Seminary allows the community to know the candidate, his maturity, his vocational motivation, his aptitudes for the life of a Missionary, and his spiritual dispositions... this same period of time allows the candidate to become familiar with the life of the community, its spirituality and its mission.

Some of the persons who seek admission into the Congregation are adults who have had many lived experiences, due to their studies, professional, and social life. There can be a thought to shorten the time due to a candidate's age, or because he has completed his theological studies.

It is not advisable to shorten the length of time of some stage of formation. Admission into the Congregation at the initiation of the Internal Seminary ought to take place after a sufficiently prolonged period of accompaniment. It should occur after a period of time when the individual has been enriched by experiences provided him with knowledge about the community, and when the candidate has been able to participate in an effective manner in Vincentian life.

On the opposite extreme, we find the situation in which some candidates are unable to enter the Internal Seminary until the time when they should make a definitive commitment through vows and/or Orders. This situation often arises when there is not a sufficient number of candidates who are eligible to enter the Internal Seminary or when the Vincentian process of formation becomes subordinate to the academic program.

The time of the Internal Seminary should not be delayed as if one were dealing with a perennial candidate. True growth of the person does not occur in one specific dimension of life while other dimensions are passed over *sine die*. Each dimension is equally important, for example, the experience of belonging to the Congregation, participation in the life and the ministries of the Community and above all else, deepening one's Vincentian spiritual experience which is very specific to the time of the Internal Seminary.

(Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume VI, p. 175; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD: VI: 175.

2. Grounding the life of the Vincentian

In order to present that which is specific to the formation that is proper to one's experience during the time of the Internal Seminary, the *Ratio* uses the image of a tree that grows and develops deep roots. Throughout this chapter, there are frequent expressions of this image, such as, *firm, solid, root, foundation*, etc.

The formation proper to the Internal Seminary supposes that those who have been admitted have sufficient knowledge of the life, the spirituality and the mission of the Congregation. In the words of the *Ratio*, the Internal Seminary is a time:

- To begin to live *in a whole-hearted manner* the life of a Vincentian;
- To experience in Jesus Christ the reason and the impetus for one's *firm and unwavering dedication to the Mission*;
- To acquire *a solid spiritual foundation* that enables the individual to live the Vincentian vocation in *a consistent and joyful manner*;
- To understand and to affirm the demands of *the vows* and *the five virtues*;
- To make a decision to continue the formation process *with the intention of committing oneself* to the following of Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor... and doing this *for the whole of one's life* and as a member of the Congregation of the Mission.

When Vincent wrote to M. Samson Le Soudier (July 29, 1640) to inform him about the path that his brother had traveled, he provided us with some insights about the experience that is to be achieved during the time of the Internal Seminary:

"Oh! What a good young man he is! Your father tried to tempt him; he stayed as firm as a rock. He told me that if he were ever so unfortunate as to leave, he was asking God to let him die at the door. He has finished his two years in the seminary and is going over his philosophy with M. Dehorgny so that he can study theology" (CCD, II: 96-97).

3. To know the spiritual experience of St. Vincent de Paul and to make it one's own

The Constitutions tell us that: "The spirit of the Congregation comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence toward the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence" (Constitutions, 6); and "the Congregation tries to express its spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely, simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls". Speaking of these five virtues, St. Vincent said:

“The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them [Common Rules, II: 14]” (Constitutions, 7).

The time of the Internal Seminary marks a before and an after in the life of each Vincentian. This is true not only because the individual moves from being a candidate to a confrere, but also because that same individual comes to know the spiritual experience of St. Vincent de Paul and makes that experience his own. He learns to understand and follow Vincent’s example of making Christ the *Rule of the Mission*. He understands and clothes himself in the attitudes that Christ proposed to those who journey along the path that the Holy Spirit inspired Saint Vincent, our Founder, to follow. Here we recall the words of our Constitutions:

“Our formation... should have as its purpose that the members, animated by the spirit of Saint Vincent, become suitable to carry on the mission of the Congregation” (C. #77.1); *“members should be trained in the word of God, sacramental life, prayer both communal and personal, and Vincentian spirituality”* (C. 78.2).

When referring to the objectives that are to be achieved during the time of the Internal Seminary, the Constitutions state:

“In order to achieve this, the seminarists should take special care to reach an understanding of the special character, spirit, and functions of the Congregation by returning to the sources, especially to the life and works of Saint Vincent, to the history and traditions of the Congregation, and to an active and fitting participation in our apostolate” (C. 85.2).

To know the spiritual experience of St. Vincent, and to make that experience one’s own guarantees our missionary identity and our identification in the Church. It provides a foundation for membership in the Congregation: “The very charism of the Founders 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... The specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the Founder and of his disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times... Especially in our times that same charismatic genuineness, vivacious and ingenious in its inventiveness” (Mutuae Relationes, #11, 12 and 23).

4. Verify the documentation and clarify the right and obligations of the seminarist

4.1. At this stage of formation in which the individual moves from being a candidate to a confrere, it is necessary, at the beginning of the Internal Seminary, to verify the documentation of the seminarist, that is, the documents that are kept in the provincial archives.

The *Ratio* mentions some of the documents that the candidates ought to present in order to enter into the program prior to the Internal Seminary (chapter 2, section 4B). The Constitutions and *A Practical Guide for the Visitor* list other documents that are necessary for the admission of a candidate into the Congregation of the Mission (Constitutions, #53; *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, chapter II, article 2.1). These documents should be sent to the Director of the Internal Seminary, especially if the place of the Internal Seminary is in a province distinct from the province of origin of the candidate.

The documentation that I refer to and which should be verified at the beginning of the Internal Seminary is the following:

- The handwritten letter in which the individual requests admission into the Congregation of the Mission and a copy of the favorable response of the Visitor, a response that is given after having listened to his Council (cf. Constitutions, #53.2, 125, 8; Statutes, #20; Provincial Norms; CIC 735 and 2 and 642-645);
- Baptismal and confirmation certificate;
- Birth Certificate;
- Declaration of the freedom of the candidate (CIC 645 and 1);
- Report from the Visitor or from the person responsible for the stage of formation prior to the Internal Seminary in which it is stated that the candidate has achieved the foreseen profile (cf. Chapter 3, section 3B of the *Ratio*);
- Psychological and medical reports that can be helpful in accompanying the seminarist.

The timely remittance of a copy of the documentation of the seminarist is of great help to the formation team. Such documentation will continue to be useful in later stages of the life of the confrere (their historical value should never be overlooked). If at some time in the life of a Vincentian a difficulty should arise, documentation, carefully filed, will be of great assistance.

4.2. As we have already stated, at the stage in which the individual moves from being a candidate to being a confrere, it is necessary to clarify the rights and the obligations of the seminarist at this time of his admission into the Congregation, when he begins the Internal Sem-

inary... rights and obligations of this individual until the time of his incorporation through the taking of vows.

The seminarists enjoy all the spiritual benefits of the Congregation of the Mission (cf. Constitutions, #59 and 1). Provincial Norms can give precision to some rights and obligations that are specific to those persons being admitted (cf. Constitutions, #59, 2). For the good order of the local community of the Internal Seminary it would be good to clarify some other aspects:

- The manner in which the seminarists are expected to participate in community meetings and assemblies;
- The way in which the material needs of the seminarist will be provided for and the opportunity to obtain some form of periodic stipend;
- Recreational opportunities and medical care that is specific to a particular province;
- The times of the family visit;
- Other matters that, as a result of experience, are seen to be important.

This clarification of the rights and the obligations of the admitted Missionaries prevents possible confusion and contributes to community co-responsibility.

5. Interprovincial collaboration in the Internal Seminary

The Internal Seminary, according to the needs, may be Provincial or Interprovincial (Statute #43). It seems to me that to be effective there is a need for collaboration in the Internal Seminary.

- Magnanimity on the part of each of the Provinces involved in such an effort so that together they might seek out and provide the most capable persons and the most adequate resources for formation ministry;
- Agreement on the method that is to be used in order to organize the Internal Seminary so that all the candidates can achieve the profile that is established by the *Ratio* and concretized in the *Formation Plan*;
- The formation team should have the confidence of the Provinces and the Missionaries;
- Openness of the seminarists to the international dimension of the Congregation of the Mission, that is, acceptance of the diversity of cultures, regions, and provinces;
- Acceptance on the part of the formation team, of the community and of the seminarists of the individuals and the plurality of their cultures.

Interprovincial collaboration in formation, especially during the stage of the Internal Seminary is a very clear expression of the dynamism of the Vincentian charism and of our *creative fidelity to the Mission* (General Assembly 2010).

Translated by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Chapter 5

The Relevance of the Apostolic Year During Initial Formation

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Province of the Congo

Introduction

I am fascinated by the way that Jacques Dupuis interprets the “hermeneutical circle” as “a progressive back-and-forth continuous interaction between the present contextual experience and the witness of the foundational experience entrusted to the memory of Church tradition – and vice versa”¹. But this back-and-forth or fruitful interaction between “text” and “context” always needs the existence of an ecclesial community for interpretation (a community that contains the candidates for Vincentian missionary life). Taking into consideration “the interpreter”, it happens within a hermeneutical principle; a passage from circularity to interactive triangularity². Now a fruitful interaction between the text, context and interpreter has to be considered.

I would like to take advantage of this key for reading³, by explaining more particularly the concept of triangular interaction and the concept of experience⁴, to understand the relevance of the fifth chapter of the *Ratio Formationis*, devoted to “formation during the Apostolic Year”. I propose to understand this period as an opportunity given to seminarians at a certain point in their formation to experiment in their vocational journey direct consequences of the interaction of the different aspects involved in the initial formation.

a) The hermeneutical triangle of the Vincentian formation or the mutual and fruitful interaction between the candidate, the foundational experience and the historical context

Through the hermeneutical triangle, the Vincentian formation may be conceived as an organic system within which interact several components: the candidate (the one who is called or the interpreter)

¹ JACQUES DUPUIS, *Frontiers in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.

² Jacques Dupuis’ in *Frontiers in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.

³ Read CLAUDE GEFFRÉ, *Le Christianisme au risque de l’interprétation*, Paris, Cerf, 1997, pp. 65-90.

⁴ The most important thing during the apostolic year is the pastoral experience.

with his personal motivations, the foundational experience (or text, that is to say, the charism of the Congregation) and the historical context of the lived experiences of the vocation. That is what I mean by the “hermeneutical triangle” of Vincentian formation.

As in the hermeneutical theology or the interaction between “text”, “context” and “interpreter” contributes enormously to the success of the reflection (in Vincentian formation), the interaction between the original motivation of the candidate, the foundational experience and the historical realities. All these are essential for the maturation of a vocation to make a responsible missionary commitment. In other words, during the initial Vincentian formation, the candidate lives the *back-and-forth* of the hermeneutical triangle through the articulation (or the interaction) of his personal experience (identified as the original motivation for his vocation), the fundamental content of formation, (what the Ratio means by foundational experience with theoretical and practical dimensions), and the context within which we live the personal donation of self as a response to the Lord’s call. This context is generally characterized by the complexity of socio-political, cultural, and religious realities, experienced by the local church; it is, in short, of the existential situation or of the daily experiences of the poor.

In this perspective, the probationary or apostolic period is a necessary step in the formation of confreres as a time of direct confrontation of the original foundational experience entrusted to the memory of the Congregation (that is, the fundamental principles of formation through which we transmitted the Vincentian charism and the social doctrine of the Church), and the challenges of the context where we exercise the Vincentian mission. Such a confrontation takes place in a back-and-forth between the different interactive experiences. These mark the formation of future confreres, contributing greatly to the emergence of the missionary vocation.

It would seem that it is through such continuous interaction between the original motivations, the fundamental aspects of formation, and the direct pastoral experiences that bring about needed transformations; even better, a conversion for a realistic and balanced Vincentian formation. It is a formation which involves the determination and sincerity in the commitment to serve the poor. From this point of view, taking into account its specific objective, the probationary or apostolic period is defined as a time of direct pastoral experience of a year’s duration, as suggested in the Ratio Formationis. It remains an important moment in the formation of all future Vincentians.

b) Specific Objective and recipients of this time of apostolic year

Before talking about the target and recipients of this time of the apostolic year, let us recall with insistence the fact that the Ratio highlights a Vincentian orientation and unity in all stages of formation within the Congregation. Indeed, in each step, formation within the Congregation of the Mission must always engage Vincentian charism. All steps marking initial formation are equally united to the extent they relate to each other in a symmetrical fruitful interaction (such is unity of formation in various stages). Therefore, the year of internship (a normal period of Vincentian formation), as the Ratio notes, “can be attached to or be part” of any step in the formation of our candidates. Therefore, it is up to each Province to determine these times according to its priorities, but not without taking into account the profile or even of personal evolution of each candidate.

Nevertheless, whatever step to which it is attached or time when it occurs, it is still true across the board for all candidates, Vincentian formation in the year of internship is meant to pursue common and specific objectives, including helping candidates discover our missionary charism and developing missionary skills. This can help them see their vocation as a concrete response to the challenges of evangelization and the existential needs of the poor. This occurs in a pastoral experience, made directly in an open, lively Vincentian apostolate and community (chaplaincies, parishes, educational, etc.). In other words, this time is a special period of discernment, enrichment, and deepening the Vincentian vocation from one or more pastoral experiences.

In the light of this objective, it is consistent to see that the Ratio “considers profitable” such a pastoral experience for all Vincentian candidates, including those preparing for priestly ministry, brotherhood candidates, and even those who are hesitant to permanently commit to their vocation in the Congregation. It should be specified where and when this apostolic experience should be done to make it as beneficial as possible.

c) In relation to the places and at the time for the beginning of this experience

Of course, if the specific objective fixed in the Ratio Formationis concerning the year of internship highlights the relevance of such an experience for all, the places and times to begin this experience will vary according to the diversity of contextual realities, needs, or mission priorities of each Province and the pathways of each candidate. In a general way, the Ratio targets places of lived experience in this pastoral experience for a year, in Vincentian communities and apostolates that are alive and open. The pastoral character of this experience is

present in all Vincentian communities and through all forms of ministries exercised by confreres and communities within a Province. It is important to avoid tensions in the transmission and reception of candidates in non-apostolic communities. Therefore, in the spirit of the Ratio, all Vincentian communities and apostolates can accommodate confreres who need to deepen or discern their vocation in the Congregation from a given pastoral experience given.

However, to make it a truly profitable experience for the Province and confreres, the choice of place and time of the apostolic year should not be done arbitrarily. On the contrary, it must submit to objective criteria relating to the priorities of the province and the Congregation, to the needs of the poor, to the type of Vincentian being formed for these purposes, and the personal profile of each confrere in formation. Hence, there is a need to connect this dual choice (of place and time) with the various elements, especially with the candidates or student and the director who accompanies them. This dialogue allows each Province to determine the time of formation for all candidates in a pastoral experience, which will possibly be tailored for individual cases.

To succeed, a certain human, spiritual, intellectual, and community-minded maturity is required from candidates. For that reason, it is preferable that this probationary period be linked to a stage of training where the candidate has acquired a degree of maturity enabling him to deepen his appreciation of pastoral work or sharpen his discernment as it applies to his vocation. In any event, this must also be a goal of interprovincial formation

d) The lived experiences of the unity of formation during the apostolic year

The concern of the Ratio to explain this chapter appears very clearly, and it is bolstered through in the second section devoted exclusively to objectives and strategies of formation in the apostolic year. The apostolic is also a year of deepening the formation in each of its dimensions (also called 'axes'): Vincentian, human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral community. The student and director must ensure that the pastoral character of this experience is consistent with the unity of formation. One of the possibilities to achieve this is to be attentive to the way the different axes of formation are integrated into the life of the student. Maintaining unity in formation through the organic experience of these different axes remains an indispensable factor for a harmonious deepening of one's vocation and a successful pastoral experience.

e) Appreciation of the student

Naturally such an important moment in formation, such as the pastoral year, must its end have an evaluation of how it functioned in lines with the stated objectives. It is here that the Ratio suggests some criteria or a framework that can serve as evaluation grid of the student after his pastoral experience. It is interesting to note that as an evaluation, it appears to be global in that it takes into account almost all dimensions of formation: personal, community, and human maturity highlighting a spirit of openness and dialogue. In other words, the time of the pastoral experience should point toward deep vocational discernment and encourage a more mature response to the call of the Lord.

At this step, it is essential that the student situate his vocation in relation to the foundational experience and historical context with the help of his director and the local community that welcomed him. At the end of the period of apostolic year, the student should come to appreciate the effects of the triangular interaction on his life and vocation. Otherwise, the experience will be worthless. To this end, the role of the director is necessary as seen in this chapter of the Ratio. It is still important each Province could take it into account in its own Executive Board: to help the Directors of the apostolic year in their role as guides, to clearly define their functions and specify the nature of their mission during this time of pastoral experience.

We could also think to determine, in this same process of discernment, of enrichment and deepening of the vocation, the degree of responsibility of the local and ecclesial community that welcomes the student.

Conclusion

I have used the hermeneutical triangle to locate the Vincentian formation in a dynamic of reciprocal interactions between the subject (candidate), the content of the formation and the historical context. In this dynamic, the apostolic year that the Ratio proposes, with its specific objective as time of pastoral experience intended to all candidates for the mission, I found the curriculum of this formation of our candidates as a privileged moment – but not separate from the other steps of the formation. The goal is similar: to deepen, enrich and discern a missionary vocation from its interaction with the existential reality of the poor.

Beyond adaptations that place to the principle of contextualization as applicable to the Ratio, the general guidelines insist on the necessity of this time for all students and confreres being formed to have a Vincentian orientation in this period. It is meant to be an effective integration of the student in the life and in the mission of his host community, and unity of his formation during the apostolic year by highlighting

the pastoral dimension of each 'axis'. However, if the principles of orientation of the life of the student during this time are sufficiently shown here, the role of the Director and the host community requires a more intentional, personalized approach in each province to avoid being caught in the trap of letting the confrere or student to conduct his life and apostolic endeavors in a solitary manner, thus depriving him of effects of community on his discernment as well as the enrichment and deepening of his vocation.

This step of initial formation is necessary for the candidate who is discerning his vocation, the provincial community who accompanied him in discernment, and is familiar with the candidate, and the Congregation who expects him to give of himself fully in the evangelization and service of the poor. The continuous accompaniment of the student in this time of pastoral experience is indispensable; it remains an imperative, a requirement of Vincentian formation.

Translated from French by NARCISSE DJERAMBETE YOTOBUMBETI, C.M.

Chapter 6

Formation of Vincentian Brothers After the Internal Seminary

Célestin Farcas, C.M.
Province of Toulouse

This chapter six of the new *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation focuses on formation of lay brothers after the Internal Seminary, and before taking Good Purposes. It is a crucial period in the life of the Brother, insofar as his vocation is concerned, and a fundamental time in coming to terms with his future commitment to the Congregation. Chapter 6 is composed of four essential sections which are important for the preparation of brothers during their formation. Let us examine these more closely in this chapter.

The *Ratio* in the first section of this chapter reminds us of the identity and vocation of the Brother over the history of the Church. Since the early centuries, following the teaching of Jesus, every baptized person is a brother or sister and is responsible for one another. With the appearance of monastic orders, congregations, and most recently societies of apostolic life, the concept of the lay brother opens new perspectives on commitment. Today, without delving too much into the history or focusing on canonical terms, we can say simply that the Brother is a lay person who makes commitment with vows to follow Jesus Christ and puts himself at the service of the Christian community.

According to Saint Vincent, there is no doubt about the nature of the vocation of lay brothers. They are dedicated people and authentic missionaries, and even if they are not clerics, they are apostles. Through their service as brothers, they cooperate to the ministry of the church. *“So, gentlemen, whether the Brothers are those who work for the Gospel, or pray for the conversion of the people, do penance, whether they are fasting and are working for the sanctification of the clergy and of people, it may mean that they are participants and cooperators of the good that is done in the missions, seminars, ordinations, pensions, and so on”* (XII, 98).

Brothers are true missionaries; St. Vincent valued them and their work. He gave them jobs to go along with their personal qualities and skills. Our Constitutions tell us that, “Lay persons, who among us are called brothers, are destined for the apostolate of the Church and the Congregation. They carry it out by the work that is appropriate to their status” (C. 52 §2).

St. Vincent often used the word “lay” to characterize Brothers, that is, to show the importance of their identity in the Congregation, and promote through them the condition of the laity in the Church. There justification about the vocation of the Brother emerges from the baptismal commitment, along with a call to contribute to the work of evangelization in a special way. This in turn is an enrichment of our faith in Jesus Christ.

The *Ratio* presents us with the goals and context of formation. It is primarily to help a brother discover his future commitment in the Congregation according to his personality and skills and to help him to find his place in the Congregation so that he can flourish spiritually and humanely. To accomplish that, the *Ratio* gives him the means for professional formation in the light of his physical and intellectual abilities, to prepare for his future apostolate in the Congregation.

Our Constitutions state that, “Brothers should be gradually introduced into the apostolate, so that they learn to view, to judge, and to do all things in the light of faith, and, through their actions, to develop and perfect themselves with the others” (C. 92).

If we questioned our senior brothers about their professional formation, they will often use these unfortunately revealing phrases: “*I learned on the job*”, or “*It was another Brother who taught me*”. Their wonderful commitment shows that this form of transmission was functional for a time. With the decreasing number of Brothers today, and especially with the progressive disappearance of the number of professionals, the old training style does not and should not work. Over the past forty years, the apostolate of the Brothers has changed. Formerly, in some larger houses of the Congregation, there were five or six Brothers, and each one specialized in a particular field: cooking, tailoring, shoemaker, carpentry, nurse, etc. Today, brothers have transitioned from what was once solely “domestic duties” to pastoral activities. They manage to still combine both as well: for example, from the kitchen in the morning, visiting the sick or people in the afternoon and ending the day by teaching to a group of catechesis in the evening. These diversifications of the apostolate bring new challenges, but also new requirements to insure that the Brothers receive good formation.

The *Ratio Formationis* is innovative in that it promotes the possibility of setting up a support and training more suited to the person’s skills. We move from the concept “formation” used by the Constitutions to the concept that one “has to be formed.” We no longer have to learn on the job, because the world in which we exercise our mission requires more professionalism. For that reason, the time of formation is a favorable period for Brothers and it must bring forth the benefit of a solid and good formation.

To do this, in the third section the *Ratio* describes the objectives and strategies to be followed. They are orientation bases to help in the

spiritual, apostolic, and human formation of Brothers. They are similar to important lights at the roadside to help us at night to see clearly. These important formations are: Vincentian, human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and community. All these lines are crucial during and after the formation.

– **The Vincentian axis of formation:** This is the continuity of Vincentian formation, which we have received the basis of during the Internal Seminary. It involves a deepening of the understanding of our charism, and finding ways to promote its practical application. As a Brother, I am often asked to explain our charism, or to direct speakers or groups in the way of our charism, and that requires not only knowledge, but an exemplary awareness of its meaning and value. Taking time to deepen our awareness of the charism, trying to understand our commitment through the vows, endorsing the spirit of availability for mission, are beneficial for ourselves, for the Congregation and for the people we will work with. We must use this time of grace well to deepen our spirituality so we can more easily live his wealth and benefit others.

– **Human formation:** to support the importance and necessity of this dimension of formation, I refer here to a recent key document of the Church to summarize my thoughts:

“The human and fraternal dimensions of the consecrated life call for self-knowledge and the awareness of personal limitations, so as to offer its members the inspiration and support needed on the path towards perfect freedom. In present day circumstances, special importance must be given to the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially in their own community, their serenity of spirit, their compassion for those who are suffering, their love for the truth, and a correspondence between their actions and their words” (Vita Consecrata 71).

“Being at peace with yourself”, being right with yourself and others, feeling good about one’s abilities and limitations is a life-long process. Human formation allows Brothers to discover themselves outside the realm of their families, in a large environment such as the Congregation, where the focus is centered on the mission. With the guidance of formators, the Brother can adjust to the demands of the mission, both in the ways of being and doing.

– **Spiritual formation:** *“If the Congregation, with the help of God’s grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Christ will be needed. How to do this is learned mainly from what is taught in the Gospels: Christ’s poverty, his chastity and obedience; his love for the sick; his decorum; the sort of lifestyle and behavior which he inspired in his disciples; his way of getting along with people; his daily spiritual exercises; preaching missions; and other ministries which he*

undertook on behalf of the people. There is something on each of these in the chapters which follow” (RC I. 3.).

Following the recommendations of our Holy Founder, each confrere is called to make the spirit of Jesus Christ his own. Our life is a perpetual assimilation to Jesus, but especially during this time of formation, where Brothers have an opportunity to focus more on the spirituality of our Congregation. If we make good use of these practices and traditions of spiritual life, we can then live a well-balanced life between the spiritual and the material.

– **The intellectual formation:** taking in consideration of the evolution of the apostolate of the Brothers in the Congregation today requires to study and reflect on theology and spirituality, and to receive some professional formation in these areas. Some Brothers join the Congregation with a background of professional or theological formation, while others came without any formation. The *Ratio* encourages the chance for seeking professional formation according to the capabilities of the person and the needs of the Mission. However, there is a need for some basic theological formation. Both are necessary for the Brother so to feel comfortable in future ministries.

In the time of St. Vincent, Brothers had many varied responsibilities in the temporal domain, such as Brother Alexander Veronne, who was in charge at St. Lazare of the chapel, its organ, the pharmacy, infirmary, kitchen and laundry. We have all known some Brothers who had similar responsibilities throughout their lives, but they are exceptions today. In our current configuration of the Congregation, Brothers are often called upon to change their apostolate to move from material to pastoral responsibilities and vice versa.

– **Pastoral formation:** We are in the action area of applying the practical pastoral aspect. As Vincentians, we must confront the reality of the Church, society, and the poor we are called to serve throughout our lives. This time of formation helps the Brother and his formators to discern and take directions for future engagement in pastoral work. Our congregation has a multitude of ways to serve the poor that a Brother can undertake, such as schools, support for migrants, visiting the sick, working with travelers and the homeless, visits to the hospital, prison, or the places where the poor congregate or live on the margins. These activities, along with serving in parishes as catechists or accompanying various church groups, should give Brothers an idea of how wide the range is and the many opportunities available. Brothers can be fortunate in having such a chance to delve in many types of pastoral ministry, even if we have to ‘learn on the job.’

– **Community formation:** *“We try to live our community life animated by love, particularly with the practice of “the five virtues,” so that*

it will be a support to our apostolate and a sign to the world of the newness of evangelical life” (C. 24).

St. Vincent wanted communities to be centered on Jesus Christ so they could serve the poor, living in simplicity and humility with fraternal charity and mutual support. The community is our “home,” where we need to feel good and ensure that our confreres feel welcome. Being good in his community is the key to greater fulfillment in the apostolate. Living in a community is not easy, it takes time to adapt, work on your personality and reflects on the reasons of why and how of we are called to live and adapt to community life. The Brother in formation has the opportunity to discover a community in the Mission, to adapt himself to the ambiance of community life, and to live with the other confreres in a positive experience. These six axes of the formation of the Brothers are helpful for the good preparation to the missionary life and our lay brothers have all the necessary to carry out their future ministries.

The fourth section of this chapter presents some few criteria for the evaluation of this formation program and establishes the profile for becoming a Brother. Indeed to understand the success or failure of this program, it is important to give time for the evaluation both of the candidates but also the method of formation. During the time of training, the Brother is brought to acquire certain attitudes, ways to do and be, knowledge and be open minded.

This profile is there to help him to self-evaluate and together with his formators to project the future. To conclude I give thanks to God for this well elaborated Ratio Formationis, which provides a context for future brothers to achieve an adequate formation in vocation and mission.

Jean-Pierre Renouard said in a retreat he preached for Brothers: “I fear that we have still had a simplistic point of view about the vocation of brother, because by experience we knew them as gardeners, cooks, shoemakers, tailors, cleaners...”. In other words, we have been more attentive to what they did than to who they are. In the very nature of their vocation, we must be attentive to the fact that they are first of all missionaries, and that their action must be in priority apostolic... and secondly dedicated to the material tasks.

This time of formation will allow the Brothers to better understanding of the vocation which is theirs, to deepen their identity and find their place in their apostolate, to feel appreciated for who they are and for what they do. Daily in community, we pray the Expectatio Israel, our community prayer for vocations. I would like to end with this prayer for vocations, and in particular, to promote vocations to the Vincentian Brotherhood. At a time when it may appear that the vocation of the Brother is disappearing from our Congregation, let us pray

to the Lord, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, to raise up zealous brothers to join us in the Mission.

Saint Joseph, as you watched over the Holy Family, watch over us. Through your example of living humility, charity, zeal and courage, as did Jesus, give us vocations of lay brothers in our Congregation of the Mission, for the service of the Church and our fellow human beings. In so doing, may this bring peace to our hearts, and transform us as people of loving servants like Jesus in a world affected by hatred. We bring all these intentions, to you who is our model of humble, loving service, and ask you to present them to Jesus your adoptive son, who lives and reigns with the father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Translated from French by NARCISSE DJERAMBETE YOTOBUMBETI, C.M.

Chapter 7

Formation at the Level of the Major Seminary

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Province of Madagascar

We can say that the major seminary is the last step in the initial formation of our confreres. It is the passage between the secular state to the clerical state of the seminarian. That is why we must give importance at this training stage.

As it is the last step, there may be a temptation to take risks, both from the side of either the formator, or from those under formation. Formators may have a tendency to question if they are dealing with fully-formed adults, so they will often have the temptation to control even the small errors of seminarians, not only to correct them, but rather to exert their own authority, or in a worst-case scenario, to find reasons to dismiss them. In human psychology, there can at times be the tendency to be more sensitive to the faults of others than to their qualities. But the new Ratio Formationis will help to correct that tendency.

In the same context, but in another opposite way, formators could too rely too much on the maturity of these young people, leaving them alone, with the notion that this is a self-formation process worthy of adults. When this occurs, they will not take the time to be present and attentive to the needs of the formation house. Gradually, this can come across to those being formed as a lack of commitment, a passive presence replaces an active formator. In this case, knowing the lack of commitment of a formator, those in formation may have a tendency to not showing their true identity, which, as with all human beings, has both positive and negative aspects. Consequently, during their time in the major seminary, they can hide (in a hypocritical way) their true personality until after ordination, when the revelation of their true identity surfaces. Of course, by that time, it would be too late for correction.

Another difficulty that can occur is that these young confreres could believe that as adults, they are on the end point of their formation, and no longer need to be corrected. Or perhaps they could be deluded into believing they might know all they need to for completion of their formation, and as a result lack curiosity, especially in undertaking

theological learning and research. I such as case we might recall an aphorism attributed to St. Augustine: "Search as someone who must find, and find like someone should who should search again". This refers to the need for a continue thirst for knowledge, in which the effort is never in vain. It also is a challenge for the person to never be fully satisfied until one reaches total perfection. As Saint Vincent might have stated, it would the quest to always "*do more*" (*davantage*).

In fact, the temptation can be to believe that the formation of the Internal Seminary is enough to know St Vincent and the charism of the Congregation. But the notion of service to the poor must be understood in context, relating to time and in space. In this way, a Vincentian must be versatile to respond to the calls of the poor, which differ from one time and place to another. It is essential not to have a fixed, inflexible idea of service to the poor. It is not appropriate that we consider the poor as our property, or the care of the poor as our exclusive talent. The whole Church, following Jesus Christ evangelizer of the poor, is called to engage in this service.

In view of this complex situation, it may be beneficial to initiate the idea with our students of taking their responsibilities in formation more seriously, both individually, and for that of their peers. In fact, students are often more open among themselves than to formators and can possess a mindset for creating a place of healthy, fraternal formation. This idea can be juxtaposed with this other mentality: *here we are all students in formation, so who could claim to correct his colleagues? If I reveal the mistakes of my brothers, do I bear responsibility for the consequences of their dismissal?* If this fiction were true, it would appear that everyone would manage to finish his formation years without problems. But, what a pity!

For that reason precisely, it is necessary to always engage in formation, from the study in college of philosophy, through the years of the Major Seminary. This will appear in these places according to stages and methods of approach that facilitate a realization of necessary, progressive stages of formation to promote human maturity in all areas. In cultures and places such as Africa, where mutual respect is a prime principle, this fits well in the secular tradition. The idea to consider stages of formation should be implemented without hesitation or even in light of the challenges it may present to a specific cultural or ethnic group.

To create a sense of mutual respect and encourage young people to take responsibility for their formation, they should be given a strong sense of duty and the freedom to carry it out. If a young confrere in formation realizes or knows the risk of deviations from proper living of the goals of formation in the life of one of his brothers, he is responsible to share with him what he saw. If the confrere heeds his advice, he has succeeded in his mission and he can wait in humility for others

to come and offer him fraternal correction. Otherwise, he has a duty to notify the formators, so that they can take appropriate and timely action. But if he refuses to take action and accepts in quiet the error of others, he is wrong, and should question whether he should continue in formation. On the opposite end of the spectrum, if a student-confrere runs to his formators at the slightest mistake of another of his brothers without first engaging in fraternal correction with his fellow student-confrere, he is wrong. This type of petty behavior can ruin the atmosphere of the community, and work against achieving any meaningful formation.

It is important to insist that a confrere's life as an ordained priest does not begin only at the time of his ordination. Indeed, as was previously mentioned, it can sometimes happen that seminarians wait for the time of ordination to pass before they fully reveal what they are really like as persons. After that time, it is too late to correct them, even if they have accepted fraternal corrections. In truth, some dare to say that as they are no longer in the seminary, they do not want to be told what to do. One can hear this type of mentality expressed: *"I am no longer in the seminary; now, we are all priests, so it is not appropriate to criticize each other again"*.

It is also important to emphasize the meaning attached to the background of young confreres from their family of origin and ethnic and cultural traditions to understand and contextualize what it means to become a Vincentian priest. In fact, it is also appropriate to explain the meaning of this dynamic specifically in regard to the vow of obedience. Indeed, there is a clear difference between slavish and noble service: the differences are interpreted differently between men, and this affects their understanding in a spiritual and religious context (between the person and God) on the other hand. By servile service, it is meant to be an obligation of duty, done often against his will to fulfill his responsibilities to the community or apostolate. But the higher ideal, that of noble service, is done in love and joy, without expecting anything greater.

In sum, it is not easy to take on the mission of the training our young confreres in the major seminary. Thus, one can understand the refusal of some when they are asked to undertake this difficult apostolate. Others may make conditions after being trained as formators. Good will to serve as a formator is not enough; we need educated confreres with the right qualifications. This last requirement is often lacking, due to a problem of finding the right personnel in the province.

In terms of the recent emphasis by the General Assembly and Superior General and Council on the issue of systemic change for those living in poverty, I feel the Ratio Formationis does not have a clear development about the matter. It would then be important to develop the subject in detail as part of an integral formation process. In the

major seminary, it will be useful to include study of the social doctrine of the church and canon and civil law to learn how to counter the injustices suffered by those living in poverty. This should occur not only in structured classroom learning, but also in the formation house to apply our Vincentian charism in a practical manner.

It should also be noted that nowhere in Chapter 7 is there mention of the inculturation of the Vincentian charism. Since Vatican II, we know that inculturation is a necessary component of evangelization. And the mission of the Congregation, which as its center point is to evangelize the poor, will be present everywhere. Sometimes it is a common misconception that the concept of inculturation applies only to provinces and regions located in what we call the “developing” (“Third Church”) world. However, it must be noted that the “Third Church” has become increasingly important in the whole Church, including the Congregation, so a discussion and some reflection on the concept of inculturation is a significant issue.

Yet, often our thoughts are focused on the Northern Hemisphere with realities such as the lack of vocations and decreasing numbers of confreres, requiring reconfiguration of Provinces. These are undeniable realities of the moment, but this should not prevent us to see other realities. However, would it not be possible to look at things differently than to always send people to serve where there are no vocations? Thus, it may be possible to have a joint formation program where vocations are flourishing, and to send confreres to serve in places where there is a need.

Indeed, in some places where vocations are flourishing, we are obliged to limit recruitment of young people because of lack of resources to support formation. In other places, the lay members of the Vincentian Family are called to help to overcome a lack of missionary priests, without making a call to other provinces where they can have missionaries sent. One could imagine that in all these flourishing provinces, the men who are also members of our Congregation would without hesitation send missionaries wherever the need. So would it not be too difficult to imagine an openness to simply sharing he missionary spirit with others. We do so already by interprovincial cooperation, but we can go further, to aim for a global way in the Congregation.

It is important to notice that our young people should be aware of financial resources that are being expanded for their time of formation, sharing with them the income and expenditures of the Community. Yet, there is a need to cultivate during the formation a realistic mentality when it comes to temporal goods. Often our young student-confreres can expect everything from the province, without making real effort to contribute or to participate in the life of the community. Why not require them to engage in manual labor, or to produce material

goods for the house, and during the holidays, engage in some other paid activities so they will contribute to the good of the apostolate? When done in such a manner, the idea of self-financing will not seem too strange to them. In addition, it will be easier for them to understand the economic realities of managing a house or an apostolate in places where they will go after ordination. Otherwise, they can end up being ignorant of the proper management of community funds and temporal good, which can be dangerous for them and for the Province

Briefly, formation in the major seminary should help candidates realize that priestly life is not only in their future, but in the present, especially during the time of the major seminary. This would justify the importance of teaching responsibility to our young student-confreres today, so they can be well prepared for the future. Knowing that they are in this critical stage of initial formation, and need regular guidance from their formators, we have to strike the right balance in the responsibilities given them. That is not to say that we tolerate letting them do whatever they want. We need young people who have decided to be committed to their own formation. In this, the frank teaching of Jesus will be the rule. "Anyone who would come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). But remember too that when we truly love, we can demand everything, even the most difficult tasks.

Translated from French by NARCISSE DJERAMBETE YOTOBUMBETI, C.M.

Chapter 8

Ongoing Formation

Hugh F. O'Donnell, C.M.
Province of China

The year 1992 was a significant one for addressing the issue of ongoing formation in the Congregation of the Mission. In that year, the General Assembly made recommendations on how to implement a program of ongoing formation, and Father Maloney and the General Council acted on it, resulting in the start of the Centre International de Formation, (otherwise known as CIF). Thanks to the creative efforts of three confreres who designed and implemented the program, CIF opened its doors in Paris in 1994. It had a specific audience in mind, namely, confreres between thirty-five and fifty years old with ten or more years in ministry. Some might say that it addressed the challenges of a group in mid-life. Subsequently, a special month-long program was added for confreres over fifty. Post initial formation had been tried twice before, in the time of Vincent and in the eighteenth century, but each attempt lasted just a short time.

I was privileged to succeed Father Rybolt and to spend six years directing CIF. Due to my time at CIF, I have been asked to reflect on ongoing formation in the *Ratio Formationis*. It was a time of blessing, because I was able to live with confreres from around the world and witness the good effects of their participation. CIF gives confreres a time to slow down, to reflect and pray, to be with confreres from around the world, and to walk in the footsteps of St. Vincent.

Before the Second Vatican Council there was no distinction between initial formation and ongoing formation, because initial formation was all there was. Formation was completed at ordination for priest confreres or with perpetual vows for Brothers. The distinction between initial and ongoing formation came about with the shift from behavioral to developmental understandings of life and ministry. Vocation is now understood as a developing journey in a changing world. We are called to be lifelong learners. Conversion is not just a one-time event. We are called to ongoing conversion. Discipleship is a journey of transformation.

Aggiornamento was one of the by-words of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII first used it and Pope Paul VI later embraced it as the meaning of the Council. It signaled the need to update the church and come abreast of the times. Immediately after the Council, ongoing

formation practically speaking meant assimilating and promoting the teachings and the vision of the Second Vatican Council. There was a tsunami of workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences, and retreats. There was also much attention given to reading “the signs of the times” and looking to the future. This was not the only response to the Council. There were others who heard the Council calling the church to go back to its roots in the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. Rather than *Aggiornamento*, they spoke of *Ressourcement* (going back to the sources, traditions and living symbols of Catholic Tradition). In both cases, there was a great deal of education and formation to be done. It was a new day.

But it was about more than “catching up” and “coming abreast of the times”. It was about a new way of being in the world. The Council’s embrace of pilgrimage, culture and personhood gave a temporal, cultural and human setting to the eternal truths of earlier times. These are the coefficients of grasping and appropriating the fullness of the Mystery of Christ in our times. After all, this is what ongoing formation is really all about.

One of the most popular retreat themes, I discovered, is the theme of *journey*, or, *pilgrimage*. Everyone is on a journey. We are on the road, but we have not arrived yet. We are not perfect, at least, not yet. On this journey, maybe we are stalled, or maybe we have lost our way, maybe we have found an oasis, and maybe we are moving forward at full speed, but we still are on a journey. It is the opposite of the perfectionist behavioral standards some of us knew in our youth. In this context, ongoing formation for pilgrims is food for the journey.

There are many ways of presenting the story of Saint Vincent. I have found that dividing his story into “Vincent One” and “Vincent Two” helps people focus on Vincent’s journey. “Vincent Two” (1625-1660) is the Famous Vincent from age 45 to his death at 80, who at his death was said to have transformed the face of the church in France – more to be admired than likely to be imitated. “Vincent One” is the Pilgrim Vincent journeying from financial ambition at the time of ordination to radical evangelical freedom at age forty-five when he unconditionally embraced his vocation to the poor and founded the Congregation of the Mission. People love to identify with Vincent as he finds his way, makes friends, shifts directions, endures his crisis of faith, finds God in events and people, and gives his life to the poor. His journey not only clarifies his vocation but also brings him to the freedom to wait on Providence. We can identify with Vincent’s journey, because it is a lot like ours. Neither he nor we are born free or holy – we grow into evangelical freedom and apostolic holiness by stages.

Did Vincent experience Ongoing Formation? Formally, no, but that is not my point. Actually, he had a lot of teachers and mentors, from Berulle and Duval through Madame de Gondi to Louise de Marillac,

his greatest companion, and Francis de Sales, his greatest mentor. However, the most important thing was that he *was a lifelong learner*. He learned from all these people, and he learned habitually from events, persons, and circumstances believing that God was present in and through them. He was on a true pilgrim. We cannot really understand Vincent apart from a developmental view of his *story*.

Bernard Lonergan, S.J., one of the outstanding theologians of the twentieth century, was asked in an interview to sum up his life as a theologian. He answered, "I spent my life introducing history into theology". Without history, everything we know is two-dimensional, timeless, abstract, as our theology was for a long time. It is taking history seriously that privileges development and growth and dynamically shapes our horizons and way of thinking. Ongoing formation means taking history and time seriously as human persons, as priests, as brothers, as missionaries – in our journey of transformation.

By embracing a developmental view of our lives in relation to persons, events and circumstances, *experience* becomes central. Adult models of ongoing formation evoke, honor, respect, engage and build upon the experience of the participants. Sometimes in the past the experience and experiences of the participants were taken for granted because they were presumed to be common to everyone, but today serious attention is paid to life experience and what people have learned along the way. It is our experiences lived and shared that give life to our lives. Yet, sharing experiences is not the whole story. Experiences once shared have to be understood and sorted out, then processed, so we can come to affirm what is real and true in them and to know our own rock-bottom truth. It is the way of coming home to ourselves.

Sharing our spiritual and apostolic experiences in community is the key to the renewal of the Congregation according to paragraph 46 of our Constitutions. This paragraph is found in the chapter on prayer, because it speaks of sharing the Word of God, but it deserves to be lifted out and put in a place where it attracts attention at the beginning of the Constitutions. Paragraph 46, along with the discernment of *the signs of the times* in paragraph 2, gives us the process key to the transformation of the Congregation as a contemporary apostolic community. It reads:

46. – *In community prayer we find an excellent way of animating and renewing our lives, especially when we celebrate the word of God and share it, or when in fraternal dialogue we share with one another the fruit of our spiritual and apostolic experience.*

In this very brief paragraph, the Constitutions give high priority to sharing and fraternal dialogue as the keys to renewal. The English text reads, "In community prayer we find *an excellent way* (Latin: *optimum*)

of animating and renewing our lives”. Some would translate *optimum* as “...the best way...”. What is important is that the Constitutions privilege sharing and fraternal dialogue as the way of “animating and renewing our lives”.

What are we called to share? We are called to share the Word of God and our spiritual and apostolic experiences.

We are expected to celebrate the Word of God and share it with one another. This has a direct link to proclaiming the Good News. Vincent’s use of the Scriptures shows how deeply the Scriptures penetrated his life and way of speaking. They had become second nature to him. We used to have the practice of reading a chapter of the New Testament every day. Perhaps many still do. Paragraph 46 calls us beyond our individual devotion to the Scriptures to corporate celebration of the Word and fraternal sharing in community. Recently a young diocesan priest arrived on one of our missions full of knowledge and love for the Scriptures. He has attracted crowds of people, who are even willing to reschedule their lives to listen to him. The hunger and longing of our people for the Scriptures is profound and often unmet. Therefore, this paragraph ultimately leads to apostolic fruitfulness and transforms not only our relationships in community but also our missionary relevance. *I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me to eat and drink.*

We are also called to share the fruits of our spiritual and apostolic experience. For some this may be easy, but for many it is not. In some cultures, it is even more difficult than in others. Nevertheless, the potential, the power, and the promise of this are great. Three factors, when present, will liberate communities to do this, namely; freedom, trust, and need. No one can be forced to this level of fraternal sharing; it must be done freely, and so the freedom of each not to share must be respected. Secondly, it calls for a tangible level of mutual trust in the group. Distrust and sometimes cynicism or other streams of negativity will be the death of efforts in this direction. Thirdly, it works best where there is a felt or even urgent need for it, for example, where the local community is trying to find its way in a new and difficult apostolate. When a community is content with all its answers, this kind of sharing will become academic.

In this connection, the Provincial is called to provide this kind of sharing opportunity at least once a year in the new Ratio. It reads:

He will gather confreres as a province at least annually (in a meeting, convocation, or provincially assembly), to share their lives, aspirations, struggles, and vision of the province and its manner of living in community for the mission today.

This paragraph honors and validates the experience, insights, and wisdom of the confreres as our way of doing things. We are called to share many things – ordained as some of us were long ago to the title

of “the common table” – but ultimately and simply, as this paragraph says, “...to share our lives”.

This same dynamic of growth through sharing is found in the section on Spiritual Formation, where we read:

...(Each confrere) will share his spiritual journey with other confreres, especially with a Spiritual Director or other confrere with whom he can speak with openness concerning the joys and challenges of his life.

The **Ratio** is detailed and thorough in its treatment of the Vincentian Axis and the five areas of formation: Spiritual, Intellectual, Apostolic, Community and Human. They are self-explanatory and need no further commentary. I would like, however, to raise up three growth areas for comment: prayer, leadership and human formation.

Prayer: There has been a revolution in prayer in the Catholic Church over the past fifty years: centering prayer, Charismatic Renewal, liturgical prayer, *lectio divina*, Christian Meditation à la John Main and John Cassian (*maranatha*)... We have, I think, been beneficiaries and participants, but not leaders in the movement, with a few exceptions. The disciples said to Jesus, “Teach us to pray”. When people today want to learn to pray and are looking for someone to teach them, do we come to mind? I suggest this is a growth area for ongoing formation.

Leadership: In both church and society today, many yearn for good leaders. As a community, we have been aware of this need and have taken some steps to encourage and enable good leaders. Would I be mistaken if I observed that there has been a tendency for confreres to avoid leadership roles, especially, those of local superior or even local apostolic leader? Sometimes we have been characterized as “reluctant leaders”. Maybe it has been motivated by “Vincentian humility”. Hopefully we are leaving this reluctance behind. We now know that leadership can be learned and everyone is capable of leading in some way. We can learn to be good, solid, even exceptional, value-based collaborative leaders. It is about working with people based on shared values and a shared vision or common direction. We can learn to be leaders that listen to the people we work with and serve. It is a real gift to our not only organization or community, but actually to us too. What am I going to do for ongoing formation? I am going to learn to lead or to improve my leadership.

Human Formation: Everything begins and ends with being truly human. Emotional and relational maturity are expected of us. This is especially true of new candidates. But it is easier said than done. It turns out that there are many cultural and social factors that contribute to deferred maturity in these areas. So, ongoing formation is an

opportunity to continue our human development, first for ourselves, of course, but equally for the people we serve and companion.

Conclusion: Let us thank God that our community has embraced ongoing formation as an integral element in the development of our personal, community and apostolic lives. May it be a blessing for each confrere, especially when the time is right in one's own Vincentian journey.

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