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## From the Superior General

### Letter to the Visitors

20 April 2016

**D**ear Visitors,

May the joy of the risen Lord remain with you always!

In March, and then again this month, you may have seen the announcement that I sent out through the Vincentian Family Office regarding our celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of the Vincentian Charism. The special theme chosen for this year is "Welcoming the Stranger."

The international leaders of the Vincentian Family, in dialogue with their members, have been asked to submit their plans for this year-long celebration by October 2016.

During the General Assembly we will have an opportunity to discern our response as a Congregation. In order to prepare for this discussion, I ask each Visitor to speak with his confreres about how they might effectively make a difference in the lives of the strangers whom they serve as a province. You will have the opportunity to finalize your local plans after our dialogue on this topic. We will then share both our provincial and international strategies with the entire the Vincentian Family.

Thank you for your work in preparation for our General Assembly.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, CM  
*Superior General*

## **Dear Leaders and Members of the Vincentian Family**

**A**s was mentioned in January at our meeting of the international Vincentian Family in Rome, 2017 marks the 400th Anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism.

The Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission, having received the approval of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee as well as an enthusiastic reception from those present in Rome, now presents to you our Vincentian Family's Global Initiative for the celebration of this year.

A special note to the international leaders: please make sure you send your Branch's work plan by 1 October 2016 to Father Joseph Agostino at [vfo@famvin.org](mailto:vfo@famvin.org).

May the Lord bless all our efforts to welcome the stranger in our midst.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, CM  
*Superior General*

## **“I was a stranger and you welcomed me..”**

A global initiative of the Vincentian Family to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism in 2017.

In 2017 we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism. It was in 1617, while preaching in the parish church of Châtillon, that Vincent exhorted his congregation to take responsibility for a poor family from the parish that had taken seriously ill and were in need of food and comfort. The family was saved by the overwhelming response to this call to action and Vincent, as a result, had his great realization that for charity to be effective it must be properly organized – an event which has changed the world for the last 400 years.

This story also brings to life a gospel text at the heart of our shared Vincentian calling, Matthew 25:35 "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." By reaching out and helping the strangers in our midst we are showing solidarity with that event at Châtillon and we are as one with our Vincentian calling. We model the example of the Good Samaritan in our community.

Who are the strangers in our midst today? There are so many to choose from – the refugees fleeing from oppression and poverty, those internally displaced within their country due to civil war, the migrants seeking a new life, the homeless, those coping alone with physical or mental illness, those suffering discrimination perhaps because of their faith or race or color, the lonely and vulnerable both young and old. Many of these people and issues are already familiar areas of work to members of the Vincentian Family globally. However, can we do more?

Are there new poverties emerging to which we are being called to respond?

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism the leaders of the international Vincentian Family would like to invite all members of the Vincentian Family around the world to consider how we might better welcome the strangers in our communities by making it the focus of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism.

The year of welcoming the stranger will run from 1 January to 31 December 2017. It will be launched formally by Father Gregory Gay,

the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, on 15 May 2016, the Feast of Pentecost.

This date is especially significant for our Vincentian Family. It also marks the end of the Year of Collaboration, issuing a call to action and inviting us to discover concrete ways to reach out to the strangers in our midst. It also connects us more deeply with the Universal Church, which, under the guidance of Pope Francis, is celebrating the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

From 15 May 2016 onwards, the international leaders of the Vincentian Family will take responsibility for developing a reflective process of consultation with their particular branch of the Family, working closely with their regional and national bodies. We invite them to focus on the following questions:

- ✓ Who are the strangers in our midst?
- ✓ How are we currently supporting them?
- ✓ What new needs are emerging?
- ✓ How might we respond to these needs?
- ✓ Might we be the strangers in need of welcoming?

This consultation and the ideas emerging from it will allow each Vincentian Family branch to develop a work plan by October 2016 to be rolled out in 2017. These work plans will then be forwarded to the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission, which will coordinate and support activities globally through the production of materials for reflection and celebration, as well as promoting, on the Famvin website, the year and the activities generated. On the Famvin website. The commission will also collate a final report on the outcomes and impact of this initiative by mid-2018, so that we can judge the result of our actions at a global level.

Where the Vincentian Family has strong connections on the ground, we encourage the Family to collaborate at either a local, regional, national, or international level. As Vincent de Paul himself recognized, we are at our best and most effective when we work together.

Welcoming the strangers in our midst should also be seen as an invitation to everyone who shares (or might be interested in) our Vincentian values, mission, or spirituality. The people we currently serve are as capable of welcoming strangers as we are, if we invite them to do so. It is not dependent on power or wealth or hierarchy. This is an opportunity for everyone to be part of our Family and to share in our celebrations over the course of the year.

## To All the Members of MISEVI International

Rome, 23 May 2016

**M**ay the grace and peace of the Lord be with all of you!

My dear brothers and sisters, members of MISEVI, I have spent 12 years accompanying MISEVI in its growth. I have attempted to invest much energy into the development of this organization which is known as Lay Vincentian Missionaries.

On the one hand, we have defined the word missionary as referring to those individuals who live in community or in missions *ad gentes*; they are, certainly, most important and most significant and we want to see their number increase. But MISEVI means more, much more. MISEVI is where people are active in their parish or participating in an apostolate with the Daughters of Charity or with members of the Congregation of the Mission or other branches of the Vincentian Family. MISEVI is where people are ministering in popular missions, in their parish, or beyond their parish and their homeland and ministering in accord with the spirit and the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul. This is MISEVI, laymen and women who love and minister in accord with the spirit of Vincent de Paul.

I have seen many examples of this. We can consider members of MISEVI those who formally become members, as well as those individuals who, for one reason or another, reject becoming part of this global institution of lay Vincentian missionaries, yet do everything that the members of MISEVI do. Perhaps there is a resistance to structures or to statutes or to whatever. Nevertheless, we have the opportunity to grow and that is what I hope will happen.

I would have liked to have seen even greater growth than has occurred, but we are moving forward and the seed has been planted in numerous places. There is much potential in various countries, where the seed of MISEVI has been planted, and we rely on our elder brothers and sisters, on those who initiated this great project of the Vincentian Family, namely, MISEVI in Spain.

We can grow. We can reflect, for example, on the idea of shared mission not only with the Daughters of Charity or members of the Congregation of the Mission, but also with new communities that are being developed. Here I am referring to communities composed of individuals from distinct countries; this is, indeed, a real challenge. Cultural differences are always difficult to confront, but we must not allow those differences to separate us, but rather those differences should be viewed as elements that can enrich our growth and our faith commitment. We can broaden our vision of the world so that we give witness to the fact that, as Christians, we can live together regardless of any difference with regard to origin, the color of one's skin, language, etc. This is precisely what we are called to do: to give witness. We are also called to form international communities and participate in a shared mission with other branches of the Vincentian Family, especially with members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

I am very impressed with the work that is being done by the missionaries in Bolivia and in Honduras and by members of the new community in Angola. These missionaries open their doors in order to receive others. They want to give of themselves. All of this enables them to grow and to learn how to deepen their love for the poor (not verbally or through means of academic courses, but through their own example). They are taught the art of loving the poor just as Blessed Rosalie Rendu did when she accompanied the young men who were the founders of what became the largest branch of the Vincentian Family, namely, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Here, then, we are speaking about Frédéric Ozanam and his companions who were accompanied by that Daughter of Charity and who, because of her and with her, learned the art of loving the poor.

The message that I want to leave with you is the following: we must recognize that we work best when we work together, when we make real this idea of a shared mission. This is how we will grow.

We are at a time of preparation, a time when we are looking for strategies that will enable us to live in a more profound way the 400th anniversary of the origin of our Vincentian charism. This is an event that we are going to celebrate together as a Vincentian Family (an event that we will celebrate from 1 January to 31 December 2017).

Yes, it is a challenge to give witness to the fact that we can work together. We have chosen a particular theme based on the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of Saint Matthew (a chapter that was very dear to Saint Vincent). In light of this text, we come to understand that, when we deal with a person who is in need and when we come to his/her assistance, we are doing the same to Jesus. The verse that we are going to reflect upon during this time is verse 35c: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me*; I was a stranger in your midst and you made me feel welcome. That is the call that the Lord extends to us, and that call is extended in a special way to the lay missionaries.

The members of MISEVI have an incredible capacity to open their doors, to open their arms, and to receive persons into their midst who feel like strangers, to receive persons and make them feel welcome. This is a basic element of the Christian life and ought to characterize all Vincentians, especially those missionaries who are called to proclaim good news to the poor and who are to find in the poor the good news that will enable them to grow. This is our call, to serve and to evangelize; this is also our mission, which is to be accomplished in charity.

I want to conclude now and say farewell as Director General of MISEVI. I can assure you that this has been a very enriching experience. My prayer and my desire is that all of you will deepen your understanding of the missionary spirit. Our young men and women, all of our adult members who have given their life in service of the Lord and who, after many years of experience, continue to share the word and want to proclaim the word far and wide, all of these persons are truly a gift of God.

History is always the same. When we proclaim the good news, we discover that we have received more than we have given. This, then, is my invitation: let us act in accord with the Vincentian spirit; in accord with the spirit of the virtues that Vincent recognized as significant in the life of Jesus; in accord with the spirit that enables us to experience ourselves as simple men and women who are in a relationship with others, especially the poor; in accord with the spirit that enables us to recognize that we are humble individuals, in no way important or distinguished. Rather the poor are important and distinguished and the most distinguished person is the Lord to whom we are called to give glory.



We are called to be gentle so that, when we proclaim the good news, others will draw near to us and, through us, will be able to experience God's love and mercy.

As missionaries we are called to be willing to make sacrifices, willing to move out of our comfort zone, willing to look beyond our own self-interest and, thus, give ourselves to others. We are called, in the words of Pope Francis, to go out to the peripheries.

Above all we are called to be zealous with regard to the mission, zealous and enthusiastic in such a way that people can experience our joy in being messengers of the Good News. These are the characteristic virtues that Vincent recognized in the life of Jesus and that he himself wanted to live: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and apostolic zeal.

My brothers and sisters, members of MISEVI, those who have many years of experience and who have lived their lives committed to the mission, as well as those who are beginning as members of MISEVI, perhaps with the idea of serving for one or two or more years, let us all ask the Lord to help us to walk with him, to help us to be that which this year of mercy invites us to be, namely, people with open arms who reveal the mercy of God, the Father. We can be this only when we allow the Lord to embrace us with his love.

May God bless all of you. You can count on my prayers. Indeed, through my prayers, I will continue to be united with you after my time of service as Director General and Superior General has concluded. I will remain united with you as one more missionary involved in a shared mission.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, CM  
*Superior General*

## Letter to the Confreres

14 June 2016

**D**ear Confreres,

May the grace of Jesus Christ accompany us during this final stage of preparation for the XLII General Assembly, which will take place in Chicago (the United States) from 27 June – 15 July 2016.

There have been many preparations and there are great expectations as we gather together to celebrate this event. In fact, this will be the first time that a General Assembly is held outside of Europe and, during this gathering, we will elect a new Superior General who will serve the Congregation during the next six years.

In this context, communication will play an important role especially in light of the recent development of technology and the multiple modalities that can provide us with immediate information. The Office of Communications at the Curia has formulated a Communication Plan so that all the themes and work of the Assembly can be assessed by the confreres.

This Communication Plan involves the use of digital media and the social networks. Each one of those various forms of communication has its own public, its own language. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of these differences in order to make known the information with regard to the assembly.

Below you will find a list of the different sites that the confreres can utilize in order to be in touch with what occurs during the Assembly. We encourage you to make yourselves familiar with these various sites so that, together, all of us might experience the joy of this event.

The official site of the Assembly will be  
<http://ag2016.cmglobal.org/>

You can follow the Assembly at the following sites

*Social Network*      *Link*

Facebook                      <https://www.facebook.com/CMGlobal.org/>

Twitter                         <https://twitter.com/cmissionis>

Google+                        [https://plus.google.com/b/  
103977904748116053441/  
103977904748116053441/posts](https://plus.google.com/b/103977904748116053441/103977904748116053441/posts)

YouTube                        [https://www.youtube.com/channel/  
UCOteJsDxIIgaFG4OZPcBe1g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOteJsDxIIgaFG4OZPcBe1g)

Flickr                            <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cmglobal/>

Scribd (AG2016 collection)  
[https://www.scribd.com/collections/16734116/  
General-Assembly-2016](https://www.scribd.com/collections/16734116/General-Assembly-2016)

Let us continue to pray for the success of our next General Assembly.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, CM  
*Superior General*