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Documents Approved by the General Assembly

Four Hundred Years of Fidelity to Its Charism and the New Evangelization

It is with great joy that I present to you the Final Document of our 2016 General Assembly. There is no doubt that the Assembly was a grace-filled event and the beginning of a new page in the history of the Congregation. The Final Document is an invitation that is extended to the whole Congregation to enter into the future toward which we are headed. The almost unanimous approval of this Document means that the delegates recognized that the text reflects the spirit that motivated the Assembly itself.

As pointed out in the *Introduction*, the Document indicates an awareness of the special context in which the Assembly was celebrated, that is, the approach of the 400th anniversary of the establishment of our charism in the Church and in the world. Furthermore, we can consider this Document as a loud and clear call to enter into the process of renewal and to return *to the first Love* (an expression that is found in the book of Revelation). “To return” does not mean that we go backwards or that we become locked in history. Rather we are challenged to find ways to expand the strength and vitality that our charism had at the time of its origin. At the same time, however, we must be mindful to adapt our charism to the present-day demands and challenges.

In the document there is a balance between enlightening principles and concrete proposals. The language is schematic and clear. There is no room for ambiguity. It states what is intended to be said in a clear and direct manner. We are confident that if such themes as our international and intercultural reality, as well as themes such as solidarity and collaboration, are taken seriously, then there will be important consequences for a renewed Congregation. Everything depends upon the seriousness with which the Document is accepted.

I invite you to accept this Document and to continue to deepen your understanding of it. To accept this Document is to accept the Assembly and to make that Assembly present in every missionary, in every community, and in every province and to do so with all the possibilities for renewal. As in most instances, everything depends upon the acceptance that you give to this Document. Let us remember that this is the project which the Congregation undertakes during the next six years.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Final Document

XLII GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF FIDELITY TO THE CHARISM AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

The Visitors and Delegates of the Congregation of the Mission held the 42nd General Assembly of the Congregation between 27 June and 15 July 2016. This coincided with the 400th anniversary of our Vincentian Charism and the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries in the United States.

We conducted our Assembly at DePaul University, Chicago. This was the first time in our history that the General Assembly was held outside Europe. DePaul University has been a pioneer in educating people from cultural minorities and first-generation immigrants to the United States. We see this as significant at a time when Pope Francis is calling the Church to be missionary at the margins.

We spent our time at the Assembly in fraternity and dialogue, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, listening to the Word of God in an environment of prayer.

As members of the Assembly, we confirmed our fidelity to the Vincentian Charism that we have inherited from Saint Vincent de Paul and we committed ourselves to respond to the call of the New Evangelization.

With the joy and the missionary determination of the Virgin Mary at the Visitation (Luke 1:39), we now share with the confreres around the world the results of our work.

To begin, we take up some of the challenges that we observe at this time both in our world and in the Congregation. Then, following the momentum of our Provincial Assemblies and the General Assembly, we present the principles of the Charism most directly related to these challenges and to the call of the New Evangelization. Finally, we propose ways to respond to the urgent needs of the Church and the Congregation in the next six years.

1. Challenges

The General Assembly observed certain challenges which should intensify our missionary zeal, connect us with the clearly missionary origins of our Charism, and move us to a renewed commitment to the New Evangelization.

1.1. In the socio-cultural context of today

a. There is an urgent call to the confreres to *missionary conversion* and to *authenticity* in a social and cultural context where reference to God and Christian commitment have little or no importance.

b. We are called to work to make possible a civilization of love, grounded in the Truth of Christ, where there is a weakening of the capacity for reflection and for commitment, a culture of hedonism and individualism. We seek to bring meaning, which is capable of transforming persons and structures.

c. The evermore numerous cries of the poor, of refugees, of immigrants, of those who are excluded and confined to the peripheries touch our hearts and urge us to work with all our strength so that our Church will become a *field hospital* where all are brought in, listened to, and healed, making the Gospel of mercy real.

1.2. In the Congregation

a. We understand the reduction of our strength as a call to collaboration with many other persons and groups, especially within the Vincentian Family. Rather than a loss, we understand this challenge in the context of a new *missionary springtime* in the Church.

b. We are challenged to deepen our identity, to cultivate our Vincentian spirituality with more intensity, and to build authentically missionary communities where our own lives are marked by some of the cultural characteristics of our time.

c. We have become more conscious of the international dimension of the Congregation in the last few years, and the reconfiguration proposed by the General Assembly of 2010 invites us to concrete missionary work, thinking globally and acting locally, in order to make the contribution of our Charism to the New Evangelization more meaningful.

2. The Vincentian Charism for the New Evangelization

The challenges lead us to give thanks to God for the gifts we have received: *to look with gratitude to the past*, and our origins. The

convictions of Saint Vincent de Paul motivate and set on fire our commitment to the New Evangelization to which the Church calls us.

2.1. Jesus Christ, the Rule of the Mission

Jesus Christ is the center of our life and mission, the Rule of our identity, the content of our preaching, and the reason for our passion for the poor.

2.2. Spiritual life for the Mission

The spirituality of the Congregation, which is nourished in prayer, in listening to the Word of God, and in the celebration of the sacraments, is expressed apostolically in “*compassionate and effective charity with the poor*,” formed by the practice of the five virtues and the vows.

2.3. The poor, our brothers and sisters and teachers

The poor reveal Christ to us in the Church, in the world, and in the Congregation: in drawing close to the poor, we encounter Christ.

The poor are *our own portion* and our inheritance; our evangelizing action is directed to them; they are also first partners.

In our direct contact with them, the poor evangelize us. The poor are for us, not only “*our lords and masters*,” but also “*our brothers and sisters and teachers*”: we learn from them as we share our lives with them. With the mind of Christ, our relationship with the poor identifies us as missionaries (rather than functionaries).

2.4. In the Evangelizing Mission of the Church

Saint Vincent de Paul assures us that the origin of the Congregation of the Mission dates back to the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul in the year 1617. As we prepare to celebrate 400 years of the Charism, we remember the vibrant exclamation of Paul of Tarsus: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel*” (1 Corinthians 9:16). Blessed Paul VI, assuming the words of the apostle, affirms that evangelizing is “*the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize*” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14). These words, reflected also in our Constitutions, have found a new echo in Pope Francis, who invites the whole Church to commit itself to the New Evangelization by *going forth in mission*. As the Congregation of the Mission, in fidelity to our origins and in fidelity to the Church, we feel especially challenged by this missionary call.

The Vincentian Charism, today as in its beginnings, is based on the discernment of the signs of the times, and is expressed in the creativity of its responses. It joins evangelization and charity; preaching with promotion: dimensions of the same missionary action that seeks *the salvation of every human person, and of the whole human person*, in service of the Kingdom.

3. Lines of Action and Commitments

The **Lines of Action**, understood as global options for the Congregation, indicate the spirit with which we live out our commitments. The Lines of Action and the commitments express *the future of which we dream and which we embrace with hope*.

3.1. The Good News of Mercy

The heart of the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the one sent by the Father for the evangelization of the poor, is the good news of mercy. The following commitments will help all of us feel that we are sons of God and brothers of one another:

- a. To live the experience of the merciful God by means of the sacrament of reconciliation, both on a personal and ministerial level.
- b. To come up with new forms of repetition of prayer and fraternal correction, so that they become personal and communal experiences of mercy, to be shared with the poor, especially immigrants.
- c. To update the practice of popular missions, integrating the demands of the New Evangelization.
- d. To participate in commissions of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation in coordination with civil and ecclesial organizations and our representation in the United Nations, to denounce violations of the rights of persons and of peoples.

3.2 Internationality and Interculturality

Internationality and interculturality offer strength for the mission of announcing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the poor and to the world, with the following commitments:

- a. To organize intercultural houses of formation on the interprovincial and intercontinental levels.
- b. To use Information and Communication Technologies in serving interculturality and the globalization of solidarity in favor of the poor.

c. To make the local community the first school of intercultural dialogue and the first place of contact with the poor.

d. To offer our students, in whatever stage of formation, concrete experiences of interculturality, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue, including the learning of languages.

3.3 Solidarity

Following the example of the first Christian community (Acts 2:44-45), we will share our life with its joys and sufferings, its strengths and weaknesses, with these commitments:

a. To ensure the self-sustainability of the provinces through the sharing of human and fiscal resources on the local, conference, and congregational levels.

b. To organize an international missionary center to prepare confreres who will go to the International Missions of the Congregation and of the provinces.

c. To prioritize the criterion of *the poorest of the poor* for the opening of new works and the evaluation of all our works, as well as in the assignment of missionaries.

d. To use Systemic Change as the methodology in our efforts to evangelize.

3.4 Missionary Collaboration

In the manner of Saint Vincent de Paul, we assume missionary collaboration to respond better to the calls of the poor, in our community and intercommunity relationships, and in our provincial and interprovincial relationships, with these commitments:

a. To deepen the processes of interprovincial and intraprovincial reconfiguration, with a view to personal and communal conversion, as well as to missionary renewal.

b. To extend interprovincial collaboration to include the exchange of missionaries, especially favoring formation.

c. To increase collaboration in formation and mission (giving and receiving) with the Vincentian Family and with other agents of evangelization.

d. To ensure a prophetic presence in the Muslim world as a community belonging to a *Church sent forth in mission*.

3.5 Formation for the Mission

Formation is an essential path for the realization of our missionary vocation. It is a space for the discernment and the carrying out of the will of God. It is a permanent motivation to respond to grace, with the following commitments:

a. To prepare experts in Vincentian studies by means of a Master's Program that will be organized by SIEV (the International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies) and with the collaboration of the provinces, which are rich in tradition, documentation, and the possibilities of offering programs of studies.

b. To promote the spiritual and professional formation of the Brothers that will assure their specific vocation in the carrying out of our common Vincentian mission.

c. To accompany missionaries with concrete plans for animation, for at least their first three years after ordination or vows, on local and provincial levels.

d. To share the missionary and ecclesial sense of our evangelization and our service of the poor in the formation of clergy and laity, above all in the preparation of missionary leadership.

e. To prepare agents of Systemic Change who will live it and promote it, especially among our own, as well as among the laity and the clergy.

Convinced that God, who began this good work in our Founder, will bring it to completion, we place all in his hands, trusting in the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul and of the Mother of Christ and of the Church, of whom we are told, *"she, more than all other believers, penetrated the meaning and lived out the teaching of the gospel"* (C. 49, § 1).

As we share the results of our deliberations with the members of the Congregation of the Mission, we wish to offer a special greeting to our elderly and infirm confreres.

We invite all the missionaries to bring this project of the Congregation of the Mission to life during the years 2016-2022, as we are inspired by the words of the apostle Paul: *"With regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course"* (Philippians 3:16).

DePaul University, Chicago, 16 July 2016

Delegates of the General Assembly 2016

Commitments of the Conferences

LINES OF ACTION AND COMMITMENTS OF THE CONTINENTAL GROUPS

The members of the Assembly, meeting in continental groups (according to the geographic area of each of the Visitors' Conferences), have formulated Lines of Action and Commitments for the following six years.

APVC

1. **Common Initial Formation:** We agreed to support an APVC Common Initial Formation project to take place in 2018. Confirmed in the 2017 APVC meeting with the practical details to be worked out at the same APVC Visitors' meeting in 2017. (That is, proposed venue to host this common project, the number of students/novices participating in the Spiritual Year/Novitiate/Internal Seminary, finances, and formation personnel.) Each province under APVC will be given the discretion to choose the relevant students fitting, in its assessment, to attend this project.

2. **International MISSION:** We reiterate our APVC commitment to assist in the stabilisation of the Solomon Islands International Mission. This means a clear list of confreres who will be participating in the teaching and formation, as well as confreres who may assist in the service and development of the seminary plant. That means we need a commitment of the provinces to commit confreres on a rolling roster of two or three years. Consequently, the curriculum and teaching/subject plan will be issued to each Provincial from the Rector annually.

3. **Popular Mission:** We also agree to explore together a regional model of Popular Mission. We will need to invite respective Directors of Popular Missions to share ideas in a face-to-face meeting supplemented by Internet meetings through SKYPE, etc.

4. APVC - Ongoing formation of Vincentian priests five-ten years ordained and below and brothers incorporated five years and below. We agreed that topics like Human Development/Human Formation will be given priority in the next meetings. We agreed that the CCC be invited to coordinate these meetings of the young confreres.

5. Closer Solidarity to be established in the APVC to respond to the needs of various provinces in times of disaster or natural calamity. Our response may be through personnel or through the establishment of a solidarity fund for the region. The latter needs further exploration. We are encouraging our members to reach out when that moment of need arises.

CEVIM

For the next six years, CEVIM is committed to deepening and actualizing the Vincentian Charism and to moving toward the internationalization of the Congregation by the following means:

1. To organize formation opportunities on “Vincentian identity” for the following groups: seminarians, young missionaries (three-five years of priesthood), and other missionaries, in order to reflect on the future of our presence in Europe and the Middle East.

2. To promote intercultural and collaborative experiences provided by the international communities such as London, the Berceau, Catania, Paris-Rue du Bac.

3. To promote experiences of International Missions for the young confreres.

4. To rethink Initial Formation (Internal Seminary and Major Seminary).

5. To launch a common missionary project in the city of Melilla (Spain).

6. To organize an Interprovincial Meeting on “The Good News of Mercy” in order to share our experiences and deepen the basic Vincentian aspects of our style of evangelization.

CLAPVI

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing participation in the Mission of Cuba and the development of a common project for the mission in Tefé (Brazil).
2. The development of an Internal Seminary on the level of CLAPVI.
3. The development of a Reflection Group around the Lines of Action of the General Assembly of 2016.
4. The participation of CLAPVI in projects that defend and protect Amazonia and in the Pan-Amazonian Network (REPAM).

COVIAM

1. Formation

- a) Strengthen the Inter-African Theologate in Enugu, Nigeria.
 - b) Continue the formation of formators.
 - c) The formation of the laity.
2. Reassess Vincentian identity in our provinces and develop our sense of belonging to the Congregation.
 3. Strengthen our interprovincial solidarity and collaboration.
 4. Work, in collaboration with existing structures, on behalf of the promotion and defense of human rights, social justice, and peace.
 5. Adopt a culture of Systemic Change in the life of our communities and our apostolic activities.

NCV

1. In our Conference, we will work at promoting the theme and spirit of Internationality present at the General Assembly 2016.

2. We will work for Solidarity with other provinces by:

Continuing our economic solidarity with other provinces by supporting the VSO and by giving specific grants.

Investigating how our expertise with money management can assist other provinces.

Participating in the dialogue with the Curia about the plan for solidarity among the provinces.

3. We will design a plan for promoting Interculturality and the International nature of the Congregation in our provinces.

4. We will encourage the Superior General to designate the individual themes of the Lines of Action as yearly themes throughout the Congregation (as we have had with Collaboration and Welcoming the Stranger).

5. We will ask the local houses to include Interculturality as part of the annual House Plan.

6. We will continue to develop (USA West) our Systemic Change Initiative on Immigration and share it with the other provinces.

Modified Statutes

Statute 68, # 1

The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, names the Visitor for no less than three years, after having consulted at least those members of the Province that have active voice. In the same way, the Visitor can be confirmed one or more times, according to the provincial norms in force in the province, but for no more than nine consecutive years.

Statute 89, # 2

Besides those who, according to the constitutions, must by office attend the General Assembly, from each Province and Vice-Province one delegate will attend the General Assembly for the first seventy-five members having active voice. If there are more than seventy-five members having active voice, another delegate will go to the General Assembly for each fifty members or part thereof. The number of delegates to the General Assembly is to be computed according to the number of members having active voice in the Province on the day of the election in the provincial assembly.

Decrees

Decree 1

The General Assembly declares that the present Constitutions, Statutes, and Decrees constitute the total proper law of the Congregation currently in force. If, as a matter of fact, any lacuna is discovered, it is remedied by referring to the universal law or, if applicable, to our previous proper law.

OR - Use the translation from Assembly General 2010.

Decree 2

The distribution of the fund for international missions and for provinces with fewer economic resources will continue. Increasing this fund is left to the judgment of the Superior General.

OR - Use the translation from Assembly General 2010.

Decree 3

Limits for extraordinary expenses that can be made by the Superior General.

a) By his own authority, the Superior General can make extraordinary expenses up to \$25,000 US.

b) Having heard his Council, the Superior General can make extraordinary expenses up to \$200,000 US.

c) With the consent of his Council, the Superior General can make extraordinary expenses up to \$2,000,000 US.

d) With the unanimous consent of his Council, the Superior General can make extraordinary expenses over \$2,000,000 US.

OR - Use the translation from Assembly General 2010.

Postulate

The superior general and his council are to study and put into motion a plan which will make solidarity among the provinces effective. This plan (draft) will be studied by the various conferences in order to reach a final plan.

Interpretation of the Vow of Poverty

CLARIFICATION OF POSTULATUM #17

The Province of Italy has presented this Postulata because some Missionaries find a contradiction between the traditional explanation of the vow of poverty that is taken in the Congregation of the Mission, the present Constitutions and Statutes, and the *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission*.

The Commission for the presentation of Postulata to the General Assembly and the Central Commission of the Assembly have carefully studied this matter, verifying the texts and referring to the Fundamental Statute on the Vow of Poverty that is taken in the Congregation of the Mission, as well as the various explanations that have been offered at different historical moments.

- 1). During the General Assemblies that were held in the Congregation of the Mission after Vatican II, assemblies in which our proper law was reformulated, there was no modification of the content of the vow of poverty that is taken in the Congregation of the Mission.
- 2). In the 1980 General Assembly which redacted the articles that refer to the vow of poverty, articles that were approved by the Holy See after modifications were made by the General Council at the request of the Holy See... those articles contained no change with regard to the content of our vow of poverty.
- 3). The universal acceptance of the Constitutions that were promulgated in 1984 and the practice of the Congregation from that time forward have not been shown to contain any contradiction with regard to the traditional understanding of the vow of poverty which has been constituted as an element in the patrimony of the Congregation of the Mission.
- 4). A careful reading of article #34 of our Constitutions indicates that “*by reason of our vow we need to have the consent of the superior*”... this same affirmation is found in the Code of Canon

Law when describing the objective content of the vow of poverty.

The above affirmation is further nuanced by the phrase “*juxta Constitutiones et Statuta*” (according to our Constitutions and Statutes)... thus joining our practice to the Constitutions and Statutes. In this way, the consent of the superior cannot be separated from the precisions that are outlined in the other articles of our Constitutions and Statutes and in other fundamental texts.

Article #34 establishes that reducing the practice of poverty to simply asking permission is not what Saint Vincent or the gospel demand of us.

- 5). The areas covered by the vow of poverty (in other articles of our Constitutions and Statutes) are outlined in accord with the principle established in article #34 of our Constitutions.

Recommendations to the Superior General

1). Proper Liturgical Calendar:

In order to strengthen the spiritual life of the Vincentian Family, it is proposed that our liturgical calendar be enriched by including the saints and blessed who are members of some of the different branches of the Vincentian Family, individuals who in some way were nourished and/or inspired by the experience of Vincent de Paul and who engaged in the mission and charity in service on behalf of the poor.

2). Vocation of the Brother in the Congregation of the Mission:

The members of the 2016 General Assembly request the Superior General, with his Council and through a process of consultation with the worldwide Congregation, to develop a plan for the promotion of the vocation to the Brotherhood in the Congregation of the Mission. This plan, then, should be implemented in each province.

3). Protection of children and young people:

The members of the General Assembly request that the Superior General and his Council establish an *ad hoc* committee for the Protection of Children and Young People for the purpose of formulating policies that will protect the children and young people who are the subjects of the ministry of the missionaries and the lay associates in their apostolates and missions. This *ad hoc* committee should recommend standards and procedures that are to be implemented.