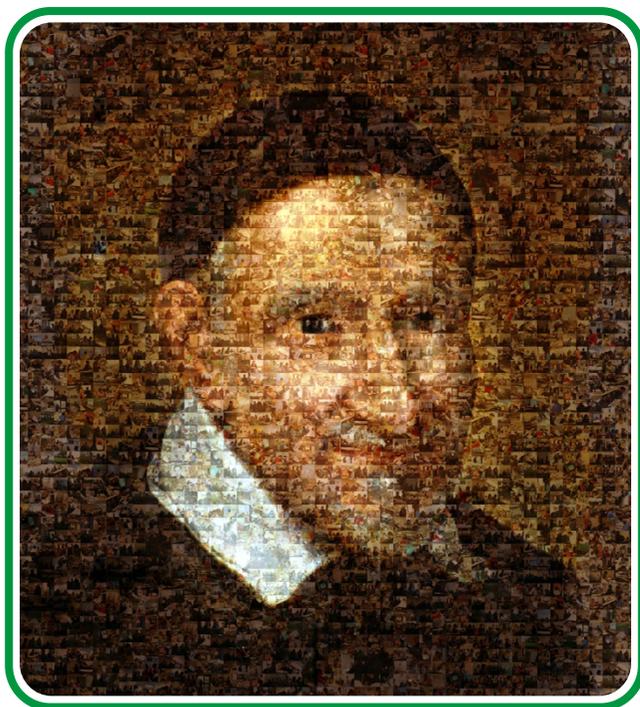


VINCENTIANA



60th Year **N. 4**
October-December 2016

Some Reflections Centered on the 2016 General Assembly

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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Introduction

Editor's Note

We bring 2016 to a close with the publication of #4 of our 60th year. This past year our publication focused on *Mercy in Our Vincentian Being, Vincentian Collaboration, and the XLII General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission*. In this present edition, we reflect on the beginning of a *Year of Welcoming the Stranger*. All of this leads us to reflect on our Vincentian identity in the midst of the present-day world.

I want to highlight the Decree of Establishment of the New Region of Venezuela which is found in the section entitled, **From the General Curia**. Since 1951 this area had been recognized canonically as the Province of Venezuela but now, 65 years later, has become a Region attached to the Province of Colombia. Also included in this section is a letter from the Secretary General who invites the confreres to use the on-line catalogue which is now up-to-date with regard to information about the members and the houses. Finally, in this section one will also find a letter **from the Superior General** concerning communication with the General Curia in which he offers some practical guidelines for doing this.

In the section, **From the Superior General**, you will find Father Tomáš's letter (19 September) in which he expresses his gratitude and admiration for each one of the confreres ministering throughout the world. He also expresses his gratitude to those confreres who have guided the Congregation during these past years. In this section, following our custom, one will also find a report on the October and December *Tempo Forte* meetings of the General Council. Here also one will find the promulgation of the decisions that were made by the General Assembly. Finally, included in this section is the 2016 Mission Appeal Letter and here I highlight the new mission in the area of Tefé (Brazil). This section also contains a document entitled, *Letter of the Superior General, Assignments and Distribution of Provinces to the Members of the General Council*.

In the third section, **Special Interview**, we include an interview that Father Tomaž gave to one of the confreres from Chile. Thus, one can attain a deeper understanding of the background and the thinking of the Superior General.

In the following section, **Of Current Interest**, the Vicar-General comments on the Final Document of our recent General Assembly, a grace-filled event. We are invited to reach out to the future as we continue to reflect on the three parts of the Final Document, namely, challenges, the Vincentian charism for the new evangelization, and lines of action and commitments.

This number concludes with **Some Reflections Centered on the 2016 General Assembly**. Four confreres from distinct provinces share with us their reflections on the 2016 General Assembly, or perhaps we could refer to these reflections as moments that touched and moved the hearts of the participants. This section includes a reflection on Vincent de Paul as the mystic of charity. Another reflection is entitled *between memory and prophecy* and develops the theme of Christ as the center of all missionary endeavors. The final reflection is entitled *Apart in Chicago* and refers to the transcultural dimension of the charism, the primacy of mercy, discernment, and the signs of communion. Let us, then, allow the confreres themselves to travel along these paths together.

Alvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM
Director of *Vincentiana*



Decree of the Establishment of a New Region: Venezuela

Decree # 0003/2016

Congregation of the Mission Vincentian Missionaries Province of Colombia

The Establishment of a New Region

The undersigned Superior General, in accord with the use of his legal faculties as stated in the Constitutions (# 103; 107, 3°)

CONSIDERING

That the region is a territory with at least one house, which belongs to a province or depends directly on the Superior General (Statute 78, § 1);

That the region is erected by the Superior General with his Council or by the Visitor with his Council. The region is confided to a regional superior (Statute 78, § 2);

That one can set up the region either in order to have its own autonomy to transform itself into a Vice-Province or Province, or to become a region since it cannot maintain its autonomy as a Province or a Vice-Province (Statute 78, § 6);

That after consulting the confreres from the Provinces of Venezuela and Colombia at the time of their Provincial Assemblies and after having received the placet of both provinces;

That having engaged in a legal process of consolidation by means of an Interprovincial Commission that elaborated the Regional Statute, which was approved by my predecessor,

IT IS DECREED

To establish the local communities located in the Republic of Venezuela and the house in Valdemoro (Spain) as a Region of the Province of Colombia (Statute 78, § 2).

Said Region will be under the authority of the Visitor of Colombia and will be dependent on the Province of Colombia (Statute 78, § 1).

Given in Caracas, Venezuela, the 17th day of September in the year 2016.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Message of the Superior General on the Occasion of the Establishment of the New Region of Venezuela

Caracas, 17 September 2016

First of all, I want to extend my fraternal greeting to all of you, but especially to Father Orlando Escobar, CM, Visitor of Colombia; Father Henry Kristen, CM, Visitor of Venezuela; Sister Nubia Quintero, DC, Visitatrix of the Province of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Bogota-Venezuela; all the confreres; Daughters of Charity; and members and friends of the Vincentian Family here present.

In December 1951, the Superior General, Father William Slattery, CM, wrote to Father Ramón Gaude, CM (Vice-Visitor, dependent on the Visitor of Madrid) and stated the following: *Father Ojeda (the Visitor of Madrid) has just spent a few days with us at the Motherhouse in Paris. He spoke with us about his trip to America and it is clear that he was impressed by the prosperity that he experienced in Venezuela. Based on his edifying account of events in that country ... the Council of the Congregation has decided to elevate the Vice-Province to the status of a Province and you have been appointed its first Visitor.*

Sixty-five years later the story has changed in a dramatic manner, not only for the Province of Venezuela, but also for the greater part of the Congregation, which has been called to participate in a process of reconfiguration. This is, indeed, one of the signs of the times that demands creativity, mobility, and sacrifice.

During its history, the Province of Venezuela, inspired by the Vincentian charism, ministered in six diocesan seminaries located in Barquisimeto, Ciudad Bolívar, Calabozo, Cumaná, Valencia, and Maracaibo. In order to support themselves financially, the confreres ministered in high schools, where they dedicated themselves to teaching and instructing children and adolescents who were lacking in their knowledge about the things of God.

At the same time, at the request of the bishops, the confreres accompanied some far distant parish communities during the Christmas and Lenten Seasons, as well as during Holy Week. They proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

The popular missions have provided support to parishes and other places that were difficult to access. Some of the missionaries traveled by horse and mule, which enabled them to minister at least once a year in those various far-distant regions of the country.

As the ministry of the formation of the clergy began to wane, the confreres began to take on commitments in urban and rural parishes. Today the majority of the confreres are involved in parish ministry.

From the beginning, the promotion of native vocations and the formation of candidates for the Congregation has been a weakness. The confreres focused on promoting vocations for the diocesan seminaries that had been entrusted to them by the bishops. At that time, there was no urgency for native vocations because missionaries were being sent from Spain, where the seminaries were full and vocations were flourishing.

This situation, however, did not continue for very long. Soon there was a reduction in the number of priests, who were being sent forth from Spain to the missions. When the pressure was felt to promote vocations, the results did not measure up to expectations. One of my calls today is that this challenge of vocations be confronted with new creativity and in collaboration with the whole Vincentian Family so that there will be the necessary vocations. Jesus gives us hope when he tells us: *pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the fields.* With the help of God, the harvest will be plentiful.

At the present time, the Province of Venezuela has 38 confreres: 22 from Spain, 13 from Venezuela (11 priests and two brothers), two from Colombia, and one from the Dominican Republic. The median age is 65.

In recent years, there has been a focus on popular missions, which have been fortified by the various branches of the Vincentian Family. These missions have been developed in different parts of the country and have produced positive results. One of the fruits of these missions has been the admission of some young men into our house of formation.

As a result of the process of reconfiguration, the seminarians are engaged in their philosophical studies in Venezuela, and then they complete their studies in Colombia. This sharing has been a very enriching experience.

At this time of the 400th anniversary of the origin of our charism, I encourage you to remain hopeful despite the difficulties that you may have to confront. Do not be afraid, continue to move forward, and be hopeful that better times will come.

At this time of reconfiguration, which is very important for all the confreres of Colombia and Venezuela, I ask our Lord, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent, and all the Vincentian saints and blessed to bless you, to keep you united, and to enable you to continue to extend the Kingdom of God during these difficult, yet challenging and hopeful times.

I thank you for the invitation to accompany you at this historic moment in which we establish the new Province of Colombia and the new Region of Venezuela.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

General Secretariat

Rome, 11 October 2016

To all the Visitors, Vice-Visitors, and Superiors of the International Missions of the Congregation of the Mission.

Dear Confrere,

We just finished the first *Tempo Forte* of the new General Council, elected at the General Assembly last July in Chicago. In it, the new Council took note of the general situation of the Congregation and its various problems. Among these, there is also the infrequent use of the *Online Catalog*, which is, in fact, a powerful tool for real-time knowledge of the situation of the Congregation.

On 21 November 2013, Father Gregory Gay, CM, then Superior General, wrote a letter to all the members of the Congregation, launching the new *Online Catalog* and supplying the information necessary for its use.

After three years, I realize that this *Catalog* is still little known and little used. That is a real shame, because it has considerable advantages. We do everything possible to keep it updated in real time. You can easily access it from a *smartphone and a tablet* (at the address: cmdb.cmglobal.org) and it is, therefore, possible to have it always with you, in addition, obviously, to being able to consult it on your own desktop computer.

In case you have forgotten the access password, or never inserted it, I invite you to ask it of me again by writing to catalogus@cmglobal.org. As soon as possible, I will generate a new password and send it to you along with the instructions for changing it, at the first entry, to one that you prefer.

A final request. In case there is incorrect data, I ask you please to inform me, using the same email address, so that the person in charge of updating the data will be able to revise it promptly.

I thank you for your collaboration.

Fraternally,

Giuseppe Turati, CM
Secretary General

Letter of the SG Concerning Communication with the General Curia

Rome, 13 October 2016

Dear Visitors,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

During the *Tempo Forte* session with the new General Council that just ended, we devoted several days to analyzing the situation of the Congregation as a whole and in its different aspects. One of these, to which I think it is important to pay due attention, concerns communication between provinces and the General Curia. After seeking the advice of my General Council and the Secretary General, I now would like to present to you some matters that I consider useful for improving such communication.

- 1) All correspondence addressed to the Superior General should be sent directly to the Curia (cmcuria@cmglobal.org), which is organized in such a way that the mail is checked daily and, in an emergency, is forwarded to me immediately. Even those who wish to write to me personally (superiorgen@cmglobal.org), should CC it to the Curia (cmcuria@cmglobal.org), so that the correspondence is archived and can be retrieved subsequently when needed. This is the usual way of proceeding. However, in very confidential matters, if a confrere wants to write personally to the Superior General, this possibility is assured (but, in these cases, email is not the safest means and I recommend using ordinary mail). Please note that circulars from the Superior General will be sent by the secretary, who has her own address (secret4@cmglobal.org); therefore, to send something to the secretariat you should not click “reply,” but use the official address (cmcuria@cmglobal.org).

- 2) E-mail is certainly the fastest way to send correspondence to the Curia. However, e-mail is just a method for sending, not a document (a bit like an envelope with postage stamp). The document to be sent or a letter that you want to send to the Superior General should be written on letterhead paper, dated, with the subject of the communication, and the full name and signature of the sender. Everything should be sent in PDF as an attachment to the email. Compliance with this procedure allows us to archive all the documentation clearly and to be able to find it again later, if necessary. When emails arrive with varied contents, perhaps even added to previous emails (thread), it is not possible to archive them in an orderly manner.
- 3) When someone asks the Superior General for a leave of absence from the Congregation (cf., C. 70), such a request must be accompanied by the opinion of the Visitor and his Council, and, if the one making the request is a priest, even the consent of the local bishop where the confrere intends to live (as indicated in *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, n. 123). In the absence of any one of these documents, the request cannot be discussed in the General Council.
- 4) For some years we have been using the online *Catalog*, which is a useful tool because it allows us to have knowledge of the Congregation in real time. Obviously, however, this depends on the accuracy and timeliness of the data communicated by the provinces to the General Secretariat. I encourage you to appoint a person (the Provincial Secretary or some other) to be entrusted with the delicate and important service of communicating the assignments of confreres and the changes to be made in the *Catalog* regarding your own province.
- 5) It is also important that the Secretary General be notified promptly of new appointments, using the forms found in Appendixes 14-17 of *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*. It is sufficient to send such notifications by e-mail except for the Certificate of Taking Vows, which must be sent by regular mail, with the signatures of the one who took vows and those who witnessed them.

- 6) Even copies of any agreements or collaboration between provinces, involving a temporary or long-term transfer of a confrere from one to the other, must be sent to the General Secretariat.
- 7) Finally, a copy of the leave of absence from the house that a Visitor grants to one of his confreres (cf., C. 67) must be sent to the Secretariat.

Compliance with these procedures may seem merely bureaucratic, but it is very important for me and the General Council to have good knowledge of individual situations, which allows us to make appropriate decisions, in addition to being a clear sign of a strong sense of belonging to the Congregation, overcoming that provincialism, which was so often lamented by my predecessor and various confreres, even during the last General Assembly.

I thank you for your collaboration.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

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From the Superior General

Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul

Rome, 19 September 2016

Dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

It is with great joy and thankfulness to each of you, my dear confreres, who are serving “our lords and masters” all around the world, that I address this letter to you for the first time as Superior General. I would like to express my deep gratitude and admiration to all of you living and serving even in the farthest corners of the globe as witnesses to Jesus’ love! We are all servants and it is wonderful to know that in this service we are never alone. It is Jesus, our Mother Mary, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, and all the other blessed and saints of the Vincentian Family who accompany us on the journey.

Let me take this moment to thank profoundly Father Gregory Gay, CM, our Superior General for the last 12 years, as well as Fathers Stanislav Zontak, CM, and Eli Chaves dos Santos, CM, and all the rest of the confreres, Daughters of Charity, and laity who had so tirelessly and with so much enthusiasm and dedication served in our general administration in Rome for the last six years to make possible the affective and effective proclamation of the Good News to the Poor.

I also would like to use this opportunity to thank so very much all of you who had written to me after my election as Superior General and expressed so wholeheartedly your good wishes and, in a special way, your promise of regular prayer. As it will not be possible for me to respond and thank each one of you individually, be assured that you are included personally in these words of thankfulness, as I extend to each of you my promise of daily remembrance in prayer.

We recently celebrated our 42nd General Assembly that left us with concrete goals for the next six years, which we will be addressing together in the years to come. It is a moment of “special grace” that Providence is offering us in the upcoming 400th Anniversary (1617-2017) of our Vincentian Spirituality and Charism. Many of you already have begun intensive planning to share and encourage others to follow our Vincentian spirituality and charism on the local, national, and international levels as community, province, vice-province, or international mission together with the other branches of the Vincentian Family who are present in your specific area or territory. I encourage all of us to keep reflecting, planning, and acting together as how best to share with others this “special moment of grace.”

The motto of the whole Vincentian Family for 2017 that is going to shed light on it all is: “... I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35). As our sight is directed toward our brothers and sisters, especially the most abandoned and those for whom no one cares, in order to be sure that our reflecting, planning, and acting go in the right direction, the path always needs to begin with us. The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul gives us a renewed opportunity to reflect on the reasons and ways of Vincent’s reflecting, planning, and acting.

The theologian Karl Rahner, at the end of the 20th century, had pronounced these prophetic words: “The Christians of the 21st century are going to be mystics, or they will not be.” Why can we call Saint Vincent de Paul a “Mystic of Charity”?

I would like to invite and encourage each confrere to reflect, plan, and act on the following two points:

A) Individually respond to why and how I can describe Vincent as a Mystic of Charity.

I asked three of our confreres, who had reflected and written on this subject in the past, to share a short personal reflection. May these thoughts help us to renew and deepen our own reflections.

1) Father Hugh O’Donnell, CM

We all know Vincent was a man of action, so we may be surprised to hear him also referred to as a mystic. But in fact it was his mystical

experience of the Trinity and in particular the Incarnation that was the font of all his actions in favor of poor people. Henri Brémond, the distinguished historian of French spirituality, was the first to bring it to our attention. He said, "...it is (Vincent's) mysticism which gave us the greatest of the men of action." André Dodin and José María Ibañez later called Vincent a "mystic of action" and Giuseppe Toscani, CM, united mysticism and action and came to the heart of the matter in calling him "a mystic of Charity." Vincent lived in a century of mystics, but he stood out as the Mystic of Charity.

Being a mystic implies experience, the experience of Mystery. For Vincent it meant a deep experience of the Mystery of God's Love. We know that the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation were at the heart of his life. The experience of the Trinity's inclusive love of the world and the Incarnate Word's unconditional embrace of every human person shaped, conditioned, and fired his love of the world and everyone in it, in particular, sisters and brothers in need. He looked upon the world with the eyes of Abba and Jesus and embraced everyone with the unconditional love, warmth and energy of the Holy Spirit.

Vincent's mysticism was the source of his apostolic action. The Mystery of God's love and the Mystery of the Poor were the two poles of Vincent's dynamic love. But Vincent's Way had a third dimension, which was how he regarded time. Time was the medium through which the Providence of God made itself known to him. He acted according to God's time, not his own. "Do the good that presents itself to be done," he advised. "Do not tread on the heels of Providence."

Another aspect of time for Vincent was the presence of God here and now – "God is here!" (influence of Ruysbroek). God is here in time. God is here in persons, in events, in circumstances, in poor people. God speaks to us now in and through them. Vincent was a man of unfolding history in the deepest sense. He followed the lead of Providence step by step. He had neither an ego-agenda nor an ideology. It took him decades to arrive at such interior freedom, which is why Vincent's journey to holiness and freedom (1600-1625) is the key to understanding the daily dynamic of the Apostle of Charity.

2) Father Robert Maloney, CM

When we speak of mystics, we usually think of people who have extraordinary religious experiences. Their quest for God moves from active search to passive presence. They pray, as Saint Paul says to the church in Rome (8:26), “with sighs and groans too deep for human words.” Mystics have ecstatic moments when they are completely lost in God, “whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know,” as Saint Paul recounts his experience in 2 Corinthians 12:3. At times, they have visions and receive private revelations. They attempt, with difficulty, to describe for others their moments of intense light and painful darkness. Saint Vincent knew the writings of mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Though generally cautious about unusual spiritual phenomena, he admired Madame Acarie, one of the renowned mystics of his day, who lived in Paris during his early years there.

Vincent’s brand of mysticism was strikingly different. He found God in the people and events around him. His “visions” were deeply Christological. He saw Christ in the face of the poor. To use a phrase from the Jesuit tradition that has become popular in Vincentian documents, he was a “contemplative in action.” Christ led him to the poor and the poor led him to Christ. When he spoke of the poor and when he spoke of Christ, his words were often ecstatic. He told his priests and brothers: “If we ask Our Lord, ‘What did you come to do on earth?’ he answers, ‘To assist the poor.’ ‘Anything else?’ ‘To assist the poor.’ ... So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if someone were to question a Missioner, wouldn’t it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, ‘He sent me to preach the good news to the poor’” (CCD:XI:98). When he spoke about Christ, he could be rapturous. In 1655, he cried out, “Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went ... He sends us, like the apostles, to bring fire everywhere, ... to bring this divine fire, this fire of love ...” (CCD:XI:264).

For Vincent, the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of spirituality were both indispensable. He saw love of Christ and love of the poor as inseparable. Again and again, he urged his followers not just to act but also to pray, and not just to pray but also to act. He heard an objection from his followers: “But there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country; there’s work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God?” And he responded forcefully: “No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them rather than to see that they get done. Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord ... Once we’re grounded in seeking God’s glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow” (CCD:XII:111-112).

In a ground-breaking 11-volume work written almost a century ago, Henri Brémond described Saint Vincent’s era as the time of “The Mystical Conquest.” At the conclusion of an eloquent chapter about Vincent, he stated: “It was mysticism that gave us the greatest of our men of works” (*Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, III « La Conquête Mystique »* (Paris, 1921), p. 257).

3) Father Thomas McKenna, CM

For this title to serve well, the word “mystic” has to be understood in its most general sense. The more popular connotation is that of a person who has more or less “direct” experience of God (visions, voices, leanings, sounds), more unmediated than not. The literature of mysticism describes experiences like ecstasies, being taken up into “a third heaven,” taken out of oneself and “sinking into” the Mystery (e.g., into the Abyss, Ocean, Ground) who is God. Its vocabulary is distinctive; e.g., progressively deeper inner mansions, active and passive contemplation, purgative/illuminative/unitive stages, passing beyond oneself, dark nights and dazzling darkness. By contrast, Vincent’s language for religious experience was quite simple and direct, and neither did he testify to these kinds of occurrences in his own life.

But the word mystic can be applied in a wider sense. That is to say, it might refer to someone who has a lived and felt contact with the sacred in life, and who responds to that encounter in service to the neighbor. Under this broader meaning, Vincent can be thought of as a mystic.

The more inclusive sense might be something like this. A mystic is one who listens to and gets caught up into God's love for creation, and who then commits himself both to recognizing that love in the world and also bringing it there. For Vincent, this love (better, "loving") of God revealed itself especially in people who were poor and marginalized. He came to recognize them both as privileged bearers of God's love and as particularly deserving recipients of it. And he followed up on this by actively bringing the Good News of that love to those poor ones.

Much like the way the right lyrics can draw out the deeper beauty of a melody, the words from Isaiah that Jesus spoke in Luke chapter 4 gave a particularly resonant expression to Vincent's experience of God. Here was Jesus announcing not only His own mission from His Father, but also His own experience of His Abba as Love for the world, especially for the downcast: "I have been sent to bring the Good News to the poor." To paraphrase, "The fire of my Father's love ("loving") is burning within me, and it drives me to bring just that love to the world, most especially to the poor ones in it." To follow the analogy, Vincent recognized these words as the lyrics to a melody that had been playing deeper and deeper within him. It was as if on hearing this text at a particular juncture in his life, Vincent said something like "Aha! That's it! Those words catch just how I'm experiencing God's love – and just how I want to spend my life in responding and spreading it."

Another angle. You might describe Vincent as a "bi-spectacled" mystic. That is to say, he was (seeing) experiencing the same God through two different lenses, both at much the same time. One lens was his own prayer; the other was the person who was poor as well as the world he or she lived in. Each angle of view influenced

the other, the one deepening and sharpening the perception of its opposite. Vincent “saw” (and felt) God’s love through both these perspectives at the same time and acted vigorously to respond to what he was seeing.

To keep our reflecting, planning, and acting in the right direction as members of the Congregation of the Mission, as missionaries who follow Jesus Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor in the steps of Saint Vincent, to help us reflect on Vincent as a Mystic of Charity, we have our Constitutions and our Common Rules, which are the compendium and synthesis of all our spirituality and the base for our life as members of the Congregation of the Mission.

B) Each confrere should carry, together with the breviary and Holy Bible, in the chapel, on the road, on vacation, the Constitutions and the Common Rules. If for any reason a confrere does not have a copy of the Constitutions and our Common Rules, he should ask his provincial or superior to help him get one.

I suggest, and wish with my whole heart, that each one of us, from the youngest to the oldest confrere, follow and respond to Saint Vincent’s call in our first Constitutions, the Common Rules, as written by him in the last paragraph, “Each one is to have his own copy ... and should read them through, or hear them read, every three months” (CR 12, 14).

In this regard I suggest you take into consideration both: our present Constitutions and the Common Rules and read and pray them alternatively: the first three months, the Common Rules, followed the next three months by the Constitutions and so on and that this become a lifelong commitment. As we pray the breviary and read and pray the Bible on a daily basis, we will make sure to do the same with our Common Rules and Constitutions.

To assist us in the reflection of what it means to me to see Vincent as a Mystic of Charity, his other writings and conferences certainly will accompany us, as well as the writings and conferences of other blessed and saints of the Vincentian Family.

As we approach the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul that we will celebrate with the whole Vincentian Family, as well as with many other people, groups, and organizations whom we touch and serve, may we be deeply encouraged by this “moment of special grace” that Providence is putting in front of us.

I wish each of us a wonderful celebration, as we continue our prayers for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Tempo Forte Circular

29 September – 11 October 2016

To all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

The members of the General Council, including the Treasurer General, the Secretary General, and I met for our first *Tempo Forte* Council Meeting, beginning on 29 September. The following matters were discussed.

1. 2016 General Assembly

- a. We determined some of the texts to be published in *Vincentiana*.
- b. We considered the four recommendations made to the Superior General.
 - 1) *Our Liturgical Calendar*. We asked the staff of the Vincentian Family Office to gather information on the Saints and Blessed of the various branches of the Family. When we have received this, the Procurator General will be asked to contact the Congregation of Divine Worship to have the liturgical texts approved and the feasts inserted in our Liturgical Calendar.
 - 2) *Vocation of Brothers*. The Assistant General charged with formation will be asked to study this topic and look into the possibility of accompanying the provinces in promoting vocations to the brotherhood.
 - 3) *Protection of children and youth*. We determined that this matter should be confronted and decided to do so both on the level of the Congregation as a whole and on that of the General

Council in its efforts to help the individual provinces. For the former, we will consider involving our representative at the UN to obtain and disseminate useful information. For the latter, we will consider getting help from experts and perhaps forming a commission to assist the provinces in facing and preventing situations involving abuse of minors.

- 4) *Indulgence for the 400th anniversary of the charism.* The Procurator General informed us that the Holy See has accepted this request and will soon be sending the official document.
- c. We studied the evaluations of the Assembly, which were mostly positive. However, there are aspects to improve for the next Assembly: distribution of time, *Documentum laboris*, work method, Central Commission, participation of the General Council, election of the Superior General, Final Document, publication of the documentation produced, and interpretations/translations.

2. Reflection on the General Council and an Action Plan 2016-2022

- a. We considered several points, as proposed for discussion by the Vicar General:
 - 1) Adequately structuring the General Council
 - 2) Decision-making
 - 3) Reflecting, in the coming six years, on eight objectives:
 - i. Initial Formation
 - ii. International Missions and internationality
 - iii. Confreres in difficulty
 - iv. The Vincentian Family
 - v. Solidarity (*ad intra*)
 - vi. Reconfiguration
 - vii. Sense of belonging and overcoming provincialism
 - viii. Vincentian identity

b. Responsibility of each Assistant

With regard to the accompaniment of the Conferences, it appeared reasonable to assign the Assistants in this way: NCV (Miles Heinen), CEVEM (Javier Álvarez), CLAPVI (Aarón Gutiérrez), APVC (Mathew Kallammakal), and COVIAM (Zeracristos Yosief). The Superior General and the Vicar General, along with the Secretary General, will prepare a draft for the distribution of individual provinces among the Assistants and it will be discussed in an upcoming council meeting.

c. Canonical Visitations

There was a discussion on the necessity and importance of these visits in accompanying the provinces.

3. General Curia

a. Personnel

- 1) Appointment of the Superior/Administrator. We considered the names of several possible confreres. These will be contacted in a determined order.
- 2) Appointment of the new Treasurer General. The choice is made of Paul Parackal, who is already in the Curia, serving as Assistant to the Treasurer General.
- 3) Procurator/Postulator. The name of Giuseppe Guerra was suggested and he is available.
- 4) Archivist/Librarian. Brother Martial Tatchim, who is presently assisting in this service, will be considered, but he needs further preparation. A work plan must be developed. SIEV already is considering this matter and we will await its development in SIEV's meeting of November 2016.

b. Communications Office

Nuntia and Vincentiana. Given the importance of communication, it was determined that the office needs to be reorganized. It was decided to ask the confreres responsible for the bulletin and magazine to develop a proposal to be presented to the General Council at the December *Tempo Forte* Meeting.

c. SIEV

The Vicar General reminded us of the goal of SIEV, which is threefold: reflection, animation, and diffusion of Vincentian studies. There are presently ten members, but some have other responsibilities such that the number could be reduced significantly in the coming months.

d. CIF

The outgoing and incoming Directors will be present at the next *Tempo Forte* Meeting to reflect and discuss on the future of CIF.

e. VSO

Miles Heinen commented on the report sent by Scott Fina. He noted that USD 56,000 will be available in 2017 for micro-projects. He also mentioned the importance of not beginning any projects before the money from the funding agencies is actually allocated. The names of two confreres were proposed to replace Miles as Director of the VSO. Their Visitor will be consulted before making a definitive appointment.

f. UN Representative

It was proposed to establish a structure for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation, which would involve the entire Congregation. The office at the UN is being supported temporarily by the Eastern USA Province, but will soon need to become self-sustaining. It seems worthwhile to have this role of sensitizing confreres to poverty in the world and of working together with other branches of the Vincentian Family.

g. Various

- 1) The printed *Catalog* will be published at the beginning of 2017.
- 2) The online *Catalog* is updated regularly, but little used. The confreres are encouraged to consult it. It was decided to change its webmaster.

- 3) The Secretary General provided the Assistants with information on upcoming expirations of Visitors' terms, absent confreres, processes underway, and use of the internal network.
- 4) Communication between the Curia and the provinces.

A letter to this effect has been sent to the Visitors.

4. Financial Matters

The Treasurer General presented the data for the first semester of 2016. He noted that the cost of travel is continually increasing and suggests that the Assistants be reimbursed for travel during visits to the provinces.

5. International Missions

a. El Alto, Bolivia

The mission is experiencing difficulties and needs in-depth study. The local superior will be asked to do this. The Bishop will be consulted too.

b. Cochabamba, Bolivia

The Community Plan was approved, but some observations were given.

c. Papua New Guinea

The contract with the Catholic Bishops has yet to be signed.

The confrere designated for the Diocese of Alotau-Sideia cannot go at this time and we presently have no one to replace him.

d. Solomon Islands

This mission is also in constant difficulty. Various proposals were put forth to improve its situation. It was decided that this matter will be discussed in the next meeting of the APVC.

e. Angola

The mission seems stable, but there are only two confreres there, with much work, so a third confrere is needed. There is a financial crisis in the country, which makes it impossible to send money to the confreres.

f. Chad

The General Council approved the appointment of one of the confreres as pastor and another as school principal.

g. Benin

The construction of the house should be finished in December. The Province of Poland is thinking of a third confrere to send to this mission.

h. Punta Arenas, Chile

Two confreres will be leaving the mission in 2017. It would be ideal if we could find a fourth confrere to send to this mission.

i. Alaska, USA

The Superior will be asked for his opinion on the need for three or four confreres for this mission.

6. Missions

We studied the framework of the missions: their personal, those missionaries awaiting assignment, the expiring contracts. We also looked at future candidates and the requests we have received. For two of these latter, Belize and Riga (Latvia), we will reply that we cannot give them a positive response to their requests.

7. Vincentian Family

- a. Possible appointment of Gregory Gay as International Advisor of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. We will respond that the decision is up to his Visitor.
- b. Worldwide Initiative for the 400th Anniversary of the Charism. The Superior General has requested an appointment with Archbishop Fisichella in view of organizing a three-day worldwide meeting in Rome, with the presence of the Holy Father, for the entire Vincentian Family.
- c. Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change. The Coordinator informed the General Council of the initiatives underway.

8. Visitors' Conferences

We received the minutes from the CEVIM meeting in Chicago.

9. Calendars

We drafted the calendar for the members of the General Council from October through December 2016, the calendar of Canonical Visitations (to be completed), the calendar of General Council Meetings, and the calendar of *Tempo Forte* Meetings.

10. Final Matters

At the next *Tempo Forte* Meeting, the Assistants will present drafts of each one's plans for the priorities established during this *Tempo Forte* Meeting. These drafts will be done by Javier for Initial Formation, Aarón for the Vincentian Family, Mathew, Zeracristos, and Aarón for the International Missions, Miles and Joseph Geders for Solidarity, Javier and Miles for Reconfiguration/Identity/Sense of Belonging, and Giuseppe Turati for the Confreres in Difficulty.

We confide all the work and plans of the General Council to your prayers. May Jesus's Spirit, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Saint Vincent, guide us as we seek to remain ever faithful to the spirit and charism of our Founder.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Mission Appeal 2016

Rome, 25 October 2016

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

In this month of October, dedicated in a special way to the prayer of the Rosary and reflection and concrete actions in relation to the missions *Ad Gentes*, I extend to each one of you my heartfelt greetings.

- 1) Being missionaries is our call from the time of our Baptism, when we officially became members of the Universal Church and a mission was entrusted to each one of us.
- 2) Being a missionary is our identity as members of the Congregation of the Mission. We carry the name of missionaries, as the people started to call us, from the beginning of the Congregation's foundation, which Vincent explains at the beginning of our Common Rules.
- 3) The recent 42nd General Assembly clearly emphasized and underlined our common desire to keep strengthening and developing our International Missions, as well as other places of mission.
- 4) Being open to going to new places of mission around the world is part of our basic charism.
- 5) This said, however, before responding to so many invitations and needs coming from around the world, we need to strengthen and reinforce some of the already opened international missions, as well as other missions.

- 6) Among other recommendations and petitions from the recent General Assembly was that of having good preparation for the confreres who will join the international missions and other missions.

In this regard, at our October *Tempo Forte* Meeting, we talked about preparing a program for the confreres to accompany them as they get ready for their service in the international missions or other places of mission. We will start preparing this program in the coming days.

- 7) Responding positively to the many requests and needs around the world becomes a ground where collaboration and mutual support play a decisive role.

If two, ten, or 30 confreres go to new missions, we all, the whole Congregation, goes on a new mission with them. The confreres always come from a concrete province, vice-province, or region of the Congregation. When the confreres leave a present place of service and go to the next one, most of the time replacements for the confreres in a concrete province, vice-province, or region need to be found. Our availability to the invitation or plea of the Visitor, Vice-Visitor, or Regional Superior to accept a new service in place of the confrere or confreres who went to the new mission – although this may bring added responsibilities – becomes the concrete sign of mutual support, collaboration, and witness that all we do is our common mission, part of our common call. In this way, we can say clearly that all go to the new mission. We all respond positively to the mission appeal, those who go to the mission, as well as those who stay back and give others the opportunity to respond to the appeals we received and keep receiving.

The following are the needs in the International Missions and the Provincial Missions at the present time:

AFRICA

International Missions:

Angola – (2012). Languages: Local language and Portuguese. The confreres are involved in parish ministry and in accompanying local communities and the Vincentian Family. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Marcos Gumieiro and Jason Cristian Soto

Herrera. They request the presence of more Missionaries in order to expand their missionary service.

Benin – (2013). Languages: Local language and French. The confreres are involved in parish ministry, assisting the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal, and supporting the Vincentian Family. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Stanislaw Deszcz and Jakub Hiler. There is a need for more Missionaries. This mission is supported primarily by the Province of Poland.

Chad – (2012). Languages: Local language and French. It is supported by COVIAM (the Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar). The confreres are involved in parish ministry, John Paul II Minor Seminary, and teaching in school. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Roch Alexandre Ramilijaona and Sylvain Rémy Disuka at Bébalem, with a third confrere due to arrive at the end of this year; Léon Moninga Andogele and Ambrose Esigbemi Umetietie at the minor seminary. More support is needed.

Tunisia – (2011). Languages: Arab, French, and English. The confreres are involved in parish ministry, charitable assistance through Caritas, and ministry with the Diocesan Office of Education. Missionaries presently ministering in two missionary sites are: Narcisse Djerambete Yotobumbeti and Eric-Prosper Mputu Ebengo at La Goulette; Claudio Santangelo and Fadi Bassil at Sousse. In Sousse, the parishioners are mostly retired people, expatriates, many tourists, and mixed families (Christians and Muslims).

N.B. During the 2016 General Assembly, the idea of incrementing our presence in Maghreb was discussed. In fact, the importance of our presence and mission there is to build bridges and dialogue with the Muslim community on behalf of the poor in this area. The Church in Tunis is positioned on the peripheries. It is not self-sufficient and there is no seminary to train future priests. The priests have to come from outside the country. The faithful in Tunis are composed of about 30,000 foreigners, university students, and expatriates. The majority of the population is Muslim and, as a result, there is always an environment of suspicion, indifference, and prejudice; all of which we attempt to change through the witness of our life.

Provincial Mission:

Vice-Province of Mozambique. Languages: Local language, Portuguese, and English. The members of the Vice-Province are involved in ministry with men and women in great need, in formation ministry in seminaries, and in a mission in South Africa. The Vice-Province is still dependent on Missionaries from other provinces in order to continue its ministry. They are most willing to accept new members.

AMERICA**International Missions:**

Alaska, USA – (2014). Languages: English and Spanish. The confreres ministering there are serving an increasing number of Latinos, who live in the Archdiocese of Anchorage. The Missionaries presently serving there are: Andrew Bellisario, Pedro Nel Delgado Quintero, and Jesús Gabriel Medina Claros. We are in the process of assigning a new confrere to this archdiocese and to a neighboring diocese. More missionaries are needed.

Beni, Bolivia – (2016). Languages: Local language and Spanish. Two confreres are preparing to open this mission. More missionaries will be needed to strengthen the community.

Cochabamba, Bolivia – (2009). Languages: Local language and Spanish. The confreres are involved in pastoral and parish ministry. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: David Paniagua and Jorge Manrique Castro.

El Alto, Bolivia – (1994). Languages: Local language and Spanish. The confreres are involved in pastoral ministry with the indigenous peoples, which implies rural pastoral ministry and the formation of the laity. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Aidan Rooney, Cyrille de la Barre de Nanteuil, and Diego José Plá Aranda. They request the assistance of more Missionaries.

Punta Arenas, Chile – (2013). Language: Spanish. The confreres are involved in pastoral ministry. The Missionaries presently ministering

there are: Ángel Ignacio Garrido Santiago, Pablo Alexis Vargas Ruiz, and Margarito Martínez González. They request the support of more Missionaries.

Tefé, Brazil. Languages: Local language and Portuguese. The Prelature of Tefé, located in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, had been entrusted to the Spiritans. Bishop Fernando Barbosa dos Santos, CM, is the fourth Bishop of Tefé and the first one who is not a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. The Prelature extends for some 264,669 square kilometers and has a population of about 238,000 inhabitants. There are ten cities, about 405 riverside communities, and 40 urban communities. There are 88 indigenous communities in 15 different villages with a total population of 8500. It is a poor missionary territory that needs more priests and evangelizers. The primary means of transportation is by boat (long hours of travel in precarious and difficult conditions).

So far, a few confreres have expressed their readiness to go to this mission, but to give serious consideration to opening it, we need more candidates.

Provincial Mission:

Province of Cuba. Language: Spanish. Even though this province is searching for a way to reconfigure itself with another province, it lacks personnel. Confreres will be welcome to minister there for either short- or long-term commitments.

ASIA – OCEANIA

International Missions:

Solomon Islands – (1993). Languages: English and Pidgin. The confreres are involved in formation ministry (major seminary) and rural parish ministry. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Paulus Suparmono, Antony Punnoth, Ricardo Pradhan, and Brian O’Sullivan. Justin Eke and Tewolde Teclemicael continue their ongoing formation. There is always a need for Missionaries to teach philosophy and/or theology. Those confreres having at least a licentiate in philosophy or theology and willing to teach will be of great service to the mission. The medium of instruction is English.

Papua New Guinea – (2003). Languages: English and Pidgin. The mission there includes ministry in various dioceses. In addition to formation ministry in the seminary at Port Moresby, the confreres are involved in rural parish ministry and also work at the center of missionary cultural formation. The Missionaries presently ministering there are: Homero Marín, Marceliano Oabel, Emmanuel Lapaz, Jacek Tendej, Neil Lams, Joel Bernardo Yco and Marcin Wróbel.

Provincial Mission:

Province of China. The Province of China continues to provide for the pastoral needs of the people of Taiwan and mainland China. The language is Mandarin and the confreres are involved in a variety of ministries.

I look forward to hearing from anyone who is interested in volunteering for one of these missions. In the meantime, let us keep in prayer all those who evangelize in foreign lands. May we all be filled with Jesus's Spirit as we follow in the footsteps of our holy Founder.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, C.M.
Superior General

Volunteers for the Missions *Ad Gentes* Criteria for Selection

The realities of missionary life are a challenge and almost always differ from the challenges that we have to confront in our province of origin. Therefore, some criteria are needed in order to select the confreres who will minister in those places. Using the following criteria, the volunteer will be interviewed by some member of the General Council or his representative.

1. The Missionaries ought to have emotional stability. Missionary work is difficult! The interpersonal relationships with one's companions in ministry, the cultural tensions, and a certain anxiety with regard to ministry, all of these increase tension. Only those persons who are emotionally stable should make a long-term commitment for mission in a different cultural context.

In order to be effective, those confreres who minister in a culture that is distinct from their own must learn another language and attain knowledge with regard to the new culture(s), so that the message of God can be proclaimed in that different and changing world context.

2. The Missionaries ought to have a spiritual maturity. In order to preach the gospel in an effective manner, initiative and ability are not enough. Saint Paul tells us that we are earthen vessels and we ought to reveal in our ministry the *surpassing power* that proceeds from God and not from us (2 Corinthians 4:7). The missions are a supernatural work, engaged in through the power of God. Therefore, missionaries ought to be people who *kneel before the Father* (Ephesians 4:2) in prayer. They ought to be people who live the word, not only in order to prepare their homilies and lessons, but also in order to reflect upon the will of God for their own lives.

3. Mindful of the local reality, Missionaries ought to possess those qualities and be formed in a manner that enable them to build up the Church, to form new mature Christians, and to form Church and national leaders for Christian service. Those are the essential tasks of the mission. Missionaries must avoid the temptation of transferring the culture of their church of origin to the church of their new mission.

Rather they should minister in a manner that enables the gospel values to become rooted in the culture of the place where they are ministering.

4. *The Missionaries ought to be properly motivated.* Missionaries ought to develop a clear and direct motivation for evangelization, for mission, and for service on behalf of those who are poor. They should always be mindful of the fact that their ministry is exercised for the greater glory of God. Doubtful motives, such as personal gain or vainglory, always lead to failure in achieving the objective of the mission.

Information for those who wish to offer their ministry as volunteers

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer for the missions, please send you letter or e-mail to Rome by 25 November 2016 or again by 17 February 2017 so that we can review requests at our *Tempo Forte* meetings in December 2016 and March 2017.
2. It is helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries.
3. It is necessary that the Missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.
4. Confreres who volunteer should inform their Visitor that they have done so. Later, the Superior General will dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
5. Your letter should give some background knowledge about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
6. Even if you have already written in the past, please make contact again.

7. If you cannot go to the missions, we welcome your monetary contribution as a sign of your zeal for the missionary work of the Congregation. Every year, many eligible provinces needing help seek a micro-project grant of \$5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity Office. These grants are awarded by the VSO quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful results of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (see, www.famvin.org/vso).

How to make a contribution to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund

Contributions from individuals and provincial houses

- Checks only and those checks should be made out to the

Congregazione della Missione.

The bank will not accept checks with any other name. Checks should be sent to:

**Treasurer General
Congregazione della Missione
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Roma - Italy**

- Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.
- **Clearly indicate that the funds are for the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO)**

In every case:

- All gifts received will be acknowledged (if your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable length of time, please contact us for clarification).
- Please inform us if you are making, as described above, any transfer of money.

Promulgation of the Decisions of the 2016 General Assembly

Rome, 7 November 2016

Circular letter to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

On the occasion of the publication of the decisions of the 2016 General Assembly in *Vincentiana*, by this present letter, I officially promulgate those decisions, as is required of the Superior General in the Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission (cf. S 51, 6°).

I take this opportunity once again to thank all the participants of the 2016 General Assembly, held in Chicago from 27 June to 15 July 2016, for the dedication of their efforts for the good of the Congregation.

I trust that all the confreres of the Congregation, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family, will welcome these decisions joyfully and translate them into concrete actions for their spiritual and apostolic growth and that of each local community.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, C.M.
Superior General

Assignments and Distribution of Provinces to the Members of the General Council

Rome, 15 November 2016

To all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

At a recent meeting of the General Council, held on 4 November, we concluded our discussion on the distribution of work among the members of the General Council that we had begun during our September-October *Tempo Forte* Meeting. I write today to inform you of the decisions reached as a result of those discussions. I will begin with the conferences and special assignments and then continue with the distribution of the provinces and vice-provinces.

Aarón Gutiérrez: CLAPVI Conference; Vincentian Family, especially JMV, AMM, and MISEVI; International Missions of Bolivia (El Alto, Cochabamba), Punta Arenas, and Angola.

Mathew Kallammakal: APVC Conference; Mission Distribution Fund (with the Treasurer General); International Missions of the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea.

Miles Heinen: NCV Conference; Students at the Leonine College; Collaborator with the VSO and visits to the European Agencies; Solidarity Project (with the help of the Treasurer General) and the International Mission in Alaska.

Zeracristos Yosief: COVIAM Conference; International Missions of Tunisia (Tunis and Sousse), Benin, and Chad; Interreligious Dialog in collaboration with the commission coordinated by Claudio Santangelo.

Javier Álvarez: CEVIM Conference; *Vincentiana*, SIEV, and CIF; Project for Initial Formation.

AFRICA – COVIAM

- Ethiopia (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Congo (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Cameroon (Zeracristos Yosief)
- St. Justin De Jacobis (Mathew Kallammakal)
- Nigeria (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Madagascar (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Mozambique (Javier Álvarez)

LATIN AMERICA – CLAPVI

- Ecuador (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Central America (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Argentina (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Curitiba (Javier Álvarez)
- Rio de Janeiro (Javier Álvarez)
- Fortaleza (Javier Álvarez)
- Chile (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Colombia (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Costa Rica (Miles Heinen)
- Cuba (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Mexico (Javier Álvarez)
- Peru (Javier Álvarez)
- Puerto Rico (Javier Álvarez)

AMERICA USA – NCV

- New England (Miles Heinen)
- USA Western (Miles Heinen)
- USA Eastern (Miles Heinen)

ASIA – APVC

- South India (Mathew Kallammakal)
- North India (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Indonesia (Mathew Kallammakal)
- Philippines (Mathew Kallammakal)
- Oceania (Mathew Kallammakal)
- China (Mathew Kallammakal)
- Vietnam (Mathew Kallammakal)

EUROPE – CEVIM

- Austria-Germany (Zeracristos Yosief)
- France (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Ireland (Mathew Kallammakal)
- Spain-St Vincent (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Italy (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Slovenia (Tomaz Mavrič)
- Saints Cyril and Methodius (Miles Heinen)
- Portugal (Javier Álvarez)
- Orient (Javier Álvarez)
- Poland (Miles Heinen)
- Saragossa (Aarón Gutiérrez)
- Hungary (Zeracristos Yosief)
- Slovakia (Miles Heinen)

Holland, which depends on the General Curia, is entrusted to Miles Heinen.

I am certain that each of you, particularly the Visitors and Vice-Visitors, will collaborate with us during our visits to the provinces and vice-provinces and in our contacts with the confreres. For our part, we will do our best to assist you in every way possible. Please do not hesitate to call on the confrere assigned to your province or vice-province for any needs or questions you may have.

I count on your prayer for each of us as we begin this more direct service to you. In turn, I ask the Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Saint Vincent, to bless each of you abundantly and fill you with zeal in your ministry of evangelization and service to our poorer brothers and sisters.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Vincent himself, at the end of the Common Rules, asks each one of us to read them every three months. We now have our Constitutions, as well as the Common Rules. By way of encouragement I ask every single confrere the following questions:

- 1) Do I carry my Common Rules and my Constitutions together with my Holy Bible and my Breviary?
- 2) As I do with my Bible and Breviary, do I read-pray a small passage of the Common Rules or Constitutions every day?
- 3) Since the Feast of Saint Vincent two months ago, was I able to start reading-praying the Common Rules or the Constitutions in order to finish them at the conclusion of three months?

Dear confreres, with all my heart I encourage each one of us to help one another to keep walking along this path, or re-embark on it. I encourage all the Visitors, as well as the Local Superiors, to be the source of inspiration, encouragement, and example to all the confreres on the local and provincial levels.

It then will be after another three months that each of us, individually, will be able to answer the above-mentioned three questions again. The goal is to deepen our vocation and to keep walking on the road to sanctity and our mission.

Every period of the liturgical year is a gift from God to us. The Season of Advent is God's gift to us!

One of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality is "the Incarnation." The whole period of Advent, as well as Christmas and the whole Christmas Season, places the Mystery of the Incarnation at the center of its message.

Incarnation means: God becoming man. God becoming a human being like us. God lowering himself to our level. God identifying himself with each single person individually, from the beginning of humanity until the end of time.

Jesus is incarnated every single day, over and over again, in all the corners of the world. At every conception, at the beginning of every

human life, Jesus is incarnated again. Therefore, Jesus's real presence in the human person, his Incarnation, needs to be felt in every period of human history, in every area of human development: faith, culture, science, education, politics, etc.

The Jesus, who was conceived, born, suffered, died, and raised from the dead, lives "**HERE AND NOW**," thirsts and longs to be rediscovered by us, so as to renew and deepen our closeness with Him, our friendship, the love between Him and me.

Saint Vincent de Paul left us, among his other words, the following thoughts on the Incarnation:

According to the Bull which established our Congregation, we are bound to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, mysteries beyond words. We should therefore try to carry this out most faithfully and, if possible, in every way, but especially in these three ways: (1) frequently honoring these mysteries by a prayer of faith and adoration, coming from our inmost heart; (2) dedicating certain prayers and good works each day to their honor and, above all, celebrating their feast days with special dignity, and the greatest possible personal devotion; (3) trying constantly, by our teaching and example, to get other people to know these mysteries and to honor and worship them (CCD, XIII A, 454-455; CM Common Rules, X, 2).

There can be no better way of paying the best honor possible to these mysteries than proper devotion to, and use of, the Blessed Eucharist, sacrament and sacrifice. It includes, as it were, all the other mysteries of faith and, by itself, leads those who receive Communion respectfully or celebrate Mass properly, to holiness and ultimately to everlasting glory. In this way God, Unity and Trinity, and the Incarnate Word, are paid the greatest honor. For these reasons, nothing should be more important to us than showing due honor to this sacrament and sacrifice. We are also to make a great effort to get everyone else to pay it similar honor and reverence. We should try, to the best of our ability, to achieve this by preventing, as far as we can, any lack of reverence in word or act, and by carefully teaching others what to believe about so great a mystery, and how they should honor it (CCD, XIII A, 455; CM Common Rules, X, 3).

Our confrere, Father Erminio Antonello, CM, shares with us the following thoughts:

While humans attempted in every way to exalt themselves, trying to be “gods,” God was not afraid to reverse direction and become a man: not a famous man, but a child, fragile and threatened from the beginning. Saint Vincent would say: “Don’t we also see that the Eternal Father, having sent His Son on earth to be the light of the world, nevertheless, had Him appear only as a little boy, like one of those poor little ones you see coming to this door?” (CCD, XI, 339). What is it in humans that made God want to bend down over them and exchange his divinity with the humanity of the creature? There is the love of a Father. There is his desire to hold humanity in a close embrace. He – so to speak – misses us. He wants us to be born again by his love. It may seem strange perhaps that God misses us, his creatures; yet the whole history of salvation tells of his search for us. This is the mystical insight that will lead Saint Vincent to recognize the continual incarnation of God in the poor. He felt within himself God’s tenderness and, having lived and experienced it, can pour it out on the smallest of the kingdom.

To live the mystery of the Incarnation today means, then, to realize the reality that there is this desire of God within us (that is, his love that seeks us, whose name is “Holy Spirit”) and trust him: this rescues us from the insignificance of life. Every person feels this elementary need, which is so often disappointed: “Just to be looked on favorably!” This desire is a source of psychological vitality. When it fails, encountering glances that belittle and say, you are worth nothing to me, you are a meaningless zero, then our faces darken and life fades. Now what is God’s gaze upon us witnessed by Jesus, the Son who became incarnate? He sees people favorably and wants to make his home in each of them. In the Incarnate Word’s bending down to humans, the life force of the gracious and sanctifying encounter with God is at play.

- 1) How do I rediscover the Incarnate Jesus today, Jesus who is alive **“HERE AND NOW”** in my own life?
- 2) What can I do so that the different feasts and periods during the liturgical year, which remind us of the Incarnation, of God becoming man: the Annunciation, Advent, Christmas, can be celebrated in a renewed, more personal way in our communities,

within the whole of the Vincentian Family, with others with whom we collaborate and serve, that will help us to realize the **"HERE AND NOW"** of the Incarnation, of the living presence of Jesus in our midst?

- 3) What new initiatives can we suggest and put into action so that Jesus's presence **"HERE AND NOW"** will be felt more in our communities, the areas of our service, in the villages, cities, countries, and the whole world?

We embark on the Advent Season, knowing that we do not do so alone. Jesus, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, our Founder, all the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family accompany us on the journey.

My thoughts and prayers go out to every single confrere, to each seminarian, to all those in the Internal Seminary, and to the candidates for the Congregation, as well as to those being called by Jesus to join the Congregation of the Mission as future Lay Brothers or Priests. May the Advent journey bring us deep comfort, joy, encouragement, renewed commitment, peace, and inner fire! May Christmas and the whole Christmas Season unite our hearts and minds with all the confreres who have been part of the "Little Company" from its beginnings, from the time Saint Vincent gathered his first collaborators, all through history to the present time.

Coming together in prayer in front of the manger and trusting in Providence, we look with great confidence to the year 2017, the 400th anniversary of our Charism. Open to the "signs of the times," we keep walking together-because "Love is inventive to infinity" (CCD, XI, 131).

Have a wonderful Christmas and a very happy New Year 2017!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Tempo Forte Circular

5-10 December 2016

To all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

During this week between the Nativity of Our Lord and the Jubilee Year 2017, I write to share with you some of what was discussed during our *Tempo Forte* Council Meeting earlier this month.

UPDATES

1. General Assembly

Information on the final cost. The Treasurer General informed us that the total cost was divided, more or less equally, between the Congregation and DePaul University in Chicago.

2. Responsibilities for Provinces and International Missions

Two points were discussed:

- i. The Assistant charged with relations with our UN representative will be Miles Heinen, who accepted this responsibility.
- ii. It would be well that the three missions in Honduras, which depend on three different Provinces (Slovakia, Saint Vincent-Spain, and Saragossa) be visited by just one Assistant. It was established that the responsibility of the three missions be that of Aarón Gutiérrez.

3. Possible Work Strategies

a. Formation (Javier Álvarez)

The Vicar General, in presenting his draft project, highlighted two fundamental ideas:

- look again at initial formation in light of the *Ratio Formationis*, giving particular attention to the formators;
- open up formation to a perspective that goes beyond individual provinces and that situates it on other levels (international, continental, interprovincial).

He intends to provide a follow-up and make concrete what was requested by the 2016 GA, in a special way through the development of the commitments assumed on the level of the Conferences.

The discussion was enriched by concrete suggestions. Among them were:

- make the most not only of the *Ratio Formationis*, but also the *Constitutions, Statutes, and Common Rules*.
- formation must be an absolute priority and in no way must the financial question become an obstacle to it.
- it would be well to draft five projects, corresponding to the five Conferences.
- these projects will be in turn presented to the Conferences, who will discuss them and bring their contributions to them.
- finally, they will be entrusted to the Assistants, in canonical visitations, for their implementation in the various provinces.

b. *Solidarity (Miles Heinen)*

Miles Heinen described the draft of his project, which presents two levels:

- that of an analysis of the existing resources (financial and human).
- that of the changes necessary to expand solidarity around the unique mission of the entire Congregation.

He reaffirmed the importance of having emerge with strength and clarity the ultimate goal of the postulate voted in the 2016 GA, which is that of giving the CM a permanent system of solidarity among the provinces.

c. *Confreres in difficulty (Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel and Giuseppe Turati)*

The draft presented by Giuseppe Turati was considered good. The double aim is to reduce the number of confreres in difficulty and to explain some situations which are not clear.

d. *Formation for candidates to the International Missions*

The Superior General said that he spoke with various Superiors General of missionary Congregations, who already have a program of formation for those going to the missions, and added that we might be inspired by these in order to prepare our candidates.

4. Meetings

a. *Meeting of CM Bishops*

Interest in organizing a meeting for CM Bishops within the six-year period of every administration was confirmed, envisaging the next one in 2021. Exceptionally, this year the CM Bishops will be invited to the event that will be organized in Rome with, we hope, the Holy Father on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the birth of our charism.

b. *Meeting of the Superiors of the International Missions*

In this case too, the interest in organizing a meeting within the six-year period of every administration is again proposed, envisaging the next meeting in 2019.

c. *Meeting of the Vincentian Universities*

It is considered appropriate to entrust such representation to a member of SIEV. Fransiscus Xaverius Eko Armada Riyanto seems to be the person most suitable, given that he is also a university professor. The three American Vincentian universities and Adamson University of Manila (Philippines) are to be considered. In the future, the Indian colleges, which are growing, could be added.

GENERAL CURIA

1. Personnel

Archives and Library

Project of Agustinus Heru (outgoing Archivist and Librarian)

Agus described the work carried out in his years spent in the Curia and reported on the current situation.

With regard to the future, in the hope that one could count on a full-time person, Agus makes the following observation: to finish the cataloging, he foresees three years for the library and five years for the archives.

The Superior General considers it useful to make a plan of the work to be done in the coming years, in such a way as to foresee exactly the number of persons needed to complete the work.

2. Communications Office

Director's Report

The Communications Director presented the goals in seven points:

- the regular evaluation of the communication channels we use;
- the contents to be proposed, especially those that emerged from the 2016 GA;
- the forms of communication;
- the participation of the confreres;
- the involvement of the General Curia, its commissions, and the Vincentian Family;
- human resources;
- financial resources.

3. SIEV

Report on the meeting of its members.

The Vicar General reported on the Madrid meeting.

He listed, in what follows, the decisions that the General Council now must take:

- the proposal to open a window for SIEV on the cmglobal site;
- the development of three worksheets for 2017 to aid in the discussion of the Constitutions, whose content will be offered by SIEV;
- the Master's program, which it would be well for the Superior General to negotiate directly with Adamson University in Manila;
- the development of a virtual Vincentian library;
- the revision of the number of members of SIEV;
- the date and place of the next meeting: Rome (Curia) from 26-30 June 2017.

4. CIF

The new Director will be notified that the next meeting for the CM Bishops has been decided by the General Council for 2021. He will be invited for the *Tempo Forte* of March 2017.

The Council listened to the outgoing Director, Daniel Borlik, who was invited to participate in the *Tempo Forte*. He stated that the evaluation of the participants is generally positive, as is also his personal evaluation.

To the question as to whether it is possible in the future to organize sessions directly in some countries that have sufficient space and participants (e.g., in Nigeria or Vietnam), he replied that this is possible, although the experience already carried out in Poland shows that such sessions would be limited compared to the normal standard.

5. VSO

New Director

Gregory Semeniuk has accepted the position of VSO Director. We are now in transition. He will come to the Curia for the next *Tempo Forte* (March 2017) and then visit various European agencies with Miles Heinen.

6. UN Representation

The representative at the United Nations, Guillermo Campuzano, wants to write to all the Visitors to name someone from their provinces to be responsible for reports and information with his office. The General Council agrees, but he will be asked to address the issue of the language to be used and asked to send a copy of the letter to the Secretary General, who will forward it to all the Assistants General, who can follow up on it during their visits.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

2017 Budget

The Treasurer, assisted by his assistant who has already been named as the future Treasurer General, described the 2017 budget.

The Council then went on to discuss the requests of the international missions, which were approved with the following comment: the request to build chapels or buy vehicles should not weigh on the Mission Distribution Fund, but be addressed to appropriate agencies (in particular, it is noted that the VSO is the normal route for this type of need).

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

It will be necessary to prepare criteria for the direction of the international missions, which will serve for the evaluation of the work that takes place there. In these criteria, it will be important to include also the conditions that give stability to the missions.

The following missions were discussed: Bolivia (El Alto and Cochabamba), Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Angola, Tunisia, Chad, Benin, Punta Arenas (Chile), and Alaska (USA).

MISSIONS

1. Current Framework of the Missions

Expiration of contracts (Chad and Papua New Guinea) to be renewed.

2. *Future Missions – Candidates*

The mission in Tefé is very needy, with access mostly only by river. The assistant in charge will contact CLAPVI to clarify some aspects, including those of locating human resources.

3. *Future Missions – Requests*

Tefé, Brazil; Beni, Bolivia; and Nekemte, Ethiopia.

VINCENTIAN FAMILY

1. **Information from the Vincentian Family Office**

Director's Report (6 December 2016)

It opened with a look at the International Vincentian Family as a whole:

- it depends on the Vincentian Family's Executive Committee (VFEC);
- it consists of 225 branches (to which we will write in order to have their membership expressed);
- there are various National Councils, organized into continental "regions";
- there are four commissions (Promotion of Systemic Change, Famvin Website, Haitian Initiative, Commission for Cooperation within the Vincentian Family).

As regards the criteria for determining membership in the Vincentian Family, he mentioned three:

- following Vincentian spirituality,
- existence of a constitutional document,
- recognition from the local ecclesiastical authority.

The coordinator said that the work done over 20 years has certainly produced significant results, creating the conditions to do all the things that 20 years ago would have been unthinkable.

2. **AIC**

It was proposed to entrust the responsibility as AIC International Spiritual Advisor to the member of the General Council responsible for the Vincentian Family, as in the past.

3. Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change

Information was received from the Coordinator of the International Commission, Giuseppe Turati.

VISITORS' CONFERENCES

1. APVC

The next meeting is scheduled for February 2017 in Vietnam. The program has been distributed already and is in the hands of the Assistant in charge.

2. CEVIM

The next meeting is scheduled for 26-30 April 2017 in Fatima (Portugal).

3. CLAPVI

In the recent meeting, the commitment made to the REPAM (Red Eclesial PanAmazonica) was reaffirmed. The common Internal Seminary is proceeding: there have been three (Guatemala, Ecuador, Brazil). For theology there are some additional difficulties: it is necessary to clarify well the goals if one wants to organize something at the level of CLAPVI.

4. COVIAM

The next meeting is scheduled for May 2017 in Chad.

5. NCV

The next meeting is scheduled for April 2017 at the Provincial House of the New England Province.

At the conclusion of this circular, I want to wish each of you, my brothers, a blessed Christmas season and an abundance of peace in the Jubilee Year 2017!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General



Interview with the Superior General,* Tomaž Mavrič, CM

First of all, I would like to extend a cordial greeting to all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission, to the Daughters of Charity, and to the Vincentian Family throughout the world. I wish to express the great joy I feel for the many messages I have received promising me their prayers. This gives me great security; it helps me and gives me confidence. In this way, we can do something beautiful for God and for the poor.

How do you feel after your election?

I would say that I am still somewhat in the clouds. I still feel that way. But I also think about the peace I feel in the presence of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit who is in our midst and who accompanies and guides us; it is Providence which guided the General Assembly and also created that beautiful brotherly spirit which is alive among us. It is one more support I can mention at this moment for the journey which Providence will show us.

When you left the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius, on your way to the Assembly, did you imagine this could happen to you, that you would be named Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission?

One never knows beforehand how the Spirit will guide us. But it is like this: here and there, there were whispers, but one cannot say that he knows, that he is completely sure. So the best way to be is to be open to the Spirit. What I hoped for before arriving at the General Assembly was that the Spirit would guide us, and that what Providence would show us, we would know how to accept.

* Interview with Luis Chavez, CM, for Radio Vicentina in Chile

Father, this interview has the purpose, among other things, of getting to know you better. Could you tell us something about your personal history, your family, your vocation, and about your missionary experience?

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 9 May 1959. My parents emigrated from Slovenia with other family members, fleeing from communism in 1945. In the beginning they were in a refugee camp in Austria and they arrived in Argentina in 1948. That is where my parents met and married. In my family there are five children, three boys and two girls. My father died in 1989, but my mother still lives in San Carlos de Bariloche in Southern Argentina. We Vincentians have the Miraculous Medal Parish there.

I went to elementary and high school in Mary the Queen School, in Buenos Aires province; it was founded by the confreres who came from Slovenia. Next to the college was a boarding school, a kind of missionary school, and I spent a few years there. We went home more or less every two weeks; but sometimes we were there full-time.

After high school, I asked to enter the Congregation of the Mission and I entered the Province that was at that time the Province of Yugoslavia formed by confreres from Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia.

In 1977, I made my Internal Seminary in Belgrade, Serbia, and I began my philosophy studies in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia; I also did my theology there. I was ordained in 1983. Afterwards, my superiors sent me to Canada, where we have a parish in Toronto, and I worked there for ten years. Then I worked for three years in Slovenia. Afterwards I asked Father Maloney, the Superior General, to allow me to go to the international missions. Just at that time the Congregation was contemplating the possibility of opening an international mission in Russia, in the Urals. Father Maloney assigned me to that mission with a Polish confrere. That was in 1997, and I spent four years in the city of Nizhniy Tagil, in the Urals. During those years, specifically in 2001, the province of Saints Cyril and Methodius was founded. It encompasses three countries: Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. My Visitor sent me to a formation course in Dublin, Ireland and I was there for one year. Then I spent another year accompanying our Internal Seminarians in Slovakia. In 2004, they sent me to the central house, which is known

among us as the “Gift of God House.” That was an idea of our first Visitor, that it not be called the provincial house or the central house, but rather “Gift of God.” That is where I have been until now. In the beginning I was sent to the Internal Seminary and I was later elected Vice-Visitor in 2009.

What dreams do you have or what do you wish for the Congregation of the Mission? Have you formed any ideas about what you would like to highlight during your term as Superior General?

A few days ago I shared a reflection with a confrere from Italy who has begun to develop the idea of Vincent as a Mystic of Charity. In recent years, another confrere, Hugh O’Donnell from the United States, has deepened this idea of Vincent as a Mystic of Charity. I think it is a wonderful opportunity for us as Vincentians, as a Vincentian Family, to develop this idea. The theologian Karl Rahner at the end of the last century, wrote these words which (now) sound prophetic: “the 21st century Christian is going to be a mystic or he will not exist at all.” I see this as a wonderful invitation for us as well to think about our Founder, his charism, his spirituality, and to deepen just this phrase: Vincent de Paul, Mystic of Charity and how we also can be (mystics of Charity) in our own lives.

Every Superior General has his own style. Some have been outstanding for their teachings and spiritual practices, others for their administrative and organizational qualities, others, like your predecessor, for his missionary spirit and simplicity. What do you think will be the mark you will make in this service to which you have been called?

You asked me before if I have a plan, if I had some concrete ideas for these six years. It is the same that one could say with regard to this question about the style I am going to follow. I want to follow Providence. I want Jesus to guide us and to be open to Providence. I think that is the best plan: to give priority to God, to Jesus, so that we travel together discovering the mission he wants to confide to us from today onward. One thing I want to share with the confreres and with the different branches of the Vincentian Family, the Daughters of Charity, and other religious communities and laity is that there are so many gifts and talents! Just looking at what I experienced in the

Assembly, so many gifts! There is a tremendous potential to construct and develop the Kingdom of God for this world in which we live, for the poor whom we are called to serve. The idea of collaboration — we just finished the Year of Collaboration in the Vincentian Family. The year is officially over, but we must follow this way more and more; this is where I see our future.

Is there anything you would take away or add to the Congregation?

At this moment it is difficult to speak concretely about what I would add or subtract. I think Jesus with his Spirit, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Saint Vincent, is going to guide us. They are going to point out concretely the path we should follow and give us signs about what to improve and what does not correspond to our charism or what we should add. I think we must look to the future with great hope, precisely because by giving ourselves to Providence I think we are not going to go wrong.

Recently much has been said about reconfiguration. What do you think is the model that best fits us for reconfiguration: the joining of provinces or collaboration?

Surely, if by reconfiguration we understand only the fusion of provinces, that is not enough. At the end of the day, that does not give positive results, because the idea is to collaborate. If some changes are made in a province as it is now or among provinces as they are, it is for the spiritual good, in the first place, for the good of the people we are called to serve, to go to the poor. This must be our aim — to serve them better. It is for this reason that in our Congregation — and not just in ours — this same process is going on in other congregations — we are trying to collaborate. In some places there is a scarcity of vocations, fewer confreres or they are becoming fewer; this is the reason for making these decisions. Collaboration is the basis of serving better.

What would you say to the Daughters of Charity? You are their Superior General as well. What message would you give them?

I thank them with all my heart for their prayers; many houses and provinces have sent messages of congratulations in which the promise of regular and daily prayer is the first consideration. So to all the Daughters of Charity a grand and affectionate greeting, an embrace

for each sister. As you said, you owe your vocation to the Daughters of Charity, and this too is a concrete sign of collaboration, that we help one another. We are all joyful, if we are developing our collaboration more and more; and, without doubt, God gives this to us through our brothers and sisters. The Daughters of Charity are doing great work and have done for so many years, for so many decades and centuries, from the beginning of our charism whose 400th anniversary we are celebrating next year. I wish that they, just as all our confreres and all the members of the Vincentian Family continue giving an example of service with great hope. Then God is going to give us vocations so that we not continue to decrease, but, just the opposite, grow and develop. God willing, we shall see each other soon. In a few weeks or months, I will probably begin my visits, and with great joy I hope to meet you all.

Next year we celebrate the 400th anniversary of our charism. What do you think would be the greatest sign we as a Vincentian Family could give to today's world?

Our spirituality is centered on Christ, the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Eucharist, the love for the poor, and the Virgin Mary. These are the foundations of our spirituality. To immerse ourselves in this spirituality which we are called to live — that will take us to the poor more and more. Immersing ourselves in our spirituality will draw us ever closer to them. More and more we will find the answers to the needs of today's world, especially the poor. That is what I see as a sign of our times; and, once again, Providence will point out the needs to us and to the people around us, those we will encounter this year as we celebrate our 400th anniversary. Without doubt, the people who have moved away from God will be able to see, through us and our way of acting, that it is something that truly comes from God and they too will be attracted to this path. And so our circle will become ever larger. We can include more people within our circle so that the Family continues to grow, and, of course, with God's grace, we will do this.

Father, in our days, technology has opened many areas, especially the area of communication. Many young people use social media and have had the opportunity to know the Vincentian Family in that way. I would like you to send some encouraging words to all those young people, who are willing to become involved in service.

I am so happy to hear that, that young people are living with their hearts open, that they are using social media and different forms of communication for good. I see a great possibility and I think we must develop this means of communication more and more. We have the means; we have the tools; we can use them for ill or we can use them for good. The media, in themselves, are not bad; they are just means. It depends on us, and I see a great potential. More people are going to see and hear about examples like you, my dear young people: what you are doing, the service you are rendering, your open heart, and the help you give to the poor in many different ways. It is to be hoped that some be committed and that others have their hearts opened to making such a decision. They too can do something like that, helping in one way or another.

I tell you with all my heart, go forward, try to invite others to follow you, that they may draw near and that their service be based in Jesus, in our God, in our brother, who gives us a solid foundation, the most solid of all, because there will be difficult moments. When one sees that things do not go as one wished or planned, that there are so many needs, one can begin to lose hope. It is precisely then that we need the accompaniment of Jesus; that we need to go with an open mind and heart, knowing that Jesus is with us; that it is He who opens the doors for us; that it is our Mother, the Virgin who goes with us and leads us to the poor; that we never go alone. May God grant, among you young people, that Jesus is calling some to follow him as missionary priests or sisters in religious life. You yourselves will feel it. If your heart begins to beat in that direction, open your hearts, and say yes with all humility but with great confidence, because it is God who is calling you.

Many thanks, Father, for granting this interview. So again, many thanks; may the Lord bless and accompany you in this ministry you are beginning.

I too wish to thank you wholeheartedly; and I ask everyone for his/her prayers for me; pray for our General Council, for the Assembly that still continues, pray for the Vincentian Family throughout the world. We pray with great confidence that together we can do something beautiful for God and for the poor. Thank you very much.

Commentary on the Final Document of the 2016 General Assembly

By: Francisco Javier Álvarez, CM
Vicar General

“400 years of fidelity to its charism and the new evangelization”

Almost half the delegates at the 2016 General Assembly were participating in such an event for the first time. As a result, the Assembly developed in the midst of a fresh and youthful environment, especially with regard to community sharing, work in small groups, and interventions during plenary sessions.

The “miracle of the Assembly” is that all the data, information, and multiple communications from the various offices and committees, as well as from the provinces of the Congregation (many quite distinct in tone and content), resulted in ideas and proposals that were formulated through discussion and dialogue and ultimately became part of the Final Document. This paper is an attempt to present some reflections on the primary theme of the Assembly (fidelity to the charism and the new evangelization), a theme that was treated somewhat hastily as the Assembly was drawing to a close, and is also intended as a reflection on the spirit that was so prevalent during the Assembly. The almost unanimous approval of the Final Document reveals that the delegates recognized the text as a more or less faithful reflection of the spirit that prevailed during the Assembly.

The Assembly was a moment of grace and the Final Document is an invitation to the whole Congregation to launch out into the future toward which we are being led. Each Assembly is a time of hope, a time in which we, together with the many people with whom we share our life on a daily basis, write a new page in our history (and we do so in harmony with the Spirit of God).

To accept the Final Document and to deepen our understanding of it is to accept the Assembly and to desire that every Missionary, every local community, and every province become rooted in its potential for renewal. As so often occurs with such things, everything depends on its acceptance and the manner in which this document is integrated into our reflection, into our formation and pastoral plans, and into the daily life of the Missionaries.

In this article I want to offer you a commentary on the Final Document. Certainly, the text is most important and while any commentary can be viewed as simply more literature, nonetheless such words are important because they provide us with a context. Some ideas were discussed at length in the assembly hall and are expressed in a word or a short phrase. Perhaps the document is not very original. If, however, we take seriously our international and intercultural realities as well as the urgent need for collaboration and solidarity, then we will begin to understand the important consequences with regard to the renewal of the Congregation.

THE THREE SECTIONS OF THE DOCUMENT

The three parts of the document correspond to a classical method based on “see,” “judge,” and “act” (even though this is not made explicit). The “challenges” (the first section of the document) present the reality in the midst of which we develop our vocation and our life. Thus, there are challenges in the present socio-cultural reality, as well as in the present reality of the Congregation. An important detail: the challenges are not simply statements about our reality or about some problems that influence our lives, rather they are opportunities to grow in our identity and in our fulfillment of the mission. They are true *kairos* that invite us to *give thanks to God* (Final Document, # 2). This is a very positive perspective from which to view reality, because in the analysis of said reality we can also come to an understanding of the factors that encourage us to continue the journey. Vincent engaged in such a process.

Why were these six challenges, and no others, chosen? Why is there no mention of other realities? The Assembly did not want to engage in an exhaustive analysis of the present reality, but selected those factors that were most directly related to the theme that was under discussion.

In the second section of this document (*The Vincentian Charism for the New Evangelization*), four principles of Vincentian spirituality are made explicit: [1] Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission, [2] the complementary relationship between action and contemplation, [3] the poor are our brothers and sisters and our lords and masters, and [4] a Vincentian understanding of evangelization. The content of these four principles (which correspond to “judge”) inspired the delegates and enabled them to develop the commitments, which are outlined in the third section of the document.

The *Lines of Action and Commitments* (Final Document, # 3) can be viewed as the “landing strip” of the document. It is perhaps the most important part of the document, which cannot be neglected. Without this part the document would make no sense, but would be simply some theoretical reflection (like so many others that currently exist). Thus, the third section provides the Congregation with a program that is intended to guide it toward the future, *a future of which we dream and which we embrace with hope* (Final Document, # 3). Note that the document speaks of “lines of action” and “commitments.” What is the difference between these two concepts? Each line of action, which is written in bold print in this section, is a global option. The commitments, enunciated under the lines of action, are concrete options, or as the document states, *the lines of action indicate the spirit with which we live out our commitments* (Final Document # 3). The commitments (21 in total) are more specific and easier to evaluate.

A word about the style and the form of the document: even though during the Assembly there was much dialogue about “doing more” and less conversation about “being more,” nevertheless, in the document there is a balance between illuminating principles and concrete proposals. There is also an introduction which provides a context for the document and a conclusion in which everything is placed in the hands of the Blessed Mother, the Church, and our Founders. The document is schematic and the language of the document is balanced and clear. There are no ambiguities. The document states clearly and directly what is intended.

In the following pages, I share some reflections and observations on the content of each of the three sections of the document and I hope that these reflections will be helpful.

CHALLENGES, OR OPPORTUNITIES TO ACTUALIZE OUR VOCATION

The Document begins by presenting us with four challenges that are proper to our era. Many Church documents begin with an analysis of the reality of the ecclesial institutions. The reality that is analyzed should lead us to raise questions about the more effective manner to minister, thus avoiding utilizing methods that are no longer valid. In this regard we are called to *creative fidelity*. The document refers to three challenges that we, who have been entrusted with the mission of evangelization, must confront. Those challenges are more than some statement of the reality or a statement of difficult problems that must be confronted. They are real stimulants that will enable us to be effective and prophetic as we live out our vocation. At the same time, those challenges present us with an opportunity to grow in our Vincentian identity.

With regard to the first challenge in which reference to God and Christian commitment have little or no importance, our response has to be one in which we renew our missionary courage and our fidelity to the purpose of the Congregation, or, as the document states, *an urgent call to missionary conversion and authenticity* (Final Document, # 1.1a). However, the evermore generalized environment of unbelief (which is seen in so many countries) presents us with another opportunity to question our ministerial approaches and pastoral programs. Are we actually touching the lives of those who are alienated and those who have distanced themselves from the Church or are we satisfied with reaching out to those who are already related to the Church in some manner? We should not continue to speak about a “new evangelization” unless we are willing to change our pastoral plans. This concern coincides with Pope Francis’ words when he states: *we cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings; we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 15). In another place the Pope states: *Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 109). The Pope refers to all of this as pastoral and *missionary conversion* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 25), the same phrase that appears in our Final Document.

The second challenge invites us to become aware of certain counter-values that are present in our globalized culture, values that attempt to make our vocation less significant and invalidate our prophetic call. Among the counter-values that are mentioned we find reference to *a weakening of the capacity for reflection and for commitment, a culture of hedonism and individualism* (Final Document, # 1.1b). It is not easy to become aware of this influence because all of those realities move us in the direction of something that is comfortable, something that is not very demanding, but, nonetheless, something that is devoid of life and meaning.

Individualism, for example, destroys every sense of community and of a common mission. I have seen more than one community work fail because each individual focused on the work as his own and did so in an independent manner, not realizing (or not wanting to understand) that the work of one person had to be coordinated with the work of others. Thus, each one surrenders his self-interest for the sake of a common project. Article three of the document, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*,¹ affirms that cultural influence has been a factor that has facilitated the appearance of such a mentality. The search for personal fulfillment and well-being at the cost of everything else is another manifestation of that same reality. Furthermore, today individualism can be clothed in many other wonderful names, such as, particular charism, cultural peculiarities, personal processes, thus, creating even greater confusion.

In view of this challenge, the document refers to *the civilization of love grounded in the Truth of Christ* (Final Document, # 1.1b). The creation of this civilization of love ought to begin in our own houses. A necessary condition for this to occur is the reinforcement of the theological dimension of community life. Without a solid spiritual foundation, without spiritual and theological motivation, community life begins to break up and individualism, with its thousand faces, becomes present in our midst. This includes hedonism, which is pointed out in the document. The community plan, developed in a serious manner, seeks to harmonize the mission and community life.

¹ The English text of this document can be found at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbiedienza_en.html

The third challenge refers to the various forms of poverty: *refugees, immigrants, those who are excluded and confined to the peripheries* (Final Document # 1.1c). In the midst of this globalized world, one is able to see evermore clearly the great contrast between growing poverty and misery on the one hand and incredible waste and consumerism on the other, the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus, seated at the same table and perhaps invoking the same God. The response of the Congregation to this situation, previously and presently, can be none other than a clear option on behalf of the less fortunate members of society. Vincent stated: *There isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its position persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor ... That is what Missioners profess to do; it's their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor² ... We are priests of the poor. God has chosen us for them. They are our chief duty; all the rest is just secondary.*³

The best way for the Congregation to express its option for the poor would be to have the majority of its members involved in such service on behalf of those men and women who are poor, and ministering on their behalf with a formation that makes them competent. Here I make special reference to formation with regard to the Social Doctrine of the Church. This option also demands physical closeness to the poor, affective and effective service on their behalf, and insertion into their world. We are not bureaucrats who serve the poor, rather we are companions on a common journey, brothers and disciples to those individuals who are our *lords and masters*. Such a conviction, therefore, calls us to be involved in an ongoing process of discernment with regard to our lifestyle.

² Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XII, p. 71; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, [CCD:XII:71].

³ Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul: Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, 3 vol., edited by John E. Rybolt, CM, translated by William Quinn, FSC, notes by Edward R. Udovic, CM and John E. Rybolt, CM, introduction by Stafford Poole, CM, New City Press, New Rochelle, New York, 1993. Volume III, p. 117.

This section on challenges concludes with reference to those challenges that most directly affect the situation of the Congregation: the reduction of our strength in many provinces, which should be seen as a call to ever greater collaboration; the influence of a globalized culture; the challenge to grow in our identity; and the need to become more conscious of the international dimension of the Congregation, as well as an awareness of the various proposals with regard to reconfiguration, which is an invitation to intensify our missionary endeavor (Final Document, # 1.2). Since these themes will reappear in the final section of the document, I will leave my comments on these points for later.

PRINCIPLES OF THE CHARISM, OR OUR IDENTITY IN THE CHURCH

The second section of the Document reminds us of four principles, which are viewed as convictions of Vincent de Paul *that motivate us and set on fire our commitment to the New Evangelization* (Final Document, # 2).

Jesus Christ is the *center ... the rule ... the content ... and the reason* for our life (Final Document, (2.1). Those four words (center, rule, content, and reason) reveal the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ for Vincent and for us. This is so with regard to Vincent because it is impossible to explain his life and his ministry without making reference to the person of Jesus Christ. With regard to ourselves, it becomes clear that if we do not connect with the spiritual experience of Vincent de Paul and the manner in which he related to Jesus Christ, then all our other efforts at renewal will be ineffective. Neither our Assemblies, nor our documents, neither our formation programs, nor our pastoral plans are able to bring about renewal by themselves. All of those realities are valid instruments for renewal, but they suppose an interior renewal.

We live in a somewhat turbulent era of rapid change. Consecrated life is experiencing a crisis and a disorientation that effects the very identity of its members. In the midst of such a situation, it becomes more and more necessary to focus on that which is essential and to find a unifying center that gives meaning to all that we do. Any foundation other than that of Jesus Christ would mean that we are building on sand.

A complementarity between contemplation and action is the second principle mentioned, even though in the document it appears as *spiritual life for the mission* (Final Document, # 2.2.). The gospels are a wonderful synthesis of Jesus' activity and contemplation, of Jesus' active life and his prayer life. Inspired by Matthew 25, Vincent made the poor not only an inescapable commitment, but also "a theological focal point." Vincent, as a mystic, had told us that God is to be found in prayer and in action. According to article 42 of our Constitutions, they are two complementary forms that continually nourish us. Vincent spoke about *leaving God for God* [CCD:X:76] when moving from prayer to some other activity.

Without such mysticism, that is, without encountering God in daily activities, pastoral and missionary activity would become nothing more than some form of activism. Vincentian contemplation provides depth to our ministry and motivates our charitable and missionary activity. Such contemplation preserves us from the trap of some spiritual dichotomy in which we view prayer as a reality that is completely separate and apart from our ministry. Our spirituality is an integral spirituality and is not composed of separate entities, but rather integrates seemingly opposite entities. This basic Vincentian principle is expressed in the document when it states: *the spirituality of the Congregation ... is nourished in prayer, in listening to the Word of God, and in the celebration of the sacraments, is expressed ... in "compassionate and effective charity with the poor"* (Final Document, # 2.2). Today, that form of Vincentian spirituality, that complementarity between contemplation and ministry is a patrimony of the whole Church. Such was stated by the Latin American bishops when they gathered together in Puebla: *through [Jesus'] solidarity with us, he enables us to vivify our activity with love and to transform our effort and our history into a liturgical action* (Puebla, # 213).

The poor, our brothers and sisters and teachers ... reveal Christ to us ... are our own portion and our inheritance and evangelize us (Final Document, # 2.3). This principle with regard to the poor brings together diverse but complementary elements. As can be seen, the poor are a source of our vitality and a constant inspiration for the Congregation because, through an encounter and dialogue with those who are poor and through the various ministries that are exercised on their behalf, a

prophetic and mystical dimension is revealed. The mystical dimension enables people to “know” that Jesus Christ is not distant or far removed from them but is revealed in those who wish to share in their lives and in their concerns. The prophetic dimension is revealed when those who become friends with the poor also defend them and give witness to and promote their dignity.

Here we warn of the danger (a danger that Father Eli Chaves often references), namely, that of viewing the poor as an intellectual or a virtual reality. Here we recognize the importance of entering into a relationship with those who are poor, becoming their friend, viewing them as brothers and sisters, being sensitive and merciful when ministering with them and for them, and participating in their suffering. When this fundamental point of reference is lost, then any work or ministry can be justified. Thus, we see the beginning of a process that can rob our Vincentian vocation of its meaning and that can also lead to a loss of our identity.

The last principle refers to our evangelizing mission. Vincent had a very modern understanding of evangelization: *we can say that coming to evangelize the poor doesn't simply mean to teach them the Mysteries necessary for their salvation, but also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the Gospel effective* (CCD:XII:75). The phrase, *to make the Gospel effective*, implies that we take into consideration the whole person as the object of our evangelization. The Final Document states that the Vincentian charism *joins evangelization and charity, preaching with promotion: dimensions of the same missionary action that seek the salvation of every human person and of the whole human person, in service of the Kingdom* (Final Document, # 2.4). In this regard, Pope Francis has stated: *from the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 178).

LINES OF ACTION AND COMMITMENTS, OR FORWARD MOVEMENTS

Inspired by the Apostle, Paul: *with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course* (Philippians 3:16), the last section of this document invites all the Missionaries to make real this Congregational

Plan during the next six years (2016-2022). I offer some brief reflections on each of the lines of action, all of which *express the future of which we dream and which we embrace with hope* (Final Document, # 3).

1. *The Good News of Mercy* (Final Document, # 3.1) – the Assembly has gifted us with this first line of action that is extraordinarily rich and fruitful, that goes beyond the celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy and that for Vincentians has a perennial validity because it is grounded on that which is most authentic about our charism. The specific commitments (to live the sacrament of reconciliation, to come up with new forms of repetition of prayer and fraternal correction, to update the ministry of popular missions so that God’s mercy becomes more evident [Final Document, # 3.1]) will lead us, on a personal and on a community level, to an experience of God’s mercy.

We should recall here that mercy cannot be reduced to some sentiment of pity nor can it be viewed simply from the perspective of fulfilling the various works of mercy (which very often do not lead us to the root causes of suffering). Mercy is more radical. It is a basic gospel attitude that enables us to confront human suffering in an understanding manner. It is rooted in the heart and flows into our mouth, our hands, and our feet. Thus, J. Sobrino refers to *the principle of mercy* that provides the Church with an identity and leads her to follow Jesus Christ, who was compassionate toward those excluded from participation in society and toward those who experienced violence. Mercy, as a principle, introduces Christians to a new dynamic that enables them to see reality with the eyes of compassion, that sensitizes them to the suffering and the needs of their brothers and sisters and that enables them to make the suffering of others their own suffering and that, then, impels them to seek transformational activities and solutions.

From this biblical perspective of mercy which is presented to us by the Church and by theologians, we are invited now to understand, to live, and to interpret the heritage that we have received from Vincent de Paul, the witness of God’s tenderness and mercy. Mercy has the ability to touch others in a profound manner; it goes beyond daily routines and beyond doing things in the same way as yesterday (cf., *Evangelii Gaudium*, #33). Those who allow themselves to be caught up in this dynamic of mercy will soon find themselves becoming more inventive and more creative.

2. Internationality and Interculturality — during the Assembly there was much dialogue on both of these themes. From the time of its establishment, the international nature of the Congregation has been one of its primary characteristics. In fact, Vincent viewed the vocation of the Missionaries as a universal vocation. In one of his conferences to the Missionaries, he left no doubt about that reality: *our vocation is to go, not just to one parish ... but all over the world* (CCD:XII:215). Vincent's practice was in harmony with his theory. During his lifetime, the Congregation was found ministering in Poland, Italy, the British Isles, Madagascar, and Algiers. Vincent had intended to send Missionaries to Brazil, Spain, Northern Africa, and Sweden. Today, globalization, the trends of worldwide migration, the ease of communication, as well as an awareness of poverty and the urgent needs of evangelization all make the international nature of our vocation all the more relevant.

If we view this line of action in a serious manner, we will naturally be led to specific commitments. For example, it might be necessary to revise our programs of initial formation in order to provide some assurances that our candidates are willing to go to those places where the poor are found, to those places where there is an urgent need for evangelization (places within the confines of their own province or places outside their province). In the Final Document we find some commitments that might be very useful: *to make the local community the first school of intercultural dialogue; to organize intercultural houses of formation on the interprovincial and intercontinental levels; to offer our students ... concrete experiences of interculturality ... including the learning of languages* (Final Document, # 3.2). Indeed, in order to be faithful to the Final Document and to the voice of the Assembly, we must build solid foundations in order to promote the international and intercultural dimensions of the Congregation throughout the various stages of initial formation. In the future, the international nature of our community will be assured only to the degree that our formation is international.

Another consequence of the call to internationality is to revise and articulate the manner in which this is coordinated between the provincial and the congregational levels. There should be a balance between the autonomy of the provinces and the fact that we are one body. Before the approval of the 1984 Constitutions, the Congregation

was very centralized (the same could be said about the majority of the ecclesial institutions). However, after the approval of the 1984 Constitutions, the Congregation entered into an important process of decentralization. As a result, the provinces grew in their autonomy and today the danger is not centralization (as in the past), but an excessive autonomy which blurs one's awareness of belonging to an international congregation and, therefore, makes it difficult to promote international projects. Provincialism is a great obstacle that prevents the development of our international and intercultural dimensions. The Assembly, sensitive to this theme, understood that the International Missions are an extraordinary impulse and a demand. As such, they guarantee the international perspective of our Congregation (Final Document, # 3.3b).

3. Solidarity — some years ago, John Paul II stated: *solidarity is the new name for charity*. During the Assembly there was much discussion about this theme. In the Common Rules we read: *members of the Congregation ... should understand that ... all our belongings are common property* (Common Rules III:3) ... that is a clear reference to the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Our Constitutions also reflect this same concern for solidarity “ad intra” when it is stated that *provinces and houses should share their temporal goods with each other so that those who have more help those in need* (Constitutions 152, §1). Such assistance is not merely an act of generosity, but is a demand of justice and charity.

What motivates this solidarity within the Congregation? It is not simply the fact that we are filled with hope about our ministries or about belonging to a particular province; rather, we are filled with hope because we are members of a Congregation that rises above all those realities. On more than one occasion Vincent stated that we *should get along as good friends* (Common Rules VIII:2). As dear friends who have good relationships with one another, we must also be concerned for one another. As pointed out in the first two commitments, solidarity should be made manifest by the way that we share our financial and our human resources. Thus, we find the following proposals in the Final Document: *to insure the self-sustainability of the provinces through the sharing of human and fiscal resources on the local, conference, and*

congregational levels; to organize an international missionary center to prepare confreres who will go to the International Missions of the Congregation and of the provinces (Final Document, # 3.3a and 3.3b).

What must be done so that these commitments become a reality? The Assembly asked the Superior General and his Council to study and to put in place a plan that will promote effective solidarity among the provinces. Furthermore, this proposal should concretize financial solidarity in the Congregation. It seems that we must also apply this principle to the relationship among the provinces. We are not dealing with the development of some passing project, which, at a specific moment, might resolve some urgent need and then, in a short time, things return to their original state. This proposition has a profound significance because it attempts to provide the Congregation with a permanent structure of solidarity and hopes to do this in light of a plan that will be developed by the General Council and the Continental Conferences.

The last two commitments in this section refer to solidarity “ad extra” with the poor. Here I wish to comment more specifically on the last commitment: *to use Systemic Change as the methodology in our efforts to evangelize* (Final Document # 3.3d). The Assembly has highlighted a method that is to be utilized in all our efforts at evangelization, a method that, according to John Paul II, enables us to scrutinize and to deal with the root causes of poverty that are present in existent social systems. This systemic-change approach views evangelization and pastoral activity as a process that serves the whole person, body and spirit. This approach also highlights the prophetic dimension of the evangelization process. Not only should this methodology be utilized when dealing with social justice concerns, but also it should become an integral part of all our evangelizing efforts. In other words, all our pastoral activity ought to flow from a sensitivity to the world of those who are poor and ought to give prophetic witness as we defend and promote the rights of those persons excluded from participation in society. This approach is not something that is improvised, but is learned. This reality is expressed clearly in the commitment that states: *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* (Final Document, # 3.5e).

4. Missionary Collaboration (Final Document, # 3.4) — there was a strong and consistent call for collaboration throughout the Assembly and this call was made with regard to collaboration with the Vincentian Family, collaboration among the provinces, and collaboration with the Church in responding to urgent needs. When the extent of our mission in the Church and in the world is fully understood, there will naturally arise a desire to minister with others in order to make our outreach all the more effective. Ministering alone results in discouragement. Thus, collaboration is quite natural to our charism. This has been so since the time of its establishment. In the Introduction to our Constitutions we read: *St. Vincent brought together as many people as he could, rich and poor; humble and powerful, and used every means to inspire in them a sensitivity to the poor ... He moved them to help the poor directly and indirectly* (Constitutions, p. 19). Therefore, the meaning of missionary collaboration can be none other than *to respond better to the calls of the poor* (Final Document, # 3.4).

Specific personal attitudes facilitate and generate the possibility for collaboration; for example, the desire to minister together or a concern for sharing resources. The development of common plans is an excellent means to promote collaboration. Frequently, those and other such attitudes require personal conversion, conversion that is animated by the spirit of our charism. Experience tells us that when such collaboration occurs within the Vincentian Family, it often results in a greater enthusiasm, zeal, and a desire to promote our charism.

There are many examples of collaboration among the provinces and with the various branches of the Vincentian Family. Nevertheless, as pointed out in the Final Document, there is a need to intensify and to strengthen our collaboration. The Year of Vincentian Collaboration has made us more aware of this need, and, therefore, we must continue this process of collaboration. We begin to see the need to develop structures that will facilitate such collaboration. Vincentians are a very large Family within the Church, but if we do not join together in a common objective, the Family will lose its vitality.

5. Formation for the Mission (Final Document, # 3.5) — this has been a recurrent theme in recent Assemblies and this point was mentioned in the Final Document of various Assemblies. This occurred

because we have experienced situations in which our confreres have not been provided with competent formation. At the same time, however, confreres must begin to accept responsibility for their ongoing formation.

Formation has little to do with that which was done 60 years ago, when it seemed as though the principles were clear, sure, and indisputable. The social context of that era was infinitely less complex than that of today. Formation today must confront ever more complex needs and challenges. In light of so many diverse visions of the world and such varied lifestyles, individuals will often encounter difficulties as they attempt to find meaning in the midst of all these different situations. In this context, then, it becomes important that we do not lose sight of the purpose of our initial and ongoing formation; namely, our formation is intended to lead us to a human, spiritual, and missionary maturity. The Final Document states: *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* (Final Document, # 3.5).

In the *Ratio Formationis*, the Congregation has concretized the model of formation for our candidates. In light of the *Ratio Formationis*, it would be good to review and to revise, where necessary, the process for our initial and ongoing formation, the competency of our formators, and to adapt our processes to those outlined in the *Ratio*. Our formation should (among other things) further open the Congregation to her international nature, foster the growth of the members in solidarity, and strengthen the bonds of collaboration. In other words, our formation should lead to the promotion of the Lines of Action that were promulgated during the Assembly. Furthermore, initial formation should, by its nature, become more international, more open to intercultural realities (both of which are pointed out in the Final Document). Opening our formation to our international nature could, at one and the same time, also promote missionary and vocational solidarity. What concrete actions are necessary to order for our formation to move in the direction that has been pointed out by the Assembly and by the *Ratio*?

A FINAL WORD

As stated during the Assembly, the Final Document is guided by an underlying principle that is not explicitly stated. Here I refer to the principle of our Vincentian identity. Without this perspective, all the Lines of Action lack meaning. Our Vincentian identity can be summarized with the phrase: *to follow Christ evangelizing the poor* (Constitutions # 1). That phrase should motivate and should give meaning to our whole life. If we do not renew ourselves from the perspective of this core principle, then our process of renewal will be found lacking in that which is essential and our Lines of Action will motivate no one to seek new horizons. Indeed, all our activities should be focused on renewing those elements that provide us with a proper identity within the Church. Only in this way will we be found worthy to celebrate 2017.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

Significant Events XLII Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission

by: Juan Corpus Delgado, CM

During the time from 27 June to 15 July 2016, the Congregation of the Mission held its XLII General Assembly at *DePaul University*, Chicago (USA). The Office of Communication presented a daily summary of events on the various social networks. Also, on four different occasions, some of the Catholic news agencies reported on the deliberations of the Assembly.

I do not intend here to write anew the Chronicle of the Assembly; rather, I want to highlight some of the more significant events and provide a context for the Final Document of the Assembly.

I. SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

1.- The General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission was held in the city of Chicago (USA), at DePaul University that is administered by the Vincentian Missionaries of the Western Province of the United States. This University was established at the end of the 19th century and at the present time some 22,000 students are enrolled in that institution. This was the first time that the Congregation held its Assembly **outside Europe**. All the previous Assemblies were held in either Paris or Rome. The decision to hold the Assembly in Chicago was made in light of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Vincentians to that country. At the same time, the decision also highlighted the international character of the Congregation.

2.- As customary, the Superior General presented his report on the morning of 29 June. Father **Gregory Gay** began by thanking the Lord for all the blessings that he had received during the past 12 years during which he served as Superior General. In the context of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the birth of our charism, Father

emphasized the fact that even though we are a small congregation, nevertheless our spiritual identity is vibrant because there are always poor people who are requesting our attention and assistance. Father presented some recommendations to the whole Congregation: (a) through prayer and contemplation let us deepen our experience of God and of Christ, incarnated in the person of the poor; (b) let us remain faithful to our roots, that is, to the virtues that Vincent gave us as a heritage, to the Constitutions and the commitments that animate each province and local community; (c) let us deepen our understanding of the international character of the Congregation and the spirit of collaboration (sharing personnel and material resources) and let us do this on the provincial level and in union with the wider Vincentian Family; (d) let us overcome the temptation of routine and comfort and, therefore, let us engage in a mission of “boldness and go out to the peripheries.” From the perspective of our charism and creativity let us open ourselves to the word so that we might be more effective in our service on behalf of those who are poor.

Father Gregory also presented two initiatives that need further study and reflection: [1] the possibility of creating an international and intercultural theologate in Africa that would support those provinces that have few vocations; [2] the creation of an international mission in Northern Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania), where the residents are primarily Muslims.

3.- Father Joseph Geders, the Treasurer General, presented his report with graphs and charts. He did not focus on numbers, but analyzed the economic situation of recent years and perspectives for the future. He insisted on the financial solvency and the sustainability of the provinces, that is, an ability to sustain the provinces as a result of their own resources or through a shared solidarity. At the present time, 60% of the provinces are unable to maintain themselves financially and it does not appear that in the near future this situation is going to change in any radical manner. Father concluded by highlighting the fact that if we want to be effective in our ministry on behalf of the poor, then we need permanent financial funds. In order for that to happen, we need to foment new forms of solidarity and mutual support and we need to do that in a creative and responsible manner.

4.- Election of the Superior General, Vicar General, and Assistants General – Bishop Varghese Thottamkara, CM, bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte in Ethiopia, directed the retreat prior to the election of the Superior General. He shared with the delegates two reflections on the importance of discernment in order to discover the voice of God (which, in turn, makes possible the right election of an individual). After celebrating the Eucharist and invoking the Holy Spirit, the presence of 113 electors was verified. The election process was begun and Father Tomaz Mavrič was chosen to be the 25th Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. On the morning of 7 July, Father Javier Álvarez was reelected as Vicar General. Then on 8 July, Father Aarón Gutiérrez (Province of Mexico), Zeracristos Yosief (Province of Saint Justin De Jacobis/Eritrea), Mathew Kallammakal (Province of North India) and Miles Heinen (Western Province of the United States) were elected as Assistants General.

5.- Liturgy and prayer, important moments in every gathering of the missionaries, were especially joyful as a result of the careful planning of the commission responsible for providing the resources for such fruitful participation. Much of the music was done in accord with the Taizé tradition and various musical instruments accompanied the singing. Booklets had been prepared that facilitated our morning and evening prayers. The university's musicians and choir accompanied the participants in our more significant celebrations. All of this planning enabled the spiritual rhythm of the Assembly to be characterized by liturgical prayer and celebration.

6.- The various sessions of the Assembly included times of witness from different individuals. On the morning of 29 June, Sister Kathleen Appler, DC, Superioress General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, addressed the Assembly. The seminarians and students from different provinces throughout the world presented video messages to the delegates. Individual confreres and various local communities, Daughters of Charity, members of the Vincentian Family, Bishops, so many different individuals assured the delegates of their prayers.

7.- On 1 July, Father John Rybolt, presented the commemorative volume that had been written as a summary of the *History of the Congregation of the Mission* (this volume included many photographs).

Each province was gifted with a copy of this volume. At the same time, the author thanked the Superior General and the Provinces of the United States for their personal and financial support in making this work a reality. At the present time, this work is being translated into other languages.

8.- Father Tomaž Mavrič wanted to maintain an open dialogue with the members of the Assembly. This dialogue took place on the morning of 15 July. The Superior General invited the delegates to speak freely and openly, to express their concerns and suggestions and to do this so that the General Council might serve the Congregation in the best possible manner. During the dialogue various concerns were expressed and suggestions were offered and all of these were carefully noted by the Superior General, who expressed his gratitude to the delegates for this exchange of ideas. Father Tomaž concluded this dialogue by encouraging the participants to promote the same type of dialogue in their provinces and local communities.

II. FOUR REALITIES THAT TOUCHED THE HEART OF THE DELEGATES

During every General Assembly there are events that go beyond the various themes that are being discussed and that touch the heart of those who have gathered together. Here I highlight four events that seem to have touched our hearts in a very special manner.

1.- Holland

During the morning session of 13 July, the moderator invited Father Gregory Gay and Father Harrie Jaspers to approach the presiders' table. Here I refer to the events as narrated in the official minutes for that day.

Then Father Gregory GAY and Father Harrie JASPERS came to the front table. Father Gregory GAY talked about how, in 2015, the missionaries of Holland had formed one community that is directly linked to the General Curia. The confreres of the Province of Holland have made a big impact with their missionary zeal throughout the Congregation. Their work has been especially significant in the Provinces of: Fortaleza, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Central America, China, and Congo. Father Harrie JASPERS presented how the Province of

Holland has made the transition into a community and the means it has foreseen to keep the Vincentian Charism alive in Holland by working with other groups, the laity, and, especially, the Center of Saint Vincent de Paul. Father Silvio Alfredo BATISTA MITOZO, Visitor of the Province of Fortaleza, thanked the Dutch confreres, who had arrived in Brazil in 1927, for their missionary spirit, which was present in the work there of the formation of the clergy and in the missions of the Amazon. Father MEMHERU Mekonnen Menkir, Visitor of Ethiopia, highlighted the missionaries' commitment to inculturation in the land where Saint Justin De Jacobis had arrived in 1839 and the effort they made to learn the language of the peoples and work closely with them. Then, the Visitor of Indonesia, Father Robertus WIJANARKO, gave, on his behalf, a recognition of the missionary activity of the confreres from 1923, a vibrant spirit that is still enjoyed today in the Province of Indonesia. Father José Edilberto LAZO RODRÍGUEZ, Visitor of Central America, also remembered the work done by the missionaries of Holland and the love of the confreres for the land and people, and how their witness gave hope to the confreres there. Father Yohanes KUSNO BINTORO, Visitor of China, pointed to the witness of some missionaries from Holland who were Bishops in China, especially, Frans SCHRAVEN, whose process of beatification is in course and who now is known as the patron of those who suffer from sexual abuse. He remembered the work of many missionaries who always united mission charity to their evangelization. The emotion, filled with gratitude, that brought tears to the eyes of some of the confreres of the Assembly, led to a spontaneous intervention from Father Henry Miguel KRISTEN. Father Bernardin YOGA MONGU, Visitor of Congo, brought the tribute of the missionary action of the confreres of Holland to a close, referring to a work done together with the confreres of Belgium in his country, mentioning their dedication to formation and the development of the Pigmyes, considered the poorest of the poor. After listening to the testimony of those provinces, where the missionaries had been so prominent, the Superior General promised Father Harrie JASPERS and the members of his community the prayers of all the Assembly and of the entire Congregation, while at the same time asking his community to pray for all of us. Father Tomaz MAVRIČ expressed his hope that one day new vocations would flourish again in the land of Holland.

The words of gratitude expressed by the Superior General ended with a gift to remind the community of Holland of today's tribute to their missionary contributions, given on behalf of the Assembly, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Vincentian Family. The Superior General and Father Harrie JASPERS, shared a fraternal embrace, while the Assembly came to its feet in an emotional round of applause.

2. Cameroon

On 6 February 2016, Cameroon was established as a Vice-Province and Father Clément Victorien Ondoua Kono, became the first Vice-Visitor. Cameroon had been part of the Paris Province. Cameroon is a young and multinational province: there are 40 missionaries (five different nationalities) who form five local communities (one of which is in the Republic of Central Africa). The confreres minister in parishes (mostly rural parishes) and serve those persons who are poor. They also accompany the Daughters of Charity and the various branches of the Vincentian Family. There are some 30 seminarians and that number would be even greater, but the vice-province cannot receive all those who present themselves because it lacks financial resources. Indeed, the main challenge for the vice-province is to become financially self-sufficient. Other challenges are the formation of candidates, ongoing formation, and providing the opportunity for some missionaries to specialize in different areas of ministry.

3. Vietnam

Fathers Augustin Gia NGUYEN HUU and Gérard DU TRAN CONG, respectively Vice-Visitor and Delegate of Vietnam, spoke to the delegates about the reality of the vice-province. They thanked the confreres for their prayers and support. The history of this vice-province began in 1955 with the arrival of the first Vincentian missionaries (missionaries who were not able to enter China). At the present time there are 77 priests, one deacon, four brothers and 150 students and seminarians residing in 11 houses. Their ministry is focused on formation and ministering in those areas that enable their charism to be discovered and embraced by others. They are working in six different dioceses, going out to the most remote and difficult areas, at times, risking their own lives. The vice-province has provided missionaries for the international missions of the Congregation.

4. Nigeria

The delegates united in prayer and expressed their solidarity to the Province of Nigeria as they recalled the tragic death of six seminarians on 22 February 2016. The Visitor, Father Cyril Nnamdi Mbata, thanked the delegates for their support and prayers (expressions of that support arrived from every part of the world almost immediately after the news of the accident was reported). Father spoke about the reaction of missionaries in Nigeria, the family members of the deceased, and the faithful men and women who knew these seminarians and/or had a relationship with the Vincentian Family. Missionaries from Ireland established the presence of the Vincentians in that country and today there are ten houses and some 80 young men in various stages of formation.

III. THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE XLII GENERAL ASSEMBLY

As a result of a decision of the Superior General and the Preparatory Commission, a decision that was affirmed by the members of the Assembly, the work of the Assembly did not flow from a Working Document. The work of the Assembly was based on a process of Appreciative Discernment, a methodology that encouraged dialogue and an exchange of experiences among the delegates. The Synthesis and Redaction Commission put into writing those guidelines and commitments that would give a direction to the ministry of the Congregation during the next six years.

The Visitors and delegates, grouped together by continent, were entrusted with the task of making the lines of action more concrete and in accord with the reality of their geographical area.

Another Commission organized and presented the various postulata that were then discussed and studied by the Assembly.

The 2016 General Assembly produced three distinct documents.

1.- FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF FIDELITY TO THE CHARISM AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

This document was developed by the Synthesis and Redaction Commission and is based on the discussions that took place in the various work groups and during the different plenary sessions of the Assembly. This document was given to the delegates on 9 July and was

discussed in small groups and during plenary sessions (11-12 July). As a result of those discussions, a second edition of the Document was presented to the delegates on 14 July and further changes were incorporated into the text which was approved by the Assembly on 15 July. Following the methodology of see-judge-act and in light of our charism, the delegates proposed various commitments in order to respond to the Church's call to engage in a new evangelization.

2.- LINES OF ACTION AND COMMITMENTS OF THE CONTINENTAL GROUPS

These are five brief documents developed by the members of the Assembly when they came together in continental groups (geographical areas of the various Conferences of Visitors: APVC – Conference of Visitors of Asia and the Pacific; CEVIM – Conference of Visitors of Europe and the Middle East; CLAPVI – Conference of Visitors of Latin America; COVIAM – Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar; NCV – National Conference of Visitors of the United States). These documents were redacted and approved by their respective continental groups. These documents were incorporated into the documentation of the Assembly in order to express the support of all the delegates for those commitments.

3.- FINAL DOCUMENTS THAT WERE APPROVED

The General Assembly, as the supreme authority of the Congregation of the Mission, in addition to electing the Superior General, the Vicar General and the Assistants General, can *enact laws or Statutes, and Decrees, for the good of the Congregation, with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity. Statutes which are not explicitly abrogated remain in force.* Decrees must be explicitly confirmed in order to remain in force. The General Assembly modified the content of Statutes 68.1 and 89.2, confirmed the three decrees approved by the previous Assembly, and approved one postulatum.

In light of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the origin of the Mission and the Charities (1617-2017), and as pointed out by the General Assembly, the Apostle Paul indicates the path that we are to follow: *with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course* (Philippians 3:16).

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

Saint Vincent, the “Mystic of Charity”

Nicola Albanesi, CM

1. A Happy Rediscovery

One of the greatest and most beautiful surprises of the last General Assembly was the definition of Saint Vincent as a “Mystic of Charity.” On 6 July, during his first homily after his election, the new Superior General presented him, by that phrase, as model for our life as Missionaries, citing expressly the studies of Father Giuseppe Toscani, followed by Father Hugh O’Donnell. I believe that it was the first time that Saint Vincent was called “mystic” during a General Assembly.

It was not expected to be done! It is much easier to talk about Saint Vincent as a “spiritual person,” or as a contemplative. In fact, few among the scholars, have had the courage to place the spiritual experience of Saint Vincent as “mystical.” There are two fundamental reasons.

The first reason is found in the restricted use in which often times the category “mystic” is used even in the theological-spiritual literature, reserving the word to an extreme experience accompanied by some extraordinary “phenomena” (visions, ecstasies, raptures, etc.). In effect, Saint Vincent seems, from the witnesses that we have, not to have enjoyed special “gifts” from God, except the episode of the vision of the globes on the occasion of the death of Chantal.

Whereas, the second reason is to be found in the common use of the term “mystic,” which has become synonymous with “un-incarnated spirituality,” far from the world, a clairvoyant without a practical common sense. This is wholly opposite to Saint Vincent, whose gifts as a great organizer have always been emphasized; a man with his feet planted on the earth, concrete, realist, and pragmatic. In this sense, “mystic” is opposed to the man of action!

Therefore, it is difficult to consider Saint Vincent as a mystic if one starts from these premises. I thus would wish, in the short space of this

article, to map out the great lines of the evolution that the term “mystic” underwent in religious studies and the richness of the application to Saint Vincent of such a category to interpret his and our action.

2. The mystical dimension of faith

“Mysticism” entered fully into contemporary theological reflections, after having been reevaluated in the 20th century by the movements of renewal of theology, which, in the need for a return to the sources, led to a renewed interest in Patristic Studies and which, in the need for overcoming the “Manuals,” has drawn attention again to the spiritual sources. Furthermore, “Mysticism” (the mystical phenomenon at the start of the 20th Century was known as such) underwent a reevaluation even around the studies of religious literature, of philosophy, and attained attention and recognition even in the field of linguistics and the humanities. Thus from the long road initiated by Henri Brémond and Jean Baruzi, it continued afterwards with Giovanni Getto and his school, Massimo Petrocchi and Giovanni Pozzi, arriving at Michel de Certeau and those inspired by him. Mysticism has given way to the “mystical” regarded as the “science of the saint.”¹

Interdisciplinary studies multiplied in the last decades, which, of course, deepen and complement each other: historical-patristic, theological-spiritual, anthropological-psychological, phenomenological-linguistic.² But as happens often, the ever-increasing use of the word and its vast utilization within the diverse

¹ See the bibliography and historiographical reconstruction of this cultural journey in Carlo Ossola, “La parola mistica” [“The Mystic Word”], introduction to *Mistici italiani dell’età moderna* [Italian Mystics of the Modern Age], (edited by Giacomo Jori), Einaudi, Turin 2007, VII-LIII.

² To navigate this very varied and complex panorama, see the following collections of studies: *Spiritualità: fisionomia e compiti* [Spirituality: Features and Tasks], Rome 1981; *Vita cristiana ed esperienza mistica* [Christian Life and Mystical Experience], Rome 1982; *La spiritualità. Ispirazione-ricerca-formazione*, [Spirituality. Inspiration-Research-Formation], Rome 1984; *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione teologica* [The Mystique. Phenomenology and Theological Reflection], (2 vols.) Rome 1984; *Alle radici della mistica cristiana* [The Roots of Christian Mysticism], Palermo 1989; *Filosofia e mistica. Itinerari di ricerca* [Philosophy and Mysticism. Research Routes], Rome 1997; *Les enjeux philosophiques de la mystique* [The Philosophical Stakes of Mysticism], Grenoble 2007.

fields of knowledge have favored its semantic variation: the term has thus lost so much of its unique significance by being enriched with further meanings. The risk that always looms in these cases is a simplistic use of the term that ends up trivializing a category and use of it in an inappropriate way. Therefore, it is necessary to make clear in what sense the term is being used and what is the meaning being attributed to it.³

First of all, one has to distinguish the “mystical phenomenon” that is a particular “grace,” special, extraordinary, which God gives to a determinate person, from the “mystical dimension of faith,” which, on the contrary, pertains to all. That can be described as a kind of immediate perception of God understood as He who exercises an action in relation to humans and who wants to assert himself in their personal and collective history. The immediate perception determines a “mystic state” (an ecstatic condition given by the attraction that God exercises on the subject) and generates an “experience,” which comes to be defined as “mystic” by the global and all-absorbing character that it possesses, investing and transforming all the dimensions of the human experience: its thought, its feeling, and its action.⁴

The word “mystic” is, therefore, understood as an immediate

³ The rediscovery of the mystical dimension in Vincentian spirituality has been amply illustrated by Father Giuseppe Toscani in all his work, in particular: *Rinnovarsi per ricreare la Carità [Innovate to Recreate Charity]*, Turin 1981; *Contemplare a viso scoperto [Contemplate with Unveiled Face]*, Turin 1982; *La mistica dei poveri [The Mystique of the Poor]*, Pinerolo 1986. The latter is the most successful book, a real gem for the original perspective and compelling language. His other contributions on the theme are: “L’incarnazione: cuore della spiritualità vincenziana” [“The Incarnation: Heart of Vincentian Spirituality”], “L’aderenza: modellati sull’amore” [“Adherence: Modeled on Love”], “La missione: servizio di chiesa per i poveri” [“The Mission: Service of the Church for the Poor”] in *Annali della Missione* 91 (1984), 134-144; “Il Cristo di S. Vincenzo” [“The Christ of Saint Vincent”] in *Vincenziana* XXX (1986) 357-405, taken up again and expanded upon in the volume, *Amore, contemplazione, teologia. Gesù Cristo visto da S. Vincenzo [Love, Contemplation, Theology. Jesus Christ as Seen by Saint Vincent]*, Alzani, Pinerolo, 1987, his final contribution on his research methodology for the reconstruction of the contemplation of the mystery of Christ of Saint Vincent.

⁴ For a phenomenology of mystical experience, see: Toscani, G., *Amore, contemplazione, teologia [Love, Contemplation, Theology]*, Turin 1987, 57-84.

consciousness of the presence of God⁵ determined by his action. The foundation is the faith which opens to the perception of God, of his personal properties and his modes of acting. The scope of the affirmation is the experience of the person, where it is rooted and manifested. Moreover, it gives origin to a “new” language in an attempt to express in an adequate way one’s own perception of the divine.

From all the abridged readings of Saint Vincent, from all the deformations, as Father Giuseppe Toscani has shown, the worst would be that of ignoring the mystical dimension of his thought and action. Beyond all the cataloguing, Saint Vincent is a believer who lived an exciting experience of the mystery of Christ. In virtue of this experience, he became a real master, not only of thought, but of life.⁶ Reading his writings, one can see clearly that what he says is fruit of a knowledge that does not come only from a cultural tradition. Only a mystic, who has lived a transforming experience of Christ, is capable of speaking about God, about the world of the Spirit, about his own interior experience, with a surprising linguistic singularity.⁷

⁵ This is the definition that Elmar Salmann gives it in several of his essays, in particular: Salmann E., “Presenza e critica. Sulle affinità elettive tra filosofia e mistica” [“Presence and Criticism. The Elective Affinities Between Philosophy and Mysticism”] in Collection; *Filosofia e mistica. Itinerari di ricerca [Philosophy and Mysticism. Research Routes]*, Rome 1997, 29-60; “Mistica: esperienza e teoria – storie e figure” [“Mysticism: Experience and Theory – Stories and Figures”], in idem; *Presenza di spirito. Il cristianesimo come gesto e pensiero [Presence of Spirit. Christianity as Gesture and Thought]*, Padua 2000, 193-208.

⁶ J.-P. Renouard, *Saint Vincent de Paul maitre de sagesse. Initiation à l'esprit vincentien [Saint Vincent de Paul: Master of Wisdom. Initiation into the Vincentian Spirit]*, Nouvelle Cité, Bruyères-le-Chatel 2010.

⁷ Unfortunately, the mystical dimension of his thought has not met the attention it deserved from criticism. There are few monographic contributions of value to this theme: we recall the works of Henri Brémond, Jean Calvet, Pierre Defrennes (extensively presented in L. Mezzadri, *La sete e la sorgente II. Alla ricerca delle origini [The Thirst and the Source II. Searching for the Origins]*, CLV – Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome 1993; *Dizionario storico spirituale vincenziano [Vincenzian Historical Spiritual Dictionary]*, edited by L. Mezzadri, CLV – Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome 2003), which were followed by the works of André Dodin, José María Ibañez Burgos, Luigi Mezzadri, Jean-Pierre Renouard, Giuseppe Toscani (analyzed in L. Mezzadri, *La sete e la sorgente I. Introduzione agli studi vincenziani [The Thirst and the Source I. Introduction to Vincenzian Studies]*, CLV – Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome 1992). The most extensive studies on the mystical experience of Saint Vincent placed within an overall reconstruction of his spirituality are those of Ibañez and Toscani; in particular, the volumes: J. M. Ibañez, *Vicente de Paul. Realismo y encarnación [Vincent de Paul. Realism and Incarnation]*, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca 1982; G. Toscani, *La mistica dei poveri [The Mystique of the Poor]*, Alzani, Pinerolo, 1986.

3. An Opportune Correction

It happened quite often in the past to present Saint Vincent as an organizer totally separated from Saint Vincent the mystic, as if he were two different persons. It went even further by presenting undeniable "practical" attitudes separate from his "faith vision."

Saint Vincent was not an ordinary priest of the 17th century to be enclosed in a rigid cultural framework. What appears evident in his accomplishments is originality. The problem is to verify if this originality could be attributed only to human evolution, which he experienced in his life, or does it reveal something else. Basically, among the spiritual masters of his time, he is the one who has had the greatest spiritual posterity. What was the origin of his fecundity? Is it to be attributed to his ingenious ability to transform the environment or is it the result of an exceptional faith?

When looking for the principle that moves throughout the life journey that Saint Vincent traveled and the people who were affected by his way of living the Gospel, one cannot not find it in God. Access to the mystery of God can never be an "achievement," but only a "gift," a "grace" received, to be desired, requested, inherited.

Saint Vincent united in himself the quality of organizer and the graces of spirituality. In him the realistic man of action coincided with the mystical man of faith. In the authentic Christian experience there is no rift between the life of faith and real life. God help us if that were the case. It would be the cause of serious distortions of the Christian experience. A good administrator can be a charismatic and an authentic mystic is always a realist. Proust used to say that "despites" are always the hidden "because." Applying this maxim to Saint Vincent: is it not "despite" being a mystic that Saint Vincent was a great organizer. He was a brilliant organizer because he was an authentic mystic. The spiritual posterity of Saint Vincent was not deceived when it learned to recognize, behind the father of organized charity, the man of God guided by the Spirit, the passionate follower of Christ and friend of the poor.

4. A Spirituality of Interiority in Action

The ideal of spirituality, until the 17th Century, was completely centered on the theme of the “presence of God.” Whereas, with the French School, a language, according to which the summit of Christian life is not to live in the presence of God, but to follow the “Will of God,” begins to prevail. Doing the will of God means to practice the love of God.⁸

There is a radical criticism in Saint Vincent, even if not altogether conscious, about intellectualism and de-incardinated spiritualism of a certain Christian spirituality. Only the practice of charity provides protection from intellectual and spiritual deformations. Saint Vincent was profoundly convinced that charity is everything. He was fascinated by it. He was transformed by it. That is why his words and actions still remain persuasive to this day.

Charity has an external dimension, which is manifested in gestures, in caring, and in service. But, we know that authentic charity possesses also an interior dimension, which is shown in the “heart,” in sentiments,

⁸ In recent decades, research on French spirituality has experienced new impulses and developments: M. Bergamo, *La scienza dei santi. Studi sul misticismo seicentesco [The Science of the Saints. Studies on 17th Century Mysticism]*, Sansoni, Florence 1984; B. Papisogli, *La lettera e lo spirito. Temi e figure del seicento francese [The Letter and the Spirit. Themes and Figures of 17th-Century France]*, Goliardica, Pisa 1986; Idem, *Il fondo del cuore. Figure dello spazio interiore nel Seicento francese [The Depth of the Heart. Figures of Interior Space in 17th-Century France]*, Goliardica, Pisa 1991; Collection, *Il Dio nascosto. I grandi maestri Francesi del Seicento e l'immagine di Dio [The Hidden God. The Great French Masters of the 17th Century and the Image of God]*, De Luca, Rome 2001; Collection, *Pour un vocabulaire mystique au XVII^e siècle [For a Mystical Vocabulary in the 17th Century]*. Seminar of Professeur C. Ossola, Texts collected by F. Trémolières, Aragno, Turin 2004; M. de Certeau, *Le lieu de l'autre. Histoire religieuse et mystique [The Place of the Other: Religious and Mystical History]*, Gallimard-Le Seuil, Paris, 2005; R. Deville, *L'école française de spiritualité [The French School of Spirituality]*, Desclée, Paris 2008 [This is a new edition, revised and augmented. This time the author dedicates a separate chapter to Saint Vincent, the 7th, entitled, “Vincent de Paul, un Gascon qui marque son siècle (1581-1660)” [“Vincent de Paul, a Gascon Who Marked his Century (1581-1660)”], pp. 141-156].

in affections, in the measure of love that is put into the concrete things we do. In the “Augustinian century,” Saint Vincent, as all his contemporaries, experienced the fascination of the return to interiority. More than speaking of spirituality *of action*, I believe it is preferable to speak about the spirituality of “*interiority in action.*”⁹

In the spiritual language of 17th-century France, the interior man is not a man closed within himself and in his private, passive way confined to his own intimate space. In this context, interior is not opposed to exterior, interiority to exteriority, passivity to activity. That is true in our ordinary language, but not in the spiritual language of the 17th century. To speak about interiority does not mean to fall into intimism. On the contrary, the return to the internal is like a catapult which throws one to the external; its curvature on itself and its own interior motions project, paradoxically, outside itself. To live in one’s own interior space is the condition of possibility for ecstasy; that is, the place where the ecstasy movement is realized, which puts the subject into action, precisely, outside himself. The internal and the external, in a certain sense, coincide. The internal “is” the external, the place where the self is positioned in God. One enters into oneself in order to encounter God and then to find him again outside of oneself. In other words, one can get out outside oneself only if one has entered into oneself, one can leave God for God only if one has found Him. For this reason, Saint Vincent insists much on the cultivation of the interior life,

⁹ “One cannot not be struck – says Mino Bergamo – when one turns one’s mind to consider religious publications in 17th-century France, by the frequency of which, in their titles, the word *intérieur* [interior] recurs ... These recurring appearances are the indication of the fascination exerted, on 17th-century religious thought, by the world of the inner being ... Now, I think we can say that interest in the inner life, the question on its impulses, and on the states of the interior life, reached, in the French culture of the 17th century, one of its peaks of greatest development. The extraordinary success of the word *intérieur* – used as both an adjective and a noun, becomes one of the key words of the era’s religious language – allows one to sense already what was the breadth and historical significance of this phenomenon” (M. Bergamo, *L’anatomia dell’anima. Da François de Sales a Fénelon* [The Anatomy of the Soul. From Francis de Sales to Fenelon], Il Mulino, Bologna 1991, 13).

on interior attitudes, on the need to purify one's intention, on the virtues to be practiced. From this point of view, one can better understand the famous phrase of Brémond: "It was not the poor who gave him to God, but it is God who gave him to the poor." Saint Vincent was given to the poor. Working for them he consumed himself for God! In this there is all the diversity and all the originality of Saint Vincent de Paul."¹⁰

In this legacy, entire generations of Missionaries, Daughters of Charity, and members of various associations of Charity have found inspiration to incarnate the Vincentian charism in the changing circumstances in which they found themselves. Even today, defying the wear and tear of time, it can serve as a point of sure reference not only for the Vincentian Family, but also for those who are so easily tempted by the suggestions of present-day theology (or, to express it better, of ideology) of charity that is too anthropocentric and social. "It is mysticism that gave us the greatest of the men of action ..."! (Brémond).

¹⁰ The Riccardi note can clarify better in what sense we can speak of mysticism. "Vincent is a mystic, a genuine mystic, more authentic even than those who lived the mystical life as a quest for loving union with the divinity, happy to contemplate, love, and enjoy intimacy with God. The union that Vincent sought with the divinity was the search for union with his divine will, not only to contemplate but to do. Because this divine will manifested itself in Christ, who dedicated himself especially to serving the poor, in the same way Vincent tried to do so throughout his life ... Saint Vincent is called to 'consume himself for God' and not to 'lose himself in God' according to the conception of classical and abstract mysticism" (*Perfezione Evangelica [Evangelical Perfection]*). All the thought of Saint Vincent de Paul explained in his own words, edited by C. Riccardi, third edition, CLV – Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome 1983, note, XVII-XVIII).

Between Memory and Prophecy!

Zeracristos Yosief Woldemichael, CM

Short Introduction:

It is right to thank God, the beginning and the fulfillment of our entire existence and of our personal and community history. The one who does not give thanks for little things will never give thanks for much because gratitude is “the memory of the heart.” In addition, gratitude is a virtue that brings joy, serenity, and laughter into our lives and into the lives of those around us, as well as being a clear sign of our human and spiritual maturity. I am completely convinced that only mature and responsible people know how to say “thank you,” thanks for all, thanks for everything, and always thanks for our being. “Thanks is a hug turned into words,” says an anonymous author. This is because the phrase “thank you” is the best prayer that anyone can say. Thanks expresses extreme gratitude, humility, and understanding. Yes, gratitude is the virtue of a heart that sings God’s mercy. If we fail to say “thank you” in our lives, we will prove to be all the more superficial and coarse, reducing ourselves to useless and fruitless talk. Therefore, we always say thank you in our lives because, after all, it is God who is the Lord and guide of our life and existence.

We all know that our Assemblies, Provincial or General, are an ecclesial event. We meet as a Church and within the presence of the Church. It is an event that belongs to the life of the Church. We know, as Irenaeus says, “Where there is the Church, there is the Holy Spirit.” So, despite and beyond all human limitations and frailties, which we inevitably carry with us, our Assemblies are guided by the Holy Spirit. I would say that they are the *Tempo Forte* of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Congregation of the Mission. If we lose sight of this, human factors and our human frailties can bring us disappointment, frustration, and a misunderstanding of community life. Because, as Patriarch Athenagoras I said, “Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ remains in the past, the Gospel is a dead word, the Church is a mere

organization, authority is a power, mission is propaganda, worship is a memory, and Christian action is a morality of slaves.”

The action of the Spirit is unpredictable because, “The Spirit blows where it wills” (John 3:8). The Spirit does not use our criteria and parameters and does not begin to add up how often we do it. We experienced it also during this last Assembly. Those who arrived in Chicago with pre-determined human programs and calculations and preconfigured prior prejudices left defeated, disappointed, and frustrated: the Spirit blows where it wills! We Christians know that the Holy Spirit passes through locked doors and renews hope. The Holy Spirit turns the big stone that crushes the just and it revives. Yes, that same Spirit was with us and in us as representatives of the entire Congregation and inspired our actions and decisions in spite of our human limitations, which were invariably present.

Certainly our imperfections and our limitations weigh upon us. They are a burden from which we cannot be freed. Our life is imperfect, our communities are imperfect, and our relationships are filled with problems. Our Congregation is never as we would like. Yet, in our being imperfect there is space for a discovery, for a change, and especially for a common path. Perfect means finished, completed. From that which is finished and completed, nothing is missing. It is closed and stopped. Perfection ignores any possibility of change. Rather, imperfection gives the opportunity to dream, to be curious about the world because it is imperfect, and, above all, it gives a forward movement to history. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that we know and love imperfectly! That is true. However, imperfection feeds the desire and opens us to the wonder of the incomplete miracle that we are, our provinces and our local communities. “There is a fissure in everything, and that is where the light comes in,” says Leonard Cohen, a Canadian songwriter. Our General Assemblies are trying to seize this light that comes from our fissures and with this light illuminate our future by offering lines of action and operational plans capable of prophetically guiding the story of the Congregation of the Mission in the next six years.

a) FIRST WEEK: REMEMBERING THE CHARISM AND LIVING IT!

During the first week, this Assembly sought to answer the following questions: Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we

headed? What is our true identity today in the Church and society? The answers to these questions are spread throughout the Final Document of the Assembly. The Assembly attempted to assess its life, works, and convictions in order to identify strengths and weaknesses. In the end, continuing the theme of the previous Assembly (July 2010), it ended up renewing itself faithfully to God, to the charism, to today's times, to solidarity with the poor, and to everything between this. In doing this, I want to emphasize that the general climate of this Assembly was peaceful and quiet.

The Vincentian Family is now on the threshold of the 400th anniversary of the birth of its charism. The memory of living our charism, however, is not a narrative of the events that occurred as far back as 1617, but rather it is our recognition of those fundamental and foundational experiences of our true identity in the Church, as it was at that time and so it is today. Yes, like a blossoming flower in the Church, this is precisely our charism; it is still alive and fruitful. We are the fruit of the flower that blossomed in 1617. So far, it is not a memory of the past, but it is a celebration of gratitude in the present because, in us and with us, that charism is still alive; the initial flame has defied time and, after four centuries, the oil of the flame lit in 1617 is not exhausted, indeed, it is still burning. How can we not thank the Lord for all this? God willed that through us, members of the Vincentian Family, that charism put into the hands of Vincent was not a passing moment but is still alive and life-giving.

Our Assemblies have a big responsibility: to be a bridge in history. The main task and the ultimate responsibility of any General Assembly, the supreme authority of the Congregation of the Mission, is not only to elect the Superior General, but also to guard attentively the charism (perhaps purifying it with a common discernment) and faithfully transmit it to succeeding generations. This is the historical responsibility of each General Assembly of the Congregation. The General Assembly is called to make a transitional "bridge" in the history of the Family. It is called to acquire a new self-awareness that helps to live its own identity in the Church today in service to the poorest with renewed fidelity. Therefore, the objectives of our Assemblies always come from far beyond the forces and resources of our Congregation, but we have our eyes fixed on the future.

One must always keep his eyes fixed on the future because, unfortunately, we humans have a big drawback: we have a short memory. We easily forget many things. The Bible, which knows this limitation, reminds us, “Take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children” (Deuteronomy 4:9). If the Congregation of the Mission has defied the times, across four centuries, it is because it has not forgotten the tenderness, the all-forgiving love, and the mercy of God. That is why this light lit in the Church four centuries ago has not yet burned out. The role of our Assemblies in faithfully transmitting our charism is decisive.

The first week of our Assembly was dedicated to the memory of its own charism as understood in the biblical and theological sense. To “remember” is not a historical recalling as if we live in the past nostalgically. It is in the biblical and theological sense: “If my father was still in Egypt, I would still be a slave ... I would be deprived of freedom and dignity. God has just released me and made me go from slavery to freedom; from a foreign land to that land flowing with milk and honey...” (Gamaliel, explaining the celebration of the Passover). Precisely, our Assembly also remembers its charism and says, with grateful appreciation, this celebration is not a remembrance of the events that took place back in 1617, but we are that experience because the flame of that experience is still alive in the ministries of the Vincentian Family. The Assembly said it in different ways and at different stages.

The 42nd General Assembly, to ensure continuity and the legacy of the 41st Assembly held in Paris in July 2010, asked on several occasions about the creative fidelity of the Congregation of the Mission and the five lines of action outlined by that Assembly in implementing this creative fidelity. Regarding this memory of creative fidelity in the Congregation of the Mission, some provinces shared with the rest of the Assembly their experiences. Above all, there was the much anticipated report of the outgoing Superior General which, in principle, was to present a global view of the health and the success of, or contrarily, the lack of success regarding the Assembly of 2010. The Assembly,

based on these experiences, had to assess the progress made by the Congregation of the Mission in the Church and in society over the last six years. Unfortunately, the first week, in addition to recalling the history of the charism, faced many other practical and bureaucratic things, which were absolutely inevitable, but that stole so much time, sometimes compromising the noble task and duty of developing the theme chosen for the Assembly.

The status quo of the Congregation of the Mission presented by the outgoing Superior General to the Assembly focused on two themes only: solidarity and the international missions. This choice of themes unduly neglected the overview or the general framework of the real experiences of the Congregation of the Mission. Effectively, he said little or nothing about its challenges, opportunities to be promoted, the continuing creative ventures, and did not even propose a way to make our charism alive and vivifying! In my view, this omission forgot one very important thing: our General Assemblies are Assemblies of all our provinces and vice-provinces to take stock of their current situation, share the experience of their common charism and witness given in their church and society, to assess together the health and debilities of their provinces and local communities, their creativity or suffering, and the fidelity to or betrayal of their ministry. All this could not and should not be set aside, because the life of our provinces, as important and urgent, cannot be reduced to the possible solidarity among our provinces and international missions. It must evaluate not their quantity, but their quality, and the legacy they are leaving behind.

In summary, maybe due to the new methodology that was not imparted and followed well, the first week did not have a good connection with the main theme of the Assembly of 2010. It fell short of clear direction from the competent authorities on our challenges and opportunities today and could not polish off the charism in order to relaunch it again. This lack of focus on the principal theme of the meeting itself, and having a variety of topics not easily reconcilable, obfuscated the possibility and the ability of this Assembly to remember our charism so it could renew its historical fidelity. This will be the task of the redacting committee, which I think saved the meeting by filling in the gaps.

b) SECOND WEEK: OUR “TODAY” AS HISTORICAL AND RESPONSIBLE!

“Who do we want to be today?” This Assembly, like the previous ones, had to answer this fundamental question. In the diversified context of the world, how do we want to live and express our charism? What are the ministries that shine as lights in the world as the Congregation of the Mission and its identity in the Church? Not only that, “who of us” can help the Congregation to be what it was called to be in the Church? This last question is closely linked to the previous questions. Therefore, the second week was a week of true and proper discernment, during which we looked to each other. Why? Because we had to discern which of us can, with his life and his testimony, “...inspire the members of the Congregation of the Mission to dream more, learn more, do more, transform more,” and at the same time, “...be a credible sign of unity of the international Congregation of the Mission.” In leadership, that which matters most is the ability to translate the vision of the Assembly into reality. Any General Assembly is looking for leaders who, on the one hand, must be “practical and realistic” and on the other “must speak a language of the visionaries and idealists.” To do this, superiors should be artists because to be superiors “...is the art of the art” (Saint Vincent). An important grounding in this art is to have one’s sight fixed on the image of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21). Not only as artists, superiors should be able to see the invisible and be attentively vigilant. In all this, the fundamental quality that is asked of superiors is the “virtue of prudence” and that it will be accompanied by wisdom, sowing hope in a world which “...sows the wind, reaps the whirlwind,” as the prophet Hosea says (Hosea 8:7).

Under the rubrics of the second week, there was a fundamental question: “Who of us can help the Congregation better and more today?” To answer this question, the General Assembly went to its knees to pray, had common and private discernment, and discussed this question at various levels in linguistic and continental groups. Why? It was certainly not done to campaign for someone and elective politics, which does not help anyone, but rather to discern the will of God for our Congregation. To discern the will of God, it is obvious that the Assembly needed to kneel and pray, because no one could

project it on the main screen of the Assembly hall nor find it written on beautiful slides on display during the sessions. The will of God often comes through an experience of the cross. And the cross, by its nature, is painful and disappointing. Our superiors are the fruit of days of prayer and discernment done at various levels. But all of this is just in preparation for the Holy Spirit to act in us, with us, and for us. The final product, that is, the final choice, is not of the Assembly, but rather of the Holy Spirit. It is He who chooses, and not the Assembly. What the Holy Spirit does is always the best. Faced with the active presence of the Holy Spirit, human calculations, intrigues, and purely human parameters have no substance and are passed over and set aside. In this sense, the will of God is to be seen not in the process, but in the end product, the final choice of the people. The process to discern the will of God, humanly speaking, can be done badly and can leave some dissatisfaction, because there may be people who try to rob our future. Thankfully, however, all this did not happen. Certainly we are children of our time, of our society, and with the dominant mindset of our century. But Paul warns us, saying, “Do not conform yourself to this age” (Romans 12:2). To conform to the mentality of this century is always a risk that remains on our horizon and is a constant challenge for all.

In summary, the principal work which was the major concern of the first week was to answer the following questions: Who are we? From where are we coming? Where are we headed? Are all of us walking in the same direction? Instead, the second week focused on the question: Who can accompany us on this journey, which is not easy? I believe that the Assembly, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, has given the appropriate answers.

c) THIRD WEEK: LIVING PROPHETIC HOPE!

One of the main tasks of an Assembly is to shake the consciences of its members and say, “Awake, O sleeper!” (Ephesians 5:14). This is done in different ways. As the ultimate authority of the Congregation of the Mission, the General Assembly has the duty and responsibility to highlight and to prophetically call its members towards a future full of hope. If the prophetic dimension is missing in our Assemblies, our mission can be reduced to “surviving.” But we are called to project

and promote our charism and prosper. To thrive we need passion, compassion, humor, and a way of life. Without passion and compassion, the oxygen of the soul in love with Christ and the poor, our mission cannot be accomplished and promoted. I also believe this Assembly is able to energetically transmit and promote the proper charism. “A burning passion combined with complete detachment is the key to all success” (M. Gandhi).

Our “tomorrow” is the favorite son of our “today” as today is the heir of yesterday. Let us remember, along with Lord Byron, that, “The best prophet of the future is the past.” What we are today, that is, our lives, our testimonies, our aspirations and intuitions, and our convictions, either positively or negatively, affect our future. With this in mind, we must carefully discern the present century, our “historic now,” with attention and care. If attention is not paid to the lifestyle we live and to the witness given, to our work and collaboration in ministry, and to the quality of our local communities, precisely in our “historic now” in its broadest sense, we cannot open the horizons of our future. We cannot force the dawning of our future. If we want to prophetically launch our charism, we must pay attention to what we are sowing today because, as rightly said by the prophet Hosea, “When they sow the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). Therefore, the future of the Congregation of the Mission, in large part, depends on our ability to read the signs of our times and judge them with the heart of God.

The prophets, men of God, more than proclaiming the misfortunes of an unknown future, are the spokespersons and interpreters of the will of Yahweh for their people. As God’s spokesman, God wants the conversion of the hearts of His people. The prophets do not stop shouting and throwing stones against those who resist this conversion of life and heart. They try to influence the way we live, our actions, and the moral behavior of their people. The call and the mission of the prophets was not to gossip, but rather was a call to conversion, to right moral behavior, and to wisdom before God and the community of the elect. For this, true prophets throughout time are men and women of low prestige! They suffer the consequences of their prophecies. Their life, love, and passion get dirty. Most often, they face much hostility and are mistreated. Not only that, they are suffering because of the

mission entrusted to them. Yet, their efforts may fail, their vision may be temporarily blurred, and sometimes they may even lack oxygen to breathe, but their mission goes beyond their well-sealed tombs and, in defiance of hard and closed hearts, in the end divine justice triumphs and they are treated fairly for what they have suffered. As usual, a person is only able to dig up the graves, but God opens them, overturning once and for all the great stones that seal the tombs of the righteous. This is the story of the Resurrection.

The work of the prophet is fulfilled in word and deed, like two sides of the same coin. The essential elements of the prophetic announcement are: the absolute priority of having God in life, the affirmation of individual and social justice, the purification of worship, the consolation of the people afflicted with various things, and the announcement of universal redemption. To the prophets the question of justice is fundamental. Justice is the balance scale of the Spirit of God and not the courts.

We know that the mission of the prophet is difficult since it presumes to be the reference point of the life of faith and morals of his own people, a word heard in silence, whispered in the ears of faith. Often, for this reason, the prophet suffers from loneliness and is persecuted. The divine voice heard in silence is a gospel, that is, the Good News, which goes through the tribulation, suffering, denial, betrayal, and scandal of the suffering servant.

This year, the Congregation of the Mission wants to renew its vocation and prophetic mission. In fact, the Final Document of this Assembly, a succinct document, after a brief analysis of the challenges reaffirms its willingness to begin again with Christ: the Rule of the Mission! Its prophetic realism, like 400 years ago, begins with Christ. He is the center, the North Star, and the key to all the happenings and events of our lives and our ministry. Yes, it is He who rules our lives and it is He who gives sense and meaning to our mission. In Him alone we see, love, and serve the poor. At the heart of our mission and our spirituality, there is a real and concrete Christocentrism: Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus should be loved, revered, and served. This is the heart of all. The rest is the story of our lines of action that we want to put into action as far as we can!

Conclusion

I conclude by quoting Søren Kierkegaard on the strength and the victory of love: “What makes a great man, admired by creation, pleasing in God’s eyes? What makes a man strong, stronger than the whole world? What is it that makes him weak, weaker than a child? What makes a man steady, steadier than the rock? What makes him soft, softer than wax?” The Danish philosophical existentialist asks this and responds: It is LOVE. If the charism given to Vincent DePaul has come down to us, enduring four centuries, it was because Saint Vincent knew how to love. In his spiritual testament, in the person of Jeanne, the small and latest addition to the Daughters of Charity, imaginatively quoted in the conclusion of the film *Monsieur Vincent*, said, “Jeanne, you’ll soon see that charity is a heavy burden ... it is not enough to give broth and bread.” To Jeanne, as to all of us, he asked her to serve the poor with “gentleness and kindness” because they are our “...demanding and susceptible patrons.” In short, Saint Vincent gives valuable advice on how the poor should be served: it is not in doing much for the poor, the question is, “how much love we put into doing that which we do.” Yesterday as today, this should distinguish us from others. The Congregation of the Mission, like the other branches of our Family, poor, humble, and fragile as it is, has tried laboriously to preserve this precious gift and, thanks to God, it is still alive in the Church. It is up to us to continue this. It is up to us to make it even more alive and life-giving. It is up to us to make it visible and tangible.

At the same time, however, we recognize that, “We hold this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7), which is all of us. Yet God does not stop loving us, He never ceases to renew His trust. This is the Year of Mercy. Entrusting ourselves to His divine mercy, if we learn from Saint Vincent that it is not doing much that matters, but rather putting much love into what we do, then we could be credible prophets and, at the threshold of the 400th anniversary of the birth of our charism, we will be a good historical bridge to it.

The Congregation of the Mission “Apart” in Chicago

Guénolé Feugang, CM

It was in Chicago, Illinois, USA, “the Garden City,” “the Windy City” that the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission took place outside Europe for the first time in its history.

In moving away from Paris and Rome for its 42nd Assembly, the members of the Company “came away” effectively in order to live this time of mercy, discernment, communion, conversion, evangelization, and abandonment together to Divine Providence in a different cultural context.

Thanks to the environment and especially to the cultural diversity of the delegates, each person was able to experience, once again, the transcultural nature of the Vincentian charism.

The Primacy of Mercy

The convening of this Assembly was seen as the work of God’s mercy: a mercy that was active in the decisions confreres made in choosing delegates to participate in it. This is the way of incarnation desired by the Lord to appoint those who would take part in this unique and decisive meeting for the whole Congregation for the next six years.

This mercy was also that of the participants towards each other. The differences in points of view, in reasoning, in cultures, in experience and age did not reduce the participants to disrespect or obstruction. The same applied to speeches in form and substance. Everyone was received as he was and treated with respect, but above all with love and patience, in a good spirit and with humour, even if there was sometimes a little tension and impatience.

Mercy will ultimately be what is asked of all the members of the Congregation. The Final Document and the election of members of the General Curia may disappoint some confreres. However, everyone

is invited to enter into what is an act of mercy in order to forgive the impertinence of the choices of the Lord and the delegates who were aided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was invoked at the beginning of each session.

In order for mercy to be ever more fruitful, is it not necessary that each confrere, each community, each province, and the whole Congregation discover its own poverty every day and then renew its availability to begin listening to the Word of God, the Church, people who are poor and marginalised in order to identify what truly pleases God and what is the most Vincentian way to respond?

Ways of Discernment

The General Assembly was experienced as a long and deep process of discernment to hear the call of God, the Poor, and the Church. The risk of hearing oneself speak, of asking questions that nobody asks, of being turned towards the past or to the future without inhabiting the present is always there. Discernment functioned on at least four levels: the process of working, the signs of the times, challenges and ways to address them, how leadership might implement lines of action.

Working arrangements evolved throughout the Assembly. They were refined at each session. The starting pattern and the approach to the work during the sessions changed to adapt to each new development or direction that appeared in the work of the small groups and in plenary sessions.

In identifying the positive aspects in our world, in the Church, and in the Congregation, in welcoming the related challenges of our time and in the future, delegates sought the most appropriate ways to respond to them. The path to the Final Document seemed like a long, trying period of gestation: a pregnancy that was, still, the fruit of a real engagement of ideas, experiences, aspirations, and needs, but sometimes fear and apprehension as well. This document had to respond to two requirements: the collection, synthesis, and prioritization of all the contributions; and with clarity, accuracy, and brevity in the presentation. These two criteria led to the voting of a readable document reminiscent of our Constitutions and Statutes, setting out lines of action or themes for direction and describing the implementation of concrete commitments.

The election of the Superior General, the Vicar General, and Assistants General was one of the three high points of the Assembly. The proposals of the Visitors, the discussions of the Continental Conferences, the numerous exchanges in plenary sessions, the day of recollection, and the various informal sharings helped us to receive from God, the Church, the Congregation, and the poor the leadership team. If, therefore, the governance of the Congregation at the level of the General Curia is a gift of God, how do we allow it to realise concretely the international and intercultural character of the whole Company in each of the provinces through dialogue, listening, and obedience?

Signs of Communion

How beautiful it is to be gathered in the unity of the faith and of the communion of the Vincentian charism beyond ethnic and cultural differences, difference in age and ministries, the variety of political, economic, and religious situations in countries and continents, differences in the way of understanding and living out in concrete ways the faith of the Church and the Vincentian charism, the peculiarity of personal and provincial experiences! During the meeting, several signs of unity and communion were palpable and on display.

This communion took place in the common celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist, times of reflection and sharing in small groups and in the plenary session, at meals, in the moments of impromptu friendly meetings, free time, and in moving between the working areas.

This communion was also noticeable in this common will to be attentive to the signs of the times, to stay true to the heritage received from Saint Vincent, live justice, fraternity, solidarity, sharing concretely together human and financial resources, and other skills and expertise.

The concern to respond to the demands of the diocesan churches in the areas of formation, pastoral care, and mission was also an expression of the communion of the "poor" Company with the local churches. It was reaffirmed that the horizon of the Company was not itself but God, the Church, and the poor.

Another place of communion is formation and mission *ad intra*. Commitments to establish common centres of formation, the creation of joint missions, interprovincial and continental communities, as well as the international “Solidarity Fund” project, all contributing in some way to respond to the various forms of poverty of the provinces, were also visible signs and intentions of this communion.

The willingness to pool resources would thus allow the Company to deal with its own deficiencies and lacunae more effectively. One of these poverties is precisely the difficulty of welcoming confreres from different socio-cultural and geographical areas into communities. It is truly necessary that the sharing of resources be no longer unilateral. This is already effective in some provinces, but these are isolated cases and there are still large reservations in many provinces and communities.

The Assembly also wanted to stress the communion with other members of the Vincentian Family. It highlighted communion in the charism. It profoundly stressed the fact that other members of the Vincentian Family are not primarily or merely associates but truly agents of the Vincentian charism, each according to his/her own identity. It is the same in the missionary field. Not only was there this desire that other members participate fully in a common mission, but that this involvement be not only in terms of performance or collaboration, but really in consideration, development, decision-making, and evaluation. If such is the case, there really is a need for conversion of the view and stance of the Congregation in relation to other branches of the Vincentian Family. Since the other members of the Vincentian Family are agents of the Vincentian charism, as well as the Congregation of the Mission, is it not to be reformulated again today?

The Need for Conversion

Fidelity to the Vincentian charism in moving towards personal holiness, the formation of the clergy, the service of the poor, living by missionary virtues in the diversity and cultural change of our time requires continual renewal. This renewal appeared during the Assembly not only in terms of returning to the sources or the founding instincts but also in terms of creativity in relation to the new poverties that have emerged, and to the manner of missionary life, community life, and governance. The Chicago Assembly was the place where the

difficulty of living community and the mission concretely in the current international and actual multicultural context of the world, the Church, and society was fully revealed.

The danger of provincialism emerged very quickly during the interventions and exchanges. It is probably linked to a style of government and individualistic culture. From hyper-centralization, the Company has moved to hyper-decentralization, each province claiming its independence, exhibiting its cultural and historical distinctiveness, drawing attention to the legal and political particularity of the country or continent in which it is located, not hesitating to underline its autonomy in financial or human resources, but, fortunately, also making known its fragilities, its poverty, and its needs. Now between these two extremes there is a real need to find fair criteria for more collegial decisions between the Superior General and the Visitors.

Day by day, the General Assembly became a place and a moment of conversion. Fear, reticence, and suspicion gave way to Faith and Hope. To live and to give credible witness, each province has become aware of the need to share its wealth reciprocally so that no one is in need and that all suspicion of paternalism disappears. The scandal of provinces rich in financial or human resources while others are poor financially and humanly posed a question. At the end of the Assembly, how can we not welcome these commitments from the richest to the poorest? Now these affective and intellectual conversions must become effective and practical. If this conversion remains theoretical and intentional, what then will be the credibility of the Congregation of the Mission for the proclamation of the Good News and its commitment to greater justice?

Mutual Evangelization

The everyday life of confreres, communities, and provinces is sometimes made up of withdrawal into oneself, of incomprehension, and even the rejection of others, accompanied by the elevation of pastoral, missionary, and community practice as an absolute and valid norm everywhere and for all. Sometimes this focus on one's own reality leads to blindness, being judgmental, and even the condemnation of ministries and confreres. This navel-gazing sometimes creates arguments and quarrels that distance one from the heart of the Congregation and its Mission.

These three weeks of the Assembly allowed one to listen to others, to share community and missionary experiences and practices, to confront pain and joys, and to discuss projects. One discovers that elsewhere other practices exist claiming the same Vincentian charism or that confreres share the same problems and look for new solutions. All this has led to learning from others, to relativize one's own claims, and to evangelize one another. Even if this mutual evangelization was diffuse, it nevertheless retains its relevance and its acuity.

It became clear during the Assembly that the social, political, cultural, religious, and economic context contributes to shaping deeply the face of Saint Vincent and to determining the colour of the Vincentian charism in each epoch and in each region. Hence, does this variety not make it urgent to restore primacy to Christ, to the Vincentian Charism, and to the Poor in everything?

Abandonment to Divine Providence

Given the inherent limitations of human nature, the numerous places where the Congregation is present, the beginning and the end of the Assembly presented as an invitation to abandonment to Divine Providence which never errs in its designs, as Saint Vincent taught us. Nothing was in play beforehand and no certainty was safe.

If some began the Assembly with certainties and convictions, and others with a certain apprehension and question marks, the end made it possible, with a necessary re-reading, to see that God himself was at work. It is he who animates, structures, marks out, and directs the entire Company in its Assemblies.

This active presence of God was confirmed in the emergence of lines of action and the choice of government. Even if these two points could not entirely satisfy every member of the Congregation, and the delegates first of all, it is clear that they must be received as a work of God and of the Congregation. In this respect, since the Holy Spirit has presided over these decisions, since the members of the Congregation have made an act of trust in choosing delegates, what is expected of all, and of the delegates primarily, is the humble reception of the results of the Assembly in a spirit of abandonment to Holy Providence. Even if a

thirst remains in relation to the decisions of the Assembly, how are the lines of action going to impact on the life of the provinces, communities, and confreres with regard to their community and missionary projects?

Shortcomings/Insufficiencies

Although it is impossible to make a global and systematic analysis of the reality of the world in which we live, there are points that would have deserved special attention. This concerns the religious context and the climatic context. The references to these two challenges were very discreet. It also concerns the clarification of the missionary domain specific to the Company and within the Vincentian Family.

On the religious level, one sees on every continent a return to paganism, to cultures that are under evangelized, that do not know Christ and the obligations of the Christian faith. This lack of knowledge, even ignorance, is very widespread. This context, which recalls the position of the early Church, tests the relevance of our missionary, pastoral, and sacramental proposals and decisions.

The second aspect is the multiplication of churches and Christians called "evangelicals," "born again," or "Pentecostals." Even if the causes of this phenomenon are not always linked to the life, practices, and institutions of the Church, each member of the Congregation of the Mission cannot consider this movement as marginal or neglect to question his own means of Community and missionary witness. Millions of men and women who thirst are not adequately taken into account in our proposals for evangelization and for service of the very poor.

The third aspect is that of militant or political Islamism. The Congregation of the Mission has a great missionary tradition in predominantly Muslim countries. Today, Islam is no longer a remote reality or confined to a precise geographical area. It is present in many countries where the Congregation is on mission; hence the challenge to meet and dialogue with our Muslim brothers and sisters, the challenge to respond to Christians attracted by Islam or to Muslims provoked by Christianity, the challenge to respond to Islamophobia as a reaction to the violent attitudes of some who claim to be Muslim.

Where climate is concerned, it is a truism to affirm the link between climate justice and social justice. The Encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, of May 2015 and the Paris Conference on Climate Change “COP 21” of December 2015 have shown sufficiently the link between the global climatic situation and creation, and indeed the growth of poverty, and climate injustice and social injustice. It is impossible today to speak of social justice without climate justice. The issue of climate and its impact on the poorest is a missionary and pastoral field in which the Congregation of the Mission cannot economize.

Concerning the clarification of the missionary domain of the Congregation, the Assembly did not address the question of the primacy of evangelization of the poor over the service of the poor. There is often a certain ambiguity when the Congregation of the Mission speaks of its mission to the poor. The expression used is sometimes the “service of the poor,” whereas the more specific is “the evangelization of the poor.” The service of the poor comprises the mission of evangelization. However, is this not the domain of the Company of the Daughters of Charity? While it is certain that this service does not happen without evangelization, it is also true that the very nature of the Daughters of Charity is first and foremost the service of the poor as a place and means of evangelization. Evangelization and the service of the poor are really two sides of the same reality, but is the Congregation not essentially for evangelization without neglecting corporeal service?

Prospects

Back down from the “mountain of the transfiguration,” carried along by the experiences and results of the Assembly, the Company can continue to let itself be enkindled by the breath of the Spirit and to be governed by Christ Jesus. It is this Spirit that inspires each one to translate his belonging to the universal Church and the Congregation, beyond differences, concretely into action. It is this Christ who invites us to leave behind self-satisfaction and one’s own frontiers and to effectively join the peripheries of the World, the Church, and the Congregation of the Mission. Perhaps the next General Assembly will take place in Oceania, Asia, or Africa.

Translated: Paschal Scallon, CM

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**Mission
and Charity
in our
Vincentian
Charism**



Caratula:

Mural painted by Brother Mark Elder, CM
(Western Province of the United States).

This mural is found on one of the buildings at De
Paul University, the site of the General Assembly.

