

1

From the General Curia



Circular for the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul

Rome, 20 September 2017

To all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission

“TOWARD A RENEWED CULTURE OF VOCATIONS TO THE CONSECRATED LIFE”



My dear confreres,

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

In this Jubilee Year of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, we have so much for which to be thankful!

One thing for which we need to thank Jesus is the gift of thousands upon thousands of confreres, throughout the 400-year history, who kept the charism alive up to the present day. It is thanks to them that, by the grace of God, the charism was passed on from generation to generation. Thousands of confreres achieved the state of sanctity, among whom some are recognized officially by the Church as Blessed or Saints. They are now in heaven from which they intercede for us and accompany us on the journey of life, on our own pilgrimage toward a total and eternal union with God.

As we approach the ministry of fostering vocations to the consecrated life and look to the future of the Congregation and its members, as well as that of the Vincentian Charism, the depth of our personal engagement, fire, and conviction is of utmost importance. Let one of the concrete fruits of the 400th Jubilee Year be “a renewed culture of vocations to the consecrated life.” By culture of vocations to the consecrated life, I mean an environment where vocations to the consecrated life will grow naturally, where to respond to Jesus’s invitation, “follow me,” will be accepted and not be seen as a strange or objectionable life choice. We want an environment where it will be “normal” and not “abnormal” for any young man to decide to follow Jesus, in our specific case, in the footsteps of Saint Vincent de Paul in the Congregation of the Mission as a lay brother or priest.

When I speak of a renewed culture of vocations to the consecrated life in general, I am very much aware that, in many parts of the world, such a culture of vocations is present. However, in other areas, society is not at all favorable to nurturing a culture of vocations to the consecrated life; it often is opposed to it, using diverse means to undermine such an environment.

In my letter of 25 January 2017, at the beginning of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, I invited every member of the Vincentian Family to take one very concrete step; that is, every member is to bring one new candidate to one of the branches of the Vincentian Family. A little more than half a year has passed since then and, as we celebrate the Solemnity of our Founder, every one of us can reply individually to the following questions:

- How have I responded to this invitation so far?
- How active have I been in the first half of the jubilee year in this area?
- Did I encourage someone to become active in one of the branches of the Vincentian Family, either in one of the women’s or men’s Congregations of consecrated life or in one of the lay branches?

As we enter the second half of the jubilee year, I fervently renew this invitation to each confrere individually, this time concretely directed to the consecrated life, to put every effort possible into helping youth answer Jesus's call. I would like to highlight this goal very specifically as we celebrate the Solemnity of Saint Vincent de Paul on this 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism. I ask each confrere to be open and to do all he can to encourage by prayer, personal contact, and accompaniment, depending on one's possibilities, a young person to discern if you sense that Jesus is calling him or her to the consecrated life.

Many confreres are working tirelessly in the ministry of fostering vocations, and I am convinced that, during this jubilee year, we already have seen or will see concrete fruits through new candidates joining the consecrated life, more specifically the Congregation of the Mission, as well as other Congregations within the Vincentian Family. For this, I thank you from the bottom of my heart! Saint Vincent himself would concur:

I thank God for the special devotions you are planning in order to ask God, through the intercession of blessed Saint Joseph, for the spread of the Company.

I ask His Divine Goodness to accept them. For more than twenty years I have not dared to ask this of God, thinking that, since the Congregation is His work, its preservation and growth should be left to His Providence alone. Reflecting, however, on the recommendation given us in the Gospel to ask Him to send laborers into His harvest,¹ I have become convinced of the importance and usefulness of this devotion.²

¹ Cf. Luke 10:2.

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 V, p. 468-469; Letter 1956 to Étienne Blatiron, Superior in Genoa, 12 November 1655. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD V, 468-469.

Moving toward a renewed culture to the consecrated life, I would like to suggest focusing on the following three groups:

- **Members of the Congregation of the Mission**

In writing this point, I am very much aware that I am not saying anything new. The theme of consecrated life has been touched on and spoken about so much throughout the history of the Congregation of the Mission. Therefore, I simply would like to add my voice, as well as to launch a new appeal to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission to work tirelessly to renew the culture of vocations to the consecrated life.

I urge you to work at the ministry of fostering vocations with new or renewed initiatives, approaches, and ideas. It is a wonderful opportunity. If, for some reason, in a province, vice-province, region, or international mission, there is not a concrete, active pastoral plan for fostering vocations in place, or if the plan is not reviewed annually to see how well we are walking in a given situation or environment, then this must be done without delay in this jubilee year, so as to keep the fire alive year after year.

As members of the Congregation of the Mission, our priority must be to assume responsibility for vocation ministry and to keep building a culture of vocations to the consecrated life. Every single confrere should have this as a vivid and inseparable sign of love toward the charism we have inherited, toward the Congregation of the Mission of which we are members, toward the Church, toward the Kingdom.

- **Members of the lay branches of the Vincentian Family**

A few months ago, I was approached by an international leader of a lay branch of the Vincentian Family, who brought up a proposal to encourage all the lay branches of the Vincentian Family to become involved actively or continue participating in promoting the culture of vocations to the consecrated life in the Congregations within the

Vincentian Family. This lay member expressed this initiative with the following words, “You – sisters, lay brothers, and priests within the Vincentian Family – did and are doing so much for us laity. We would like to do something for you in return.” What wonderful encouragement, support, and initiative coming from a lay member of the Vincentian Family!

I would like to invite and encourage every individual member of a lay branch of the Vincentian Family to continue or to start being involved actively in building the culture of vocations to the consecrated life and also to be involved personally in vocation ministry, in a special way for the different Congregations of the Vincentian Family. This will be a clear sign that building a culture of vocations to the consecrated life is not something reserved exclusively for persons in consecrated life – sisters, lay brothers, and priests – but it is a ministry for all members of the Church, all members of the Vincentian Family, laity as well as those in consecrated life.

The approach, the ways of participating, may differ at times from one branch to another, but the goal remains the same: we, as Vincentian Family, all participate in building the culture of vocations to the consecrated life. How can a lay branch participate concretely in this undertaking?

- Pray regularly, individually or as a group, for new vocations to the consecrated life.
- Be attentive to the signs that Jesus may be calling a young man or woman to follow Him as a sister, lay brother, or priest and encourage him/her in that direction.
- Put forth the option, when speaking with youth, of the consecrated life as a very concrete choice. When speaking of marriage, we also should speak of consecrated life, so it is seen as a very normal choice, a normal call and response to one’s lifelong commitment.

This jubilee year is a wonderful opportunity to continue or start encouraging renewed or new initiatives. The lay branches of the Vincentian Family together can build an environment, a culture, which will be receptive to the call to consecrated life as a normal response to one's life mission. The lay branches carry on the same charism and spirituality. They are a natural environment where new vocations to the consecrated life are born.

- **Persons outside the Vincentian Family**

The culture of vocations to the consecrated life is not limited just to the Vincentian Family, but is to be continued, renewed, or undertaken in society as a whole, making it a regular, normal, and logical choice, among other choices, to respond to Jesus's invitation to follow Him in one's life mission. On the level of the Congregation, one of the ways we are trying to engage and participate in the renewal of the culture of vocations to the consecrated life is by developing digital and social media, taking new or renewed initiatives and approaches to get the message out to the largest possible audience.

As we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Saint Vincent de Paul in this Jubilee Year of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, let us continue to be engaged, to reengage, or begin engaging in building the culture of vocations to the consecrated life wherever we serve. We count on our own capabilities, but always with total commitment and inner fire, so that our love for pastoral ministry to foster new vocations always will be "affective and effective."

Let us give thanks to God for all the vocations to the consecrated life we are receiving from Jesus's merciful hands, because, in the end, it is His mercy toward the "Little Company" that makes this miracle a reality! As Saint Vincent reminded us,

O Monsieur, how very precious is a good Missionary! God must raise him up and fashion him; that is the work of His omnipotence and His great goodness. That is why Our Lord

has specifically recommended that we ask God to send good workers into His vineyard;³ for in fact there will be no good ones if God does not send them, and very few of these are needed to accomplish a great deal.⁴

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul and all the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family intercede for us in this undertaking. Have a wonderful celebration! Let us keep praying for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

³ Cf. Matthew 9:31-38.

⁴ CCD VII, 626; Letter 2879 to Guillaume Desdames, Superior in Warsaw, 20 June 1659.

