

September 27, 2000

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Brothers,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I write today, with considerable excitement, to tell you about the first General Assembly of the International Vincentian Marian Youth Association. We held it here in Rome on August 8-12, just before World Youth Day. Delegates came from 44 countries, accompanied by Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and others who serve as spiritual animators of the groups.

It was a wonderful experience. The atmosphere was very positive. The delegates elected the first International President and four lay members of an International Council. These are:

Gladys Abi-Saïd, President (Lebanon)
Edurne Urdampilleta (Spain)
Gloria del Carmen Santillán Martínez (Mexico)
Francisco José Lemos Pires (Portugal)
Ana Maria Jesus Escaño (Philippines)

They also approved a document with Lines of Action to be implemented in each country over the next five years. I am enclosing a copy, knowing that it will be of great interest to you.

Since many Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and other spiritual advisors to our youth groups were present at the Assembly as auditors, Fr. Benjamín Romo and I took the occasion to meet with them to discuss their role. At the conclusion of that meeting, we agreed to draw up a document describing the ministry of the spiritual advisors of our youth groups. I am more and more convinced of the importance of this role. Sixty-four percent of the world's population is under 25 years of age. Our ministry to this segment of society is crucial for the future of the Church and also for the spread of the Vincentian charism in the world.

Our youth groups are growing very rapidly. They now have hundreds of thousands of members. In the last year alone, I approved National Statutes in 28 countries. A number of other countries are in the process of writing their statutes. The

groups exist on all continents and over the last several years have known a remarkable growth especially in Asia and Africa.

The youth groups, as you know, were entrusted to us at the same time as the Miraculous Medal. Catherine Labouré told Fr. Aladel, her spiritual advisor:

The Most Holy Virgin wants you to found an association of "Children of Mary." You will be its superior, and to you and its members abundant graces will be given.

Repeatedly during our Assembly the young people asked our help in their formation. They yearn to assimilate the Vincentian charism more deeply and to grow in living out the spirituality of the Magnificat. I am convinced that the young members of JMV can be a powerful force in the evangelization and service of the poor in our countries.

Right after the JMV Assembly, I had the joy of participating, within the context of World Youth Day, in our own Vincentian Youth Meeting. From August 14-20, around 1800 young Vincentians, the vast majority of whom are members of JMV, SSVdP, AIC, and AMM, met here in Rome. They came from 50 countries. In a happy familial climate we shared moments of formation, prayer, and getting to know one another. With great enthusiasm many have now written to me recounting how this experience led them to a deeper understanding of and commitment to our Vincentian charism.

All of this would not have been possible without the labors and support of many Visitors and Visitatrixes, Daughters of Charity, Vincentians, and lay volunteers. A Coordinating Commission worked for more than a year on all the preparations. I am very grateful to those who contributed so generously to the success of the General Assembly and the Vincentian Youth Meeting. I am delighted that the young members of our Family were able to share so much about their faith and their service of the poor. On a personal level, the meeting was a wonderful experience for me too.

I want to encourage Vincentians and Daughters of Charity throughout the world to form such groups wherever you serve and to assist them in their formation. I also urge our provincial superiors and the provincial assemblies to make the promotion and formation of our youth groups one of the top priorities for the future. The Church will be fully alive in the third millennium only if we help the young become well formed.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General