

## VINCENTIAN MARIAN YOUTH

Rome, 2 February 2011

*Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple*

My brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I write to you today as the Director General of the Vincentian Marian Youth. In August the association had its Third General Assembly in Lisbon, Portugal. Since then the International Council has had its first organizational meeting and I would like to share with you some of the conclusions of both the Assembly and this International Council meeting.

The General Assembly produced a Final Document which had the following categories: Spiritual Life, Formation, Service and Mission, Vincentian Family, Self Financing.

I have to admit with all honesty that I was very impressed with the quality of the interventions that were made at the General Assembly and the depth of the leadership that we have in our youth for the Vincentian Marian movement. They kept highlighting the importance of the spiritual life of the Association. Among the highlights of the Final Document with regard to the Spiritual Life is a desire on the part of the young people to learn to pray more deeply. We want to move in this direction and encourage all those who are moderators for the Vincentian Marian Youth to assume the responsibility of helping these young people to learn to pray, especially to pray in the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

There was also a great interest on the part of the members of the Assembly to deepen their understanding of Marian theology in light of the Church teachings on Mary in order that they might have a clearer understanding of her role in their lives especially in the key moment when they consecrate their lives to Mary as a sign of their commitment to the Association. In the same light, the young people had a great desire to be able to deepen their knowledge of the Word of God in the context of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I was delighted to hear that there was such a desire to focus on the dynamism of God's Word and at the same time the dynamism of God's presence in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist as well as God's mercy

expressed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Good accompaniment of these young people is a responsibility that needs to be carried out at the local level by their moderators, whether they be members of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, other branches of the Vincentian Family or lay moderators.

The ecclesial dimension of the Vincentian Marian Youth is one of the principal points of the association. There was true interest on the part of the members of the Assembly to develop the Association in the context of parochial ministry. And so I say to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission who are responsible for parishes to do all they can to promote the Vincentian Family in their parishes and in a special manner, paying attention to the young people who need to hear God's Word from those chosen as their pastors and to do so from the context of our own Vincentian charism. Sometimes it is embarrassing to go to our Vincentian parishes and not see any reflection of that Vincentian charism whether it be a simple statue of Saint Vincent de Paul or whether it be the image of the Immaculate Conception of the Miraculous Medal who is our patron or any mention whatsoever of that which is essential to our own Vincentian Marian devotion through novenas to the Virgin Mary of the Miraculous Medal or highlighting the different celebrations of the saints of the Vincentian Family.

With regard to the formation dimension of the Final Document, the young people truly want to be formed in the spirit of our Vincentian charism. That is a grave responsibility on the part of the moderators and so in order to encourage a deepening of the importance of that role of accompaniment, we have decided to promote a international meeting in 2014 of moderators of the Vincentian Marian Youth where members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and lay people who accompany our young people will be encouraged to participate.

I want to point out again, as I have done on a number of occasions to both the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Congregation of the Mission, that the Vincentian Marian Youth is not an independent youth movement within the Church, but it is an apostolate within the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. We have an obligation to accompany these young people and deepen the attitudes that we have learned from our spiritual founders.

With regard to the specific role of the moderators, a number of years ago we produced a document in Vincentian Marian Youth called the "Role and Functions of Advisors in the JMV." We encourage moderators, both of the Congregation and the Daughters and particularly our lay moderators to deepen their understanding of their responsibility in this accompaniment.

With regard to the dimension of Service and Mission of the Final Document, again there has been a document that was well-developed in the Association called Working in the Form of Projects. We want to encourage all the members of the Association at the national level to come to know more deeply this document that promotes solidarity. During our most recent international council meeting we invited Father Miles Heinen, the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office to join us and help us to understand what it means to work together in solidarity one with another. Hopefully the Vincentian Solidarity Office will continue to orient us in how to create and present projects in order to promote systemic change in those whom our young people are serving in their different apostolates.

With regard to the category in the Final Document on the Vincentian Family, there is a desire on the part of the members of the Association to participate actively in the different councils of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. They further that desire by wanting to promote and to share with other branches of the Vincentian Family meetings, formation and concrete projects of service and mission from the perspective of systemic change. They themselves are going to make an effort to promote the book *Seeds of Hope* to help understand better the concept of charity in a contemporary way called Systemic Change as well as to promote the involvement of the members of the Association in a Vincentian International project that we took on in the context of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, concretely participating in our webpage of ZAFEN, a creole word which means it is our business.

And it is our business to work with and from the reality of the poor. A key piece in this part of the document is the expression that we use in Spanish: “Desembocadura,” which means literally, moving on to the next stage. Our young people realize that they will not always be young and they hope to be able to continue to live the charism, moving on to other branches of the Vincentian Family. It is therefore important, and I say this to all the other branches of the Vincentian Family, to be in a disposition to receive these young people in order that you might help them to continue to foster the living out of the Vincentian charism whether that be in the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Association International of Charities, MISEVI or any of the other branches that are closely linked with out Vincentian charism.

There is a concern on the part of the young people that it becomes difficult to move on because of the generational gaps that exist. Many times the other branches of the Vincentian Family are set in their ways and are not able to understand the ways of thinking and acting of those young people who are maturing and moving on to another

stage in their own lives. So I encourage all the branches of the Vincentian Family to be open to sharing with the young people of the Vincentian Marian Youth how they live out the charism on a day-to-day basis, doing so by formation for them and with them, joint projects of service and mission, simply praying with them and being with them in moments of friendship and love. There is a desire on the part of the young people of the Association to deepen their relationship not only with the Congregation of the Missions and the Daughters of Charity, with whom they feel they have reached a very good level, but also a need to go even deeper in their relationships with other of the lay branches of the Vincentian Family. So that word goes out to all of us who are members of the Vincentian Family to deepen those bonds of relationship with our young people. The young people are going to need our help over these next five years of this new administration to continue to deepen the charism of the Vincentian Marian Youth. They hope to be able to do it in a number of different ways.

The final category of the Final Document of the General Assembly deals with Self-Sufficiency economically speaking. We all know that the Vincentian Marian Youth is economically dependent, many times, on the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, not only at the local levels but at the international level. The young people are very grateful for this financial support that they receive from particularly these branches of the Vincentian Family, but they do have a true desire to become more self sufficient. A number of years ago we began to establish a patrimonial fund, or an endowment fund, and it is beginning to build financial stability in order to help respond to the needs of the Association, at least at the international level. One of the weak points of the Association has been the different national associations being faithful in paying a very modest fee that has been asked of them. We thought that the support of one dollar or one euro from each of the members of the Association would be more than adequate to help to sustain the endowment fund and the works of the Association; and yet it is not possible to receive that even minimal amount from many of the places where the Association is established. We recognize in the Association that we failed to solicit help from the ex-members of the Association. Truly one would think that if the Association has meant something to young persons in their lives, helping transform their way of living, that once they enter into another stage of life they would be more than willing to contribute financially so that the project might continue. Yet, the ex-membership of the Association does not have a tradition of helping at the national level much less at the international level of the Association. So we have a project to continue to work on our self sufficiency and doing so with the help of the orientation of the Vincentian Solidarity Office of the Congregation of the Mission.

There will be sessions of formation for the young people:

- In 2011, the highlight is going to be the gathering of the Vincentian Youth prior to the World Youth Day in August in Madrid.
- In 2012 there will be international meetings in Ecuador for all of Latin America, as well as in Europe, the place is yet to be decided.
- In 2013 we hope to have international meetings on the continent of Africa as well as the continent of Asia.
- And as mentioned earlier, in 2014 the major international event will be of the moderators either in Rome or Paris.
- In 2015 we will have our Fourth General Assembly of our Vincentian Marian Youth.

I close this message, my brothers and sisters, you the members of the Vincentian Family, as I speak about a very dynamic and creative dimension of our Vincentian Family which is the Vincentian Marian Youth. They are our young people and they need our support, our encouragement, our witness and our love as together we, as a family, walk with our lords and masters, the poor. I pray that all that we do be for the greater honour and glory of our God who loves us and calls us to love one another.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "G" and "G" at the end.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General