

Presentation of the Documents of the General Assembly 2010¹

Synthesis – Lines of Action 2010-2016

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The General Assembly of 2010 attempted to break with the tradition of recent Assemblies that were focused on producing legal texts or documents that would serve as a guide for the whole Congregation. In presenting the *Consultation Document*, it was stated very clearly that *dialogue* ought to be the primary objective of the General Assembly 2010. In line with these words, all the delegates to the Assembly were told that the *Consultation Document* should not be considered, properly speaking, as a working document but rather should be viewed as a document intended to stimulate dialogue. At the same time, it was said that it was unnecessary to produce a final document. Nevertheless, the Assembly concluded with the approval of two documents. I do not think that this fact contradicts in any way the orientation that was clearly given to the delegates.

It is certain that the members of the Assembly did not consume their energy in the formulation of these documents. To be exact, *The Lines of Action, 2010-2016* was redacted during the final days of the Assembly as the natural result of all the debates, dialogue and presentations that took place during the Assembly and as the result of all the preparation that took place in the domestic and provincial assemblies. The *Synthesis* was redacted by a commission of three Missionaries who were not delegates to the Assembly.

¹ From the month of October until the present, a time has been set aside during each meeting of the general council in order to continue our dialogue and sharing on the content of the Assembly documents. We hope to conclude this reflection during the month of June or July. Even though I gather together in this article some of the reflections that have been shared during the meetings of the council, this article is not meant to be an official interpretation of the documents.

THE SYNTHESIS AND THE LINES OF ACTION: SOME SIMILARITIES AND SOME DIFFERENCES

In general, the content of these two documents is very similar. If someone were to read these two documents without knowing that they refer to the same Assembly, that person could easily conclude that the documents deal with the same theme or make reference to the same reality. In fact, such is the case, but we also note that the documents are written in two different styles. *The Lines of Action* is more schematic and academic while the *Synthesis* is more familiar in tone and style. Yet the documents complement one another. We might ask: in what way does this occur? Without leaving aside the content, the *Synthesis* communicates to us the environment and the life that was created by the delegates. We are told, for example, that the delegates desired an environment of *dialogue and an interchange of ideas*. It was also stated *the liturgical celebrations and prayers... not only enrich[ed] our coming together but also guid[ed] our reflections* (#2) and the videos which were shown each day at the beginning of the first morning session had a profound impact on the delegates.

As the title indicates, the *Synthesis* attempts to present an instant photograph of the Assembly, that is, a portrait drawn by three observers who were on the margin of the debates. The language is explanatory rather than intentional, more incisive and questioning, especially in the first part, and therefore less academic. Perhaps citing some phrases will suffice to corroborate what we are saying here: *we are wounded healers* (#4); *we want to be attentive to the poor in extreme situation of poverty* (#4); *we, in the manner of Saint Vincent, would like to do and be "more" for the poor* (#6); *all our persons and our possessions belong to the poor* (#7), *we are evangelized by the very poor whom we serve*, etc.

I do not know if this was intended, but the *Synthesis* is structured in the vocational style of call-response, a style which we are very familiar with not only because we have seen it so often in the Scriptures but also because we have experienced this in our own lives. In fact, the first part of the *Synthesis* is entitled: *The Lord calls in the cry of the poor*. God has spoken to us in all the words that were uttered and heard in the assembly hall and this includes the videos about the life of the poor, the various messages and communications, the debates and the round-table discussions. In the second part of the document (beginning with #7) the responses of the Assembly and the whole Congregation are gathered together... responses that we hope to make during the next six years. Call and response: here we have an old but always new format which God makes use of in order to call us or point out a path that we should follow.

The document, *The Lines of Action*, takes on the form of a plan for life, a plan that provides a clear orientation for the future of the Congregation or, as stated in the document, *for the Congregation of the future*. Here there are no ambiguities; what the delegates wanted to say is expressed in a very clear and direct manner. In dividing this document into three parts the members of the Assembly focused on the theme that was used in convoking the Assembly: *creative fidelity to the mission*. Each one of these sections employs the classical methodology of *see, judge and act* and begins with a biblical citation indicating the place where we find the ultimate foundation of our vocation and our evangelizing mission.

The first part “fidelity” corresponds with *see*. The reality of the past six years is analyzed and this analysis takes into consideration the situation of the world and the Church as it reviews the life of the Congregation from the time of the 2004 General Assembly. Only the positive dimensions are considered since everyone is aware of the negative ones. In this section there was an attempt made to point out the areas where the Congregation had been faithful. In the second part, *creative*, some scriptural texts (for example, Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 2:15) and the Constitutions illuminate and encourage us to go deeper into *our experience of God, our commitment with the poor and our commitment to the formation of priests and the laity and our willingness to embrace our role as prophets...* The third part to *the mission* coincides with *act*. As in previous sections so too this last section begins with a Scripture passage (the passage where Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, proclaims his mission, Luke 4:14-18) and a text from Saint Vincent that reminds us about our mission in the Church. This is sufficient to introduce the five lines of action that form the body of the document.

THE FIVE LINES OF ACTION IN THE TWO DOCUMENTS

As we have said, the five lines of action are developed in the two final documents in different but complementary ways. Some of these lines of action are not very original and give the impression that we are returning once again to the same themes. Nevertheless, it seemed that we had a need to grow on both a personal as well as a community level in all these areas if we are truly serious about entering into a process of *creative fidelity to the mission*. If our reality is viewed from this perspective then the five lines of action have great meaning. Why? Because how can we grow in creative fidelity if we do not also speak about on-going formation and about our ministries and the poor.

Naturally, the orientation of each one of these lines of action is sufficiently general so that each of the provinces can begin to adapt

these without feeling that their legitimate diversity is threatened. The Assembly has certainly not said everything and the documents are by no means exhaustive. Confreres, local communities and provinces will have to assimilate and interpret and own these lines of action; their provincial and local community plans will have to incorporate these lines of action and further spell out their implications. During the Assembly the distinct continental groups made their initial response (the last part of the document), but this was a first step. Now provinces and the local communities must also respond because if the documents do not influence life on these two levels then this document becomes a wasted piece of paper. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that the expressed concerns in the *Lines of Action* are reinforced in the plans of the provinces and the local communities for only in this way will they become a part of the real and concrete lives of the confreres, the local communities and the provinces.

1. Formation (initial and on-going)

I believe that the Assembly saw in this theme one of the keys that will enable us to grow in *creative fidelity to the mission* and also viewed this as the most decisive element in order to clothe ourselves in the lines of action. In fact, unless this need for on-going formation is experienced as a central element of our vocation, it will be difficult to be creative in our ministries, difficult to work on behalf of the poor, difficult to discover and attack the root causes of poverty. On-going formation, understood in its widest meaning, makes us question ourselves and lifts us out of those situations that anesthetize every attempt at creative fidelity. John Paul II understood this when he wrote in *Starting Afresh from Christ* that the desired renewal of the consecrated life cannot be achieved unless on-going formation is taken seriously². The decree *Perfectae Caritatis* stated the same: *the up-to-date renewal of institutes depends very much on the training of the members*³.

Perhaps this is the reason why this theme moved from third place in the *Consultation Document* to the first place in *The Lines of Actions*. Even though the words, *initial formation*, appear in the title, nevertheless, the content of this first line of action refers to on-going formation. The same could be said about the different forms of communication and dialogue, a theme that was discussed in the Assembly. The *Synthesis*, however, only deals with on-going formation.

² Cf. *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 14.

³ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 18.

I believe that the six guidelines that are contained in this section of on-going formation can be summed up in the following way: on-going formation is bound up with the cultivation of the interior life of the missionary. This is clear from some of the expressions that are used here: *the place of the Word of God and Jesus Christ at the center of our life and mission* (1.1); *to strengthen the mystical-prophetic and communal dimensions of our spirituality* (1.2); *to pray and reflect on our experiences and on the living out of our ministry* (1.4). All the guidelines move in the same direction. Without a personal commitment nothing will happen. We have to realize that our vocation is more than work and we need to be motivated and convinced to engage in this process of on-going formation. The power of on-going formation resides in the fact that it can transform us and, as stated so well in the *Synthesis* (#7), it can give us the continued strength to respond to the challenges and the disillusionments that confront every evangelizer on a daily basis. To strengthen the foundation of an edifice is to assure the soundness of the whole structure. Here it would be good to recall the phrase of Saint Vincent: *Give me a man of prayer, and he will be able to do anything* (CCD: XI, 76). Behind these words of Vincent we discover the experience of a whole lifetime. Vincent knew that people were able to walk along a path of transformation because he himself had experienced this transformation. He who began his adult life by searching for financial resources for his own benefit became the apostle of charity.

On-going formation leads to on-going conversion. This would appear to be obvious given the close relationship between formation and the spiritual life. If we discover that we are not engaged in a process of on-going conversion then there is a need to examine our spiritual development. Where there is a fertile spiritual life there also we discover challenges and desires to respond to new calls and an openness to new ministries. Abandonment of on-going formation is bound up with a neglect with regard to the spiritual life because beyond any provincial programs, on-going formation is an attitude that leads us to prepare ourselves, to be careful about and deepen ourselves in the spiritual life, to do this as part of a continuous and on-going process.

The further orientation that is provided by some other parts of this first line of action is perhaps secondary: *to create formation programs* (1.3); *to foster openness to the opportunity offered by new languages and the techniques of the digital world* (1.5); *to foster the interchange of experiences* (1.6)... Obviously all of these are welcome and most necessary if we do not want to be left behind to live in the past century, or even worse to live in the nineteenth century. Therefore, if we focus our attention and energy on language and technique, on theological knowledge and modern methods of evangelization, then we are really not entering into the true spirit of on-going formation. This is a very important point to understand because we must also

acknowledge that languages and techniques and formation programs can lead us to engage in a process of personal and community transformation.

But even before considering this first line of action, an important question must be answered: what can we do to motivate the confreres and local communities in this area of on-going formation that the General Assembly has placed before us as a process that should be highlighted during the next six years? We have spoken so often about on-going formation that immediately one can become indifferent or express a feeling of being tired and frustrated at listening to the same thing over and over again. It is true that the Assembly realized that much was at stake here with regard to creative fidelity. If there is no on-going formation, there is no renewal and without renewal we will not have new communities or creative ministries.

2. Reconfiguration

I will begin this section by recalling something that is evident: this second line of action, like the other four, must be seen in relation to the theme of the Assembly and in relation to the title of the documents. Reconfiguration, therefore, ought to have as its ultimate objective *creative fidelity to the mission*. If this were not so then it would be better not to even speak about this issue. Something similar was expressed by the new provincial of the Western Province of the United States, Father Perry F. Henry, CM in his presentation to the Assembly about the process of reconfiguration that was followed in the United States: *I believe there ought to be a very convincing reason for reconfiguration. We discovered reconfiguration was the best way to continue the mission of the Congregation in the United States in the future. Our reason was the mission. Thus the mission ought to determine the configuration that is most needed in the twenty-first century*⁴.

Everyone who has engaged in this process points to a similar path. We mention here, for example, the Daughters of the Charity in Spain. The title of their reorganization plan is most attractive and significant: charismatic impulse and new organization. In other words, a process of reconfiguration cannot be initiated from a simple technical point of view or with a view toward survival because in the long term this would lack the solid foundation that is necessary to sustain such a process and thus any difficulty might be strong enough for the whole process to become lost. From the beginning there is a need for a desire to

⁴ P.F. HENRY, *Reconfiguration in the Provinces of the United States*, in "Vincentiana" 54 (July-September 2010), p. 358.

revitalize our charismatic identity within the Church. Unless we are convinced about the need to renew our vocation and ministries then it is best to refrain from speaking about reconfiguration. Indeed, reconfiguration supposes a certain charismatic restlessness which would always benefit from such a process.

Intra-provincial and inter-provincial reconfiguration

The first guideline in this section makes a distinction that seems just: reconfiguration in its intra-provincial and inter-provincial senses. With regard to the internal reconfiguration of the provinces, it must be admitted that all the provinces are in the process of reconfiguration when they open or close community houses as well as when they undertake or withdraw from certain ministries. The visitor and his council have the responsibility of engaging in an on-going process of reconfiguration in the province, questioning themselves about the most appropriate provincial structures in order to attain their objectives in the church and in the here and now, in other words, being ever mindful of the concrete reality of the province. Obviously, if the missionaries of a province do not collaborate with the visitor and his council then the visitor cannot engage in a proactive or a providential process of reconfiguration; instead said process would be limited to one of reorganization that is imposed by circumstances.

Inter-provincial reconfiguration is not only a reality in our time. The name, perhaps, but the reality of inter-provincial reconfiguration is as old as our provinces. In his presentation on reconfiguration in the Congregation, Father José María Nieto, CM said: *Our General Catalogue can help us recognize the different way in which reconfiguration has occurred in the Congregation of the Mission. There in the catalogue on the pages where each Province is listed, there appear one or several dates after the name of the Province. For example, we see the Province of Rome listed with the dates 1642, 1703 and 1825. These dates highlight important moments in the history of this Province and highlight true intra-provincial and supra-provincial reconfiguration*⁵.

Father Nieto went on to say that at the present time there are two types of interprovincial reconfiguration in our Congregation, reconfiguration through expansion and reconfiguration through retrenchment. Our history has been rich in reconfiguration through expansion. We have seen this occur during times when the provinces had many candidates in formation and were looking for new areas in which to

⁵ J.M. NIETO, *Reconfiguration in the Congregation of the Mission*, in "Vincentiana" 54 (July-September 2010), p. 345.

minister. Today, thanks to God, some African and Asian provinces are in this situation. Nevertheless, many other provinces are called to reconfiguration through retrenchment which can have varying results: the union of various provinces, the disappearance of some provinces, a region dependent on another province or the superior general, etc.

The document of the General Assembly invites all the provinces to consider in a serious manner the theme of reconfiguration. In order for this to produce the desired results, all the vital elements of the province must become involved in this process: *our local communities, provincial government teams, provincial assemblies and Conferences of Visitors* (2.1).

To cultivate a sense of belonging to the Congregation (2.2)

Inter-provincial reconfiguration supposes a change of attitude; a change that highlights the importance of belonging to a province and the sense of belonging to the Congregation as a whole, that is, as a body that has received a specific mission from the Church. It is significant that when candidates enter the Internal Seminary they propose to form part of the Congregation (cf., Constitutions, #83.1) and the vow formula highlights the fact that it is within the Congregation of the Mission where the members live out their evangelizing vocation (Constitutions, #58). Above all else, we are missionaries who belong to the Congregation of the Mission. Let us listen to Saint Vincent in order to come to a better understanding of the universal meaning of our vocation-mission: *our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, nor just one diocese, but all over the world*⁶. The “body” of the Congregation is important and it is equally important to feel that one is part of this body that has received a mission in the Church. The provinces are governmental structures that can easily change and that ought to change in order to obtain a greater effectiveness: if at a specific time they have to expand, then they can do this with no problem. If, at another time, they have to retrench, they should look for the best way to do this. To highlight in some exclusive and/or excessive way the provincial identity greatly impoverishes our missionary vocation, creates difficulties for inter-provincial collaboration, and makes it impossible to think about reconfiguration. I believe that everything that we have just said is put forth in this second line of action which invites us *to cultivate a sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the sense of belonging to a local and provincial community* (2.2).

⁶ CCD: XII, 215.

As we have already said, reconfiguration supposes a change of attitude, we cannot think that achievements will come about without a process. As pointed out in the document, *inter-provincial collaboration* (2.3) in the area of formation or in common projects between two or three provinces can prepare the way for an integrated future. The *Synthesis* also refers to collaboration and presents us with many different areas for collaboration: in formation programs, in common concerns shared by distinct Conferences of Visitors, in the exchange of personnel and in a more balanced distribution of financial resources among the provinces (#8 and #9). These last two points are highlighted in the *Lines of Action* with the clear intention and hope that the Congregation will consider these matters in a serious manner: *to share human and financial resources* (2.4). It is clear that as we view the Congregation as a body or as a family the differences in resources ought to diminish as much as possible. The key word here can be none other than *share*. The manner in which this sharing is to be carried out can be a theme for reflection on the part of the provinces.

3. Dialogue with the poor and with the Vincentian Family

Since the fifth line of action also deals with the poor I will focus here on dialogue with the Vincentian Family. What contribution does this line of action make to *creative fidelity to the mission*? I believe the message here is one that helps us to see and/or realize that we cannot work in just any way but rather we must engage in dialogue and form networks and this is especially applicable when referring to the beneficiaries of our ministry (the poor) or when referring to our collaborators (the Vincentian Family). At the same time, contact with the Vincentian Family is very beneficial for the missionaries because their vocation is enriched as a result of these relationships. John Paul II stated that a new chapter is being written as we reflect on the relationships between the laity and consecrated women and men; both groups are mutually enriched because when people with distinct vocations share the same charism, everyone is enriched⁷.

The Assembly proposed that the whole Congregation walk in this threefold direction with regard to the Vincentian Family: 1. *to foster theological reflection on the challenges and the good that can arise from sharing the charism with the laity* (3.3); 2. *to intensify the collaboration in the area of formation* (3.4); 3. *to work together in common projects* (3.3). First of all we must know the members of the family in order to appreciate them and in order to work with them on behalf of the poor.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 54.

The Congregation has a great potential that is also a great responsibility. Today the Vincentian Family is one of the strongest and most active groups in the Church, one that functions with a specific and precise charism. But the Congregation and the confreres have to be willing to place ourselves in the midst of this family. There is an ecclesiology of communion that has been highlighted by Vatican II and developed throughout the post-Conciliar era. Perhaps its best formulation is found in *Apostolicam actuositatem: in the Church there is a diversity of ministry but unity of mission* (#2). In 1 Corinthians 12:5-24 we find biblical support for this ecclesiology.

Reflection on the ecclesiology of communion and its application to the Vincentian Family should not focus exclusively on common works or projects. Our mission supposes a shared life and apostolic collaboration that if not based on a shared life has no future. It is important to highlight this reality since for so long the consecrated life was based on the premise of separation, distancing itself from other believers. To share life supposes that we share faith in the same God and share the path of Saint Vincent. This is one of the experiences that the laity will live out with great joy as they participate more fully in the Vincentian mission. Certainly the Congregation as an institution must continue to live out this charism while highlighting this dimension that calls them to share their charism with the rest of the family. When we speak about sharing we mean both giving and receiving. In this vital relationship there is no fear of losing our identity. On the contrary, collaboration and relationships with Vincentian laity, when it is authentic, helps the missionaries to come to a better understanding of their identity as they live out the Vincentian charism. In the Apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* we are assured as we read these words: *Priests and religious ought to assist the lay faithful in their formation... in turn, the lay faithful themselves can and should help priests and religious in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey* (#61).

In this same line of action that we are now reflecting upon, the Assembly invites us to commit ourselves *to engage in the evangelization of the poor together with the members of the Vincentian Family and other ecclesial groups* (3.5). Thus, sharing life ought to be made more specific through common action. The mission that the Church has entrusted to the Vincentian Family is both tremendous and urgent. Countless men and women are wounded and bleeding on the sides of thousands of roads of unbelief and injustice. Today everyone demands that Vincentians unite together in their undertakings and increase the number of their collaborative initiatives; people want to see us work together as a team and coordinate our contributions, plan together and communicate with one another about our plans. In unity there is strength. And in all of this we cannot discount the possibility that the laity will assume positions of responsibility when they have adequate

and technical formation. To dedicate some of our effort to minister with the Vincentian Family is to work with a vision of the future. Collaboration with the laity can never become a situation in which the laity are simply collaborators with the Congregation. Collaboration demands that we are willing to share responsibility. If the laity are not prepared for this then we must move them in this direction. Therefore from the perspective of an ecclesiology of communion we cannot view the laity as simply agents who enable us to deal with our decreasing numbers. To think and act in this manner would mean that we are treating them as infants, and thus, we would also be acting in a disrespectful manner with regard to their lay Vincentian vocation which is as important as our own.

4. Creativity in the ministries

This fourth line of action touches the very heart of *creative fidelity to the mission*: if the provinces do not renew and examine their ministries, if they do not make decisions about the inculturated expressions of the charism which animates the Congregation, then it will be difficult to achieve the renewal that the Assembly encourages us to take on as our own. Harmony between our words and actions can make people who are in the process of searching question themselves. Incoherency between our words and actions attracts no one and is unsatisfactory even to those who are members of the Congregation. Having said this it must be affirmed that there are admirable examples of creative ministry within the Congregation. Number five of the *Synthesis* points out a few of them. True not all of our ministries reveal this creativity. How, then, can we highlight these creative ministries so that they become concrete signs for the Congregation as it attempts to walk along a more authentic path? We are not referring here to marketing techniques that manipulate reality in an unscrupulous manner in order to obtain some specific objective. Rather here we are speaking about making known a Vincentian face that is very real within the Congregation, one that obviously coexists with other faces less clearly defined.

This fourth line of action invites us to examine and renew our ministries once again so that some of them reflect our charism in a clearer manner. We are also invited to become involved in new ministries with the creativity that we have learned from Saint Vincent. To create new ministries is to serve the Church and the world with a renewed spirit. In others words we are able to open the windows and thus allow the fresh air of providence to enter. Here we find an explanation of what has been stated so far: *to support at the provincial level challenging works* (4.4); *to undertake new forms of service to the*

clergy (4.3); to undertake new works of evangelization in the area of new emerging cultures, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue (4.6); and to have as a value drawing near to the most withdrawn (mission *inter gentes*) (4.7). All of these examples are very Vincentian and they arise from a group of confreres who in July 2010 dedicated themselves to a search for that which is best for the Congregation. We know that this is not easy for many provinces for reasons that we are all aware of but it is within the grasp of each province and individual to point out that which can be obtained, mindful of course, of the present reality. The simple fact of formulating the question and searching for an answer is a worthwhile task. Maintaining a tension with regard to the direction of our true ministries does a tremendous good for all the members of the province even if this is unable to be concretized in some way.

In the revision of our ministries and, as we are reminded in 4.1, in the revision of community structures there is a basic criteria which ought to guide us. Here we refer to the missionary and prophetic dimensions as pointed out in another part of the document when envisioning the Congregation's future. Our life and our style of ministry has to say something and question the people who are close to us, just as Jesus did with his contemporaries and as Vincent did in the seventeenth Century. This is also creativity. On the contrary we can easily become mere functionaries of the sacred, persons who offer important services in the area of the spiritual life and who know how to communicate the message of the gospel when they speak but who say very little with their lives and as a result communicate no special message. We know that in the biblical world the language of gestures and symbols takes on a great importance and today in our world, characterized by indifference and weariness from so many discourses perhaps it is this language, the language of gestures and symbols that can best speak to people.

5. The methodology of systemic change

In this fifth section of *The Lines of Action* the poor appear in the first person. This is not the only place where the poor are referred to. They are spoken about in the first part of the third line of action where it is pointed out that we should listen to them and advocate on their behalf. Our mission with the poor means that we should assist them without making countless distinctions. Let us listen to the very clear words of Vincent: *If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by*

*others*⁸. This was a firm conviction of our Founder. On another occasion Vincent stated: *We can say that coming to evangelize the poor does not 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*⁹. Today our Constitutions have echoed Saint Vincent's conviction as we are invited to evangelize in word and deed (cf. Constitutions, #11). We cannot renounce the poor because they constitute part of our charismatic identity and we cannot forget about them because this would essentially mean that we have renounced them. In the third line of action the Assembly invites the whole Company to be attentive to the poor, to listen to them and to help them become subjects of their own history. The Assembly was not considering any specific new works even though it was not opposed to such undertakings, but rather the delegates were thinking about our present ministries. In all of these endeavors the poor should be given a position of primary concern and sensitivity. And why not, since in every place where the Congregation exists, ministry with people who are poor can easily be found. In the case that this were not true the means of communication will enable us to hear their voice, just as we were able to hear their voice in the videos that were presented during the assembly. It would be unthinkable to renew the Congregation's commitment to the poor and impossible to be creatively faithful to the mission if the poor were not present in the provinces and in its various ministries.

Here then we are presented with that which is most fundamental. The fifth line of action invites us to work on behalf of the poor but, according to the Assembly, we should do this in a way that utilizes the methodology of systemic change. This means that we also seek to discover the causes of poverty which will enable us to engage in activity that will assist people to break the circle that prevents them from leaving their situation of poverty and thus prevents them from becoming agents of their own freedom. The methodology of systemic changes supposes that one is willing to work as a member of a team, willing to collaborate with others and form networks. All of this is done in order to obtain the greatest effectiveness. Today the dignity of the poor requires our assistance so that they can become responsible for their life and their destiny. If Saint Vincent were alive today it is certain that he would have embraced this way of ministering on behalf of the poor.

⁸ CCD: XII, 77.

⁹ CCD: XII, 75.

CONCLUSION

The five lines of action point out a path to follow. They are like a plan that the Congregation has placed before itself for the next six years. It is true that the documents were produced by the General Assembly after having listened to the Spirit and after having entered into a process of discernment, but it is also true that the content of these lines of action goes beyond said Assembly. In fact these documents include the fruits of two long years of preparation with the participation of all the confreres of the Congregation, first in the domestic assemblies and then in the provincial assemblies. All of this work is included in these documents that now ought to enlighten and enliven the whole Congregation.

In these documents fundamental aspects of our life are pointed out. It is true that certain lines of action may not appear to be very original in the sense that they have been written about in other documents or have been the focus of dialogue and concern for some extended period of time. Among these we point out, formation, dialogue with the poor, the Vincentian Family, as well as creativity in ministry. Others in this category could be reconfiguration and systemic change. But in either case, the Assembly, that is, the delegates to the Assembly and with them the whole Congregation, has felt it necessary to grow *in creative fidelity to the mission*. Therefore it is necessary to interpret the lines of action from the perspective of creative fidelity to the mission since it is only in this way that we can come to a full understanding of their meaning.

Clearly not everything was concluded with the publication of these lines of action. Now the provinces, the local communities and the confreres must do their part because the document needs to be assimilated, digested, integrated and adapted to the distinct realities and cultures where the Congregation is present. Without this second further work the document would be condemned to the dead letter box.

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