

Economic Solidarity in the Congregation of the Mission

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We introduce a theme important for the growth, unity and vitality of the Congregation in the future: Economic Solidarity. Frs. Gregory Gay and Robert Maloney, with help from Fr. Joe Geders, have co-authored an article on this topic, given in preparation for this session.

WHY ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY?

Why do we judge this topic to be so important? We offer you two reasons.

1. Over that last two decades, with the help of your Provinces, the Congregation has expanded into the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, El Alto and Cochabamba in Bolivia, Tanzania, Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Angola, Central Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, Benin, Tunisia, Thailand, and other places. We have begun a joint mission, involving several provinces, in Punta Arenas, Chile. We have returned to continental China. The Congregation is becoming more and more global.

But we will be a truly global *community* only if we live in global solidarity as confreres. Our vocation as members of the Congregation of the Mission is not just to a particular work, nor is it to a particular province, but to the world-wide mission of the Congregation and to our being-together in service of the mission “as friends who love one another deeply”, to use St. Vincent’s phrase¹.

A striking sign of the times within the Congregation of the Mission is that many provinces with increasing personnel have few financial resources, while some provinces with diminishing personnel have significant economic means, though those resources have

¹ CR VIII, 2.

been diminished by the current economic crisis and are being heavily drawn upon for the care of aging and infirm confreres. Our Constitutions call provinces to share their temporal goods with one another, so that provinces which have more come to the aid of those in need². By fostering economic solidarity among ourselves and our provinces, we will not only be teaching and preaching about social justice and the Church's preferential option for the poor³, but we will be "practicing what we preach".

"The challenge" Pope John Paul II said, "is to ensure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization"⁴. The more our Provinces practice solidarity on all levels, including economic solidarity, the stronger and more united the Congregation will be.

Such solidarity makes demands not just on the provinces with greater resources. It also demands that receiving provinces protect and use well funds set up to help guarantee their future, that they strive to become self-sustaining, that they maintain a simple lifestyle in accord with our vows and the evangelical counsels, and that, as they choose works, they envision, as St. Vincent did, how they can fund those works in the future.

2. A second reason why it is important for us to address the topic of Economic Solidarity today is that the beneficiaries of economic solidarity will be not just be the confreres in Provinces that have fewer economic means. The ultimate beneficiaries will be the poor whom we serve. If the confreres in all our provinces have adequate economic means for initiating sustainable works and creative systemic change projects, then the poor as a whole will be much better served by the Congregation.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The article on Economic Solidarity points out that the Congregation has already done much, particularly since our new Constitutions of 1984. Over the last two decades numerous initiatives have been launched. The article describes eight:

² C 152, § 1: "Provinces and houses should share their temporal goods with each other so that those who have more help those in need".

³ Of course, this issue is much wider than the Congregation of the Mission. For some interesting analogous considerations, cf. THOMAS J. GREEN, "Shepherding the Patrimony of the Poor: Diocesan and Parish Structures of Financial Administration", *The Jurist* 56 (1997), 706-734.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Peace Message* (January 1, 1998), 3.

1. IMF (International Mission Fund): 2000 and IMF: 2004. This fund now generates most of the money that the General Curia distributes annually to Provinces with fewer economic means. The fund was created through the generous help of the Franz Foundation and several provinces, especially those of the United States.
2. VSO and VSF. The VSO helps disadvantaged Provinces to send projects to charitable agencies and assists them to raise more than a million dollars annually. The VSO and VSF are able to function only because of the contributions of the Franz Foundation, of several provinces and of individual confreres who make donations directly to the VSO.
3. Patrimony Funds for Poorer Provinces. At least 24 provinces and regions now have Patrimony Funds.
4. A Patrimony Fund for the General Curia. The Franz Foundation has pledged to help the Superior General set up a large fund for future mega-projects. Provinces, individual confreres, and other foundations will be asked to assist in building up that fund too. What might a mega-project focus on? Where might it be? Will it focus on health-care issues like AIDS or malaria? Will it focus on feeding or educating impoverished children? Will it focus on micro-credit so that the poor might help themselves? Will it be in Africa? Will it be somewhere else?
5. Commission for Promoting Systemic Change. The Commission has engaged in a wide-range of activities. It recommended the micro-credit project in Haiti, the Wise Money Management initiative, and other projects. It has offered workshops on systemic change on all the continents.
6. Three Award Programs. The General Curia and the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change have offered 3 award programs to promote creative projects in the Congregation.
7. Wise Money Management for the Mission. The Treasurer General and the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change have offered programs on Wise Money Management and will be offering another one in Paris next month.
8. Haiti. The Congregation, in collaboration with the international Vincentian Family, launched Zafèn, a micro-credit website, in 2010. We are planning to launch a new initiative for 2013: a feeding program which will provide all the children in selected schools with a daily hot meal.

These are initiatives of the General Curia, with the support of many provinces. But beyond that, many of your provinces have generously helped new missions, regions and provinces get started and build up

patrimony funds. Many of you continue to send personnel and money to the poorest parts of the world as a sign of your solidarity with society's most marginalized. What else can be done?

The article suggests ten means:

1. Consciousness-raising about the call to economic solidarity;
2. Building up the Patrimony Funds;
3. Clarifying the conditions for the use of the Patrimony Funds;
4. The use of micro-credit in other countries, as illustrated by our efforts in Haiti;
5. Mega-Projects fostered by the Superior General;
6. Further efforts to help Provinces to become self-sustaining;
7. Concrete means for promoting Wise Money Management for the Mission;
8. Promoting a fully-functioning Development Office;
9. The creation of an International Investment Committee;
10. Developing concrete means for preserving and sharing the patrimony of the Congregation.

Our topic today is economic solidarity. But of course, as the article you read points out, economic solidarity is not the only form of solidarity, even if it is the theme we focus now.

All forms of Christian solidarity are an extension of our baptismal unity and, in the Congregation of the Mission, they are an extension of the vows that bind us together in the Little Company of St. Vincent "as friends who love one another deeply". That means that each of us individually and each province collectively has something valuable to bring to our common unity. While some provinces cannot share financial resources, there are other things that they can share. Solidarity must be much more than simply the flow of money from provinces that have greater economic means to provinces that have fewer. We must be careful not to diminish gifts that are not monetary; rather, we must recognize all gifts precisely as that – as gifts. Each individual and each province has something to share with the worldwide Congregation. No one just gives; no one just receives. Everyone both gives and receives. Solidarity involves us all.

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD IN ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY?

There are surely many other concrete means for fostering Economic Solidarity which Fr. Greg, Fr. Joe and I have not thought of and which you as Visitors may want to suggest. We encourage you to suggest them

this morning. So, as a method for stimulating suggestions and reactions in regard to what the article says, the remainder of this session will be organized as follows.

At your table is an instruction sheet, asking each table to focus on a particular section of the article, while leaving you free to talk about other matters related to Economic Solidarity.

Each table should, first of all, designate someone to present, in the plenary session, the suggestions, reactions or questions that emerge from the group's discussion.

Most of all, here is what we hope for. Fr. Greg asks you as Visitors, having read the article, to challenge him and his Council. For example, express in your groups:

- What would you want the Superior General, with his Council, to do in order to promote Economic Solidarity before the end of their mandate in 2016?
- What would you like the next General Assembly to do to foster Economic Solidarity?
- Do you see the suggestions in the article as feasible?
- Are there suggestions, beyond those in the article, which you would recommend?

As Visitors, you are an experienced, creative group. You are the leaders of more than 3000 men whom the Lord has called to be servants of the poor. I encourage you to formulate suggestions and challenges for the Superior General and his council and to outline concrete ways of fostering Economic Solidarity, so that ultimately the poorest of the poor might benefit from the wisdom you share today.