

Curia Department Reports: CIF, SIEV, VSO, Commission on Islam-Christian Dialogue

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE FORMATION

Marcelo V. Manimtim, C.M. and Daniel Paul Borlik, C.M.

The **Centre International de Formation-Saint Vincent de Paul (CIF)** was set up to answer the need for ongoing formation of confreres. At the 1992 General Assembly, Fr. Maloney declared after his election, "We will not discuss the question of a Formation Center anymore, we will establish one". As a result, two confreres were recruited for the project: John Rybolt, from the USA Midwest Province and Jean-Pierre Renouard of Toulouse. Later, Luis Alfonso Sterling of Colombia joined the team. Thus, the Centre International de Formation-Saint Vincent de Paul was born. It found a home at the Maison Mère in Paris. The Centre has had these Directors: John Rybolt, Hugh O'Donnell, and Marcelo Manimtim, with several Assistant Directors: Jean-Pierre Renouard, Alfonso Sterling, Kasimierz Stelmach, Florian Kapusciak, Juan Julián Díaz, José Carlos Fonsatti and Dan Paul Borlik. The first CIF session was held in 1994.

The mission of CIF is to cultivate the vocation of each confrere to "follow Christ, the evangelizer of the poor". All programs at CIF are designed to deepen the personal commitment of each Vincentian missionary. CIF is meant to be a gift to participants from the Congregation, having acknowledged that only too rarely have individual provinces set aside time, money, and personnel to assist the growth of individual confreres.

The program centers on a deepened reflection on St. Vincent and the Congregation as expressed in the Constitutions. The reflection is facilitated by conferences on essential themes touching on the life and ministry of the Congregation. Those who take part in the program are "participants", not "students". They have an important stake in the program; hence, they are provided sufficient time to discuss matters with each other (reflection in small groups) and present their results to the others in large groups. They all have had experience in ministry and we wanted to use this and to respect their Vincentian life. The

program had been designed with enough free time in it for the confreres to relax and to regain strength after what had been, in many cases, a difficult time of ministry for them.

The experience of community life at CIF builds up the unity of the Congregation. When confreres from different parts of the world come together, they realize amid the differences in formation, language and ethnic cultures, that they possess the same spirit and aspiration as Vincentian missionaries. In sharing stories of their life and ministries, they get affirmation from the other confreres. This affirmation from the peer participants means a great deal as don't get affirmation from confreres in their ministry at home. Thus, CIF provides an experience of a truly international and enriching community.

The programs at CIF are geared toward personal renewal; they are clearly not for therapeutic treatment to solve problems of confreres. Thus, Provinces should not send confreres in the hope that problems they were having could somehow be relieved by a period in CIF. CIF exists in order to emphasize the gifts and to deepen the personal commitment that the confreres already have manifested. The availability and attentiveness of the team is valuable in this respect, as they have no other job while the CIF is in session. We are there for them, 100% focused on the confreres while in session.

The sessions of ongoing formation at CIF started in 1994 with 16 weeks. Over the years this length of time has been whittled down, to just eight weeks in the last three years. A principal reason for the shortened duration is economic. This financial concern has also entered into the selection of conference-givers for the sessions: Travel expenses to Paris for speakers from Asia or the Americas cost considerably more than for those coming from Europe. Hence, the benefits from a wider intercultural milieu and expertise and experience of confreres from these regions have unfortunately been reduced as well.

Another consequence of the shortened duration is the changed methodology. There is now less time for personal study. A theme that in the beginning was treated for a week is now treated in a day and a half. Hence, presentation of topics by the conference givers has to be balanced between giving input materials and directing the presentation toward sharing reflections in-group. Many confreres come from busy schedules, and having time to call their own was a gift of the program. Less free times affects the quality of sharing and personal interaction among the participants.

The "Maison-Mere" (Mother House) in Paris has been the home for confreres for these CIF sessions. The confreres in the house have received participants graciously, and continuous improvements have been made in the living arrangements for the participants.

The visits to the Vincentian sites have provided the participants a good sense and feel about the life and times of St. Vincent. In evaluation after evaluation, participants have mentioned this as one of the highlights of their experience. The visits concretize the classroom experience in ways that the participants don't forget; it is an effective way of transmitting the charism. Overtime, some sites have been discontinued for economic reasons. Financial considerations, therefore, should be balanced with the overall impact of the sessions on the confreres.

If the unity and internationality of the Congregation is one of the values that the programs of CIF are serving, this value should impact on the way the programs are being financed. This is all the more important today since the provinces which now have greater possibilities of sending confreres to make use of these programs are also those provinces that face greater financial limitations. It seems prudent that a portion of costs should be shouldered by the Provinces in sending confreres to the programs, but their financial burden should also be lightened through the establishment of a foundation for the ongoing formation of confreres at CIF. The present practice of just a handful of Provinces contributing to the scholarship fund seems inadequate; it should be improved. If the CIF offers ongoing formation at the congregational level, it should be also supported on the congregational level.

The second series of short programs started with the Heritage session in 2000. The Heritage session assumes and builds upon the long experience of Vincentian life and ministry of the participants. These confreres already knew plenty; what they need is a time to be away, a time for a return to the sources, contact with St. Vincent, and contact with men from other provinces. Hence, the methodology in the Heritage session provides less input from "experts" but greater sharing of experiences among the participants.

The Session on Servant Leadership is designed as a response to the felt need of leadership training among the confreres. There have been three sessions on servant leadership, for local leaders (2006 and 2011) and provincial level leaders (2008). There is expressed need that these sessions continue to be offered.

The first international gathering of CM Brothers for the purpose of ongoing formation was held from May-June of 2010. It is hoped that another such Session be offered in the near future.

In the evaluations usually done at the end of each session, we are encouraged by participant feedback on how they have appreciated and benefited by the program. They have also given honest assessments on how the sessions could be improved. Adjustments have been made in the set-up of the program, and the measure of possibilities. What we have not done is any kind of follow-up on the participants after they

have returned to their respective provinces. We have presumed a good measure of personal renewal has taken place in participants. It would be interesting to follow-up on how this personal renewal has impacted on the provinces to which they have returned after the session.

Programs at CIF in the future

1. The **Ongoing Formation Program**. CIF intends to continue to offer the program even for reduced number of participants.
2. **Shorter courses and/or less often**. First, the **Heritage session**. Due to considerable diminution of participants in the Heritage session, we have thought of offering it on alternate years. Alternating with the Heritage Course will be courses on different themes that are of relevance to the confreres:
 - a) **Course on the Popular Missions**. This form of apostolate is done in still relatively numerous Provinces. We hope to offer this course next year.
 - b) **Course for Formators**. The formation of our own members is done in varied forms. Some provinces have formation exclusively for our own members, others do it together with seminarians of various dioceses, religious and lay people. The special concerns of formation deserve a course to help the confreres engaged in this special apostolate. The *Ratio Formationis* that is presently being elaborated will be a valuable reference for the course.
3. **Course on Servant Leadership**. The course will be offered to confreres and tailored to the different forms of apostolate.
4. **Course on formation for Members of the Vincentian Family**. (The first course, in English, was held 19-25 May, 2013). There is an expressed need of formation among the members of the Vincentian Family. We can design a program with the assistance of representatives of the other branches of the Vincentian Family.
5. **Regional Courses**. There are several reasons for the regional courses.
 - a) First, the possibility of tailoring course to the differing situations and needs of the region. The differing situations and needs can be addressed several ways. One is through selection of pertinent topics. The other is the particular slant in which the general topics are, on the one hand, presented by the conference-givers and, on the other, reflected upon by the participants.
 - b) Second, regional courses provide a possibility and create challenges for the confreres of the region to be the conference-givers. This encourages confreres to deepen their knowledge and expertise on key themes for the Congregation.

- c) Sessions in the region will cost considerably less than the ones conducted in Paris. This will hopefully facilitate greater number of participants in the session. One example was the recent two-day session on Intercultural Communication for Vincentian Family missionaries in Nairobi; over ninety-five East Africans participated.
- d) The duration and the timing of the course will be set considering the best available times for the confreres of the region. There are regions in which the member Provinces follow quite diverse school calendars.
- e) One of the essential ingredients of the courses offered in Paris is the visit to the Vincentian sites. This should be arranged for the participants of the regional courses.

The first regional course will be given in Central Europe. This region comprises the Provinces of Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Vice-Province of Cyril and Methodius. The ministry situation of the confreres in Central Europe calls for quite a particular program. The program is designed to be completed in separate periods for three years. There will be conferences for a week each in the first two years, and visit to the Vincentian sites for a week on the third year.

The second in line is the Asia-Pacific Region. We have consulted with the Visitors and Councils. The general idea is to gather the participants for a period of two weeks for conferences. The visit to the Vincentian sites will be arranged at a later period.

6. **Online Courses.** With the assistance of specialists in digital educational methods, courses on Vincentian-related topics could be offered online. One clear advantage would be to make better use of confreres with expertise on Vincentian themes, without having to ask them to travel (or return repeatedly) to Paris to conduct the courses.

SECRETARIAT INTERNATIONAL DES ETUDES VINCENTIENNES (SIEV)

John T. Maher, C.M.

Outline & Meeting Agenda

- I. Goals and Objectives of SIEV (*taken from Statutes*)
- II. Meeting our Goals & Objectives
- III. Future Plans & Directions

I. Goals and Objectives of SIEV

The goals and objectives of SIEV come directly from the STATUTES, the document that established the group in October, 1999 by Father Robert Maloney, C.M., Superior General.

The goals are simple and direct:

SIEV has as its objective to **animate, inform and promote everything regarding Vincentian studies**. It is in contact with the provincial and interprovincial organisms of the Congregation of the Mission and the entire Vincentian Family.

The objectives are a little more detailed and complicated, as one would expect:

- assures information and communication through the CM publications;
- takes stock of the existing Vincentian studies, promoting new studies as well;
- provides concrete work tools for Vincentian formation;
- invites specialists to meet in symposiums to correlate their research results;
- fosters the publication of a complete Vincentian bibliography;
- promotes interest in arranging/utilizing provincial archives and their history;
- pursues historical studies of the CM, and invites provinces to publish their annals;
- propose programs to General Council for international Vincentian studies.

II. Meeting our Goals & Objectives

1. Over the last several years, seminars and colloquiums have been held on “charism-related” topics in Rome, Paris, Dublin (twice), and Indonesia.
2. There has been at least one SIEV Board meeting annually since its inception. In 2013, we will have two meetings; one last February, and another in September as a follow-up to the advice we receive from this meeting of the Visitors.
3. The seminars (colloquia) held over the years on various topics were deemed helpful to confreres and members of the Vincentian Family in living the charism.

4. SIEV has tried, with limited success, to make confreres aware of the need for Vincentian based scholarship and research, providing opportunities to do so.
5. We will look to the Visitors for advice and assistance on how to best be of service to them and the confreres in their provinces.

Your Perspective, please:

- From your view as Visitor, how well have we met the above goals and objectives?

III. Future Plans & Directions

At our February 2013 meeting, we decided upon the following priorities, which we share with you for your input and reaction:

- To insure our digital resources are as up to date and accessible as possible;
- To provide quality seminars on timely and important Vincentian related topics;
- To assist Visitors and their Councils in recruiting and training a “next generation” of Vincentian researchers and scholars;
- To assist Visitors and their Councils in recruiting and training their confreres to become translators for Vincentian research, scholarship, and new media;
- To offer assistance to Visitors and Visitor Conferences in providing initial and ongoing formation in Vincentian-related matters;
- To have the “Rybolt” historical project in the CM accessible in three languages and available in ‘compendium’ form for confreres and Vincentian Family members.

VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY OFFICE (VSO)

Myles Heinen, C.M.

Executive Director, Vincentian Solidarity Office

As you are well aware, the persons who staff any mission play a key role in the effectiveness of the mission. The Vincentian Solidarity Office, VSO we call it, has two associate directors. Mr. Scott Fina has been Associate Director since 2004. He holds a Ph.D in political science and worked in universities. His previous Vincentian service includes

serving as administrator of the Ghebre Michael Inn (for homeless men) in Philadelphia and administrator of the Vincentian Renewal Center in Princeton, New Jersey for the Eastern USA Province.

The second Associate Director is Ms. Teresa Niedda, who joined VSO in November, 2009. Teresa is a 1984 graduate of Niagara University (Eastern Province USA) and completed graduate studies at another university. She previously worked as Director of a non-profit organization that works with migrant farm workers in the USA. She brings to the VSO her experience in grant writing, international relations, and a love for the Vincentian charism.

The VSO is an office of the General Curia and is mandated to assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelizing and service of the poor. But if we look at the bigger picture, the VSO is one part of a larger vision. The vision is about Solidarity. Blessed John Paul II defined Solidarity in **Sollicitudo Rei Socialis** #38 as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say the good of all and of each individual.” The vision is about promoting a relative equality in the international Congregation of the Mission such that each province, vice-province and mission has the resources to be effective in their particular locality in evangelizing the poor.

Fr. John Gouldrick, C.M., reminded us in 2007 in Mexico that, in the realm of finances, the Congregation of the Mission has a method for promoting solidarity that has three legs:

- The International Mission Fund (IMF) responds to operating needs in the current year.
- The VSO responds to the construction, infrastructure and special project needs.
- The Patrimony Fund Project (PFP) (also known as the Vincentian Endowment Challenge) responds to the need of long term financial stability.

Let's look at the VSO. As I begin I wish to thank the Eastern Province USA for the collaboration they give in supplying a fully operational office for the VSO.

First, the VSO provides a service to manage the relationship of the Congregation of the Mission with potential funding agencies. The VSO enhances the credibility of the Congregation with the funding agencies and increases the Congregation's effectiveness in obtaining grants. The VSO works with our provinces, vice-provinces and missions selected for service by the General Curia. The list, which is included in the materials for this meeting, also includes two Vicariates Apostolic in Ethiopia with a special relationship to the Congregation of the Mission.

The potential recipients of service are 55, of which 48 have used the VSO one or more times.

The method the VSO uses to accomplish its task emphasizes four things: first project design; second, professional and detailed applications; third, detailed and timely reporting; and fourth, a contribution from the Congregation of the Mission.

The project design, application writing and reporting aspects have gained VSO a good standing with many agencies, such that VSO has even been solicited as a partner by a funding agency prior to a proposal being submitted. I personally visit many of the agencies we deal with on a regular basis. The VSO has significant experience in project design and application preparation to contribute to a collaborative effort. Reporting, however, is the most difficult aspect of the VSO work.

While in some instances the reporting by the provinces, vice-provinces and missions has been wonderful, it seems there is built into our human nature a distaste for paperwork. Even with repeated threats of denying access to viewing the "World Cup", it is sometimes almost impossible to secure the necessary information from the men in the field. I want to emphasize that good reporting is the key to building lasting and beneficial relationships to agencies and people who really do want to help. What stops them from helping is not knowing that the funds they send will actually help the people they wanted to help. Reporting is key.

The fourth aspect of the VSO method is a financial contribution to the project on the part of the Congregation. The Congregation of the Mission holds donations from three provinces and a foundation in the Vincentian Solidarity Fund or VSF. The VSO uses the Vincentian Solidarity Fund to motivate the participation of funding agencies in our projects. For the most part, VSO goes to an agency not only with a well designed project and a professional application, but also with our own funding in hand, increasing the credibility of the project.

The offering of a contribution from the Congregation of the Mission gives an opportunity to consider the way one province collaborates with projects of another province. Your donation to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund relieves us of the time-consuming "due diligence" concerns about a proposed project. In addition, the VSO brings vast experience that helps strengthen the design of any given project and contributes to the professionalism of the application. Finally, the contributing to the VSO increases the impact of your donation since it is usually equaled by the donation from a funding agency. By donating to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund, you are freed from concern over which particular project in a province will benefit from your donation.

The current level of yearly commitment to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund is \$125,000 USD from three provinces and 250,000 USD from a

foundation. The foundation will decrease its funding over time, in view of the rise of contributions resulting from international solidarity among provinces. Perhaps this is idealistic, given many ways collaboration can happen. The current reality is that the VSO has 26% less funding available on a yearly basis than in 2009.

Second, the VSO has what is called a Micro-Project program. The Micro-Project program allows VSO to directly grant a \$ 5000 USD maximum grant once per year to those on the VSO list. The reason for starting the program was to stimulate use of the VSO since these grants were more readily accessible. The funding came from a separate pool established by an initially large donation and maintained by donations from individual confreres. The program has been hugely successful in meeting small needs in a timely manner, with 110 projects granted over six and half years. However, funding has become unavailable and the program is suspended at this time.

Third, the VSO has the primary responsibility for organizing the Congregation of the Mission to respond to a wonderful challenge. We call this the Patrimony Fund Project or PFP. The Congregation will receive five million USD if the Congregation can match it. The resulting ten million USD will create 10 endowments of varying amounts that will distribute a percentage of its earnings on a yearly basis. Seven Provinces and two vice-provinces account for 9 of the endowments and the tenth is for the use of the Superior General in favor of Vincentian Lay Organizations of which he is the Director General: Vincentian Lay Missionaries, Vincentian Marian Youth and the International Association of the Miraculous Medal. I will speak more about the PFP later in this talk. Let's look at what the dreams and hopes of our confreres have produced, with the help of the VSO. First, the numbers: this is from the beginning of the VSO in 2002 through the end of 2012. The numbers are in US Dollars.

For projects, we collected	\$7,705,355 USD
For Micro Projects	\$538,092 USD
For our work in Haiti with the Vincentian Family	\$896,999 USD
For the Patrimony Fund Project, through the VSO office, we raised	\$436,222 USD
Donations to the Office for administration amount to	\$363,100 USD
The Total in these 10 years has been	\$9,939,768 USD

This is 13.48 times the operational cost to the Congregation of the VSO in this same time period.

Our confreres have certainly worked hard. I encourage us to increase our competence in planning for the unity of a particular mission, and in designing sustainable and effective projects to fulfill that mission.

The most successful projects resulted from good choices. A building that was started could be finished. Whatever was created had sources of funding for its operation was clearly designated – before the project was begun! The VSO insists on this type of planning and often helps with redesigning projects (such as breaking them into stages), to qualify them for funding. There is no better way to lose the support of a donor than to have a project abandoned or underutilized, because the province, vice-province, or mission did not plan well.

As another part of increasing our competence in designing sustainable and effective projects, I promote again the study of the Wisdom of our Vincentian Family that is elaborated in the book “Seeds of Hope”. The book presents the principles of effective projects distilled from the experience of major successful projects and programs of the Vincentian Family in our time. The book is not about theory, it is about what has been discovered to be successful in our own collective experience. I am convinced by my own experience that if the wisdom found in “Seeds of Hope” is brought to life in our projects, we will be very attractive to those who want to donate.

Let me give one example. Our Confrere Fr. Noberto Carcellar, C.M., was assigned to the parish Our Lady of the Land of Promise which serves the squatters in Payatas, Philippines, a 362 hectare area that included a 15 hectare garbage dump. Starting with direct aid of the Vincentian Missionaries Social Development Foundation, Fr. Carcellar soon transitioned to empowerment strategies of micro-finance. Starting with a parish savings program in 1995, there were soon 2000 members of the Lupang Pangako Urban Poor Association, Inc. (LUPAI) which in two and a half years grew to 5,300 members. Soon other associations were started and by 1999 20,000 + were members and were applying for mortgage funds from the government. The people were viable partners in the economic development of the Payatas area. Through their community based organizations the poor of Payatas were using their savings and credit funds to construct better housing and to purchase tracts of land and outfit them with roads, electricity, waste disposal systems, and water distribution systems, and even to create a health insurance program! listen to the beneficiaries with respect, start small, involve the poor themselves, set up the structures of collaboration – these excellent principles are found in the “Seeds of Hope”.

Finally let me return to the Patrimony Fund Project or PFP. I want to thank the provinces who have year by year contributed to this project. The project is 48.02% complete as of February 5, 2013 with 2,400,800 USD collected or pledged. This project presents to individual confreres a tangible way to express solidarity across provincial boundaries. The VSO needs confreres to promote this project with those who know and love the Congregation of the Mission. Patrimony Fund Project is about ensuring that a Vincentian way of life will be replicated

and rooted in other countries. The confreres are key to the request arriving on hearts open to listen: former members of the Congregation, former seminarians, former students, family members and friends of confreres, and people with whom the confreres collaborate.

The VSO has changed the quarterly bulletin format to emphasize the Patrimony Fund Project. The VSO has also begun to address the confreres in 19 provinces in a direct way through monthly e-mails to update them on the progress of the Patrimony Fund Project and to motivate their participation. The VSO wants to enlist at least 600 confreres who will each gather a total of 1000 USD (740€) per year for 2013, 2014 and 2015 and send to Rome for this project.

What some of you could do is to talk to your senior confreres about the opportunity for helping the international Congregation by including the Patrimony Fund Project in their wills or legacies. I have included in your materials the correct phraseology to use to include the Patrimony Fund as a beneficiary in a will. And what does the patrimony fund buy us?

One beneficiary of the Patrimony Fund Project is a new mission in Odessa, Ukraine. The mission refitted a double long city bus to serve food and give medical treatment to the homeless. The bus made its debut at a park near the main train station in Odessa. Volunteers are plentiful and even include a Jewish couple who cook the soup! Our men did not know if the park manager would allow them to stay. After awhile, the park manager came and asked "what are you doing here?". Our confrere, Vitaliy Novak pointed to the homeless and said, "We feed the homeless". The park manager looked at the group of homeless and said, "You can stay". The bus came to the park 5 days a week but had to retreat each night to a parking spot 40 kilometers away. After 3 months the park manager said, "You don't have to leave each night. I will show you where you can park the bus in the park. And I have an old office you can store your materials in".

That's a poignant story but just one of many...

COMMISSION ON ISLAM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Franz Kangler, C.M.

Throughout the Middle Ages, most people felt that Islam was some kind of heresy. From the 11th century onwards this view became the ideological basis for the infamous Crusades that mark some of the dark chapters of our history. Unfortunately, after what happened here in New York on September 11, 2001 and in the midst of our current

international crises, some groups still attempt to bring new life into these age-old ways of looking at Islam. They argue that incompatibilities between Christian and Muslim civilizations can only result in a great clash. They warn that if Christians value their culture and their religion, they must be prepared to do battle on multiple levels with Islam and Muslim peoples¹.

Fortunately, these are no longer the voices of our authentic Catholic teaching. Nearly fifty years ago the Catholic Church took a dramatic stand to promote constructive, peaceful and religious relations with Muslims. The famous French scholar of Islam, Louis Massignon, was convinced that a “Copernican shift” in the understanding of Islam was taking place.

In the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council taught us in 1965:

“The church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to people. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin mother they also honor and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms deeds and fasting” (Nostra Aetate, 3)².

Many steps were taken in the following years. Our limited time does not permit me here to go into that more deeply. Quite a fair number of the Vincentian family have been working – sometimes for centuries – in the Islamic context in North Africa, in the Ottoman Empire, in Iran. After Vatican II, some individual provinces were acting and reacting to the challenge of Islam. But it took our Vincentian community as a whole quite some time to give a common reaction. 14 years ago, in summer 1999 at Fatqa in Lebanon, the Vincentian family gathered for the first time to look into its ministry in the Muslim contexts.

¹ Alexander, Scott. (2002, January 1). What’s the Catholic view of Islam? *The Free Library*. (2002). http://www.thefreelibrary.com/What's_the_Catholic_view_of_Islam?-a081391925 (retrieved January 4, 2013).

² http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (retrieved January 4, 2013).

In 2011 such an international meeting was repeated In Indonesia, when participants coming from 34 different countries and different branches of Vincentian communities, again tried to summarize very different forms of experience³.

1. 'Seeing' Our Different Contexts

On the one side, we saw some problematic areas: the growing radicalization of the Islamic movement; the intensive promotion of fundamentalist readings of Islam; the growing imposition of Sharia laws in some places and the seeming denial of freedom and human rights that goes with it; the violent riots or kidnapping-for-ransom cases allegedly done by radical Muslim groups and the consequent culture of fear and silence; the poverty and ignorance among many of the Muslim people which can breed such violence; the stereotyping of Muslims as "terrorists" and the ignorance about the Islam religion itself that begets prejudices and mistrust. We understood, however, that many of these biases and stereotypes were misplaced, fired up as they were by many factors other than religion and recognized that religion can be instrumentalized for the elite's political, economic or ideological agenda.

We also encountered and heard from many moderate Muslims who are open to dialogue, to the humanistic reading of Islamic texts, and to collaborative efforts with Christians and other faiths. From the sharing of our experiences, we also saw many signs of hope in Christian-Muslim relations: the increase of educated young people who have critical and open minds; the empowerment of women in both Muslim and Christian contexts; the numerous initiatives for peace and dialogue in the 'official' and grassroots level; the humanitarian interventions and socio-cultural events done in common; concerted efforts to uplift the economic conditions; and the experience of mutual respect and friendship among Muslim and Christians in everyday life.

We also felt that there was still much left for us to do. We realized that sometimes our own personal, professional, theological training do not help foster a dialogical approach to life. Most of us felt that we need to know more about the Islam religion in order to quash our own prejudices and biases. Beyond intellectual knowledge, however, there is also a felt need among us for more interpersonal encounters to cultivate personal relationship with Muslims and peoples of other faiths.

³ "PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP", Interreligious Dialogue with Islam: Contexts, Vision and Action. Synthesis of the Symposium.

2. Reflecting on Our Common Vision

While we saw our own 'lights' and 'shadows', we also tried to envision what God invites us to do. We discerned what it takes to follow the command of Jesus to "put out into the deep (Duc in altum)" and cast our nets, as Luke 5:1-11 was the motto of the symposium. Through the help of our speakers, we listened to both Christian and Muslim resources on interreligious dialogue and tried to understand them in our contexts.

We realized that despite the impression of its rigid structures, there have always been attempts within the Catholic Church itself to include those 'outside its walls', in its own frame of salvation. But we were also made aware that the same dialogical direction is also present in the Islamic texts from the Qur'an, its interpreters and theologians up to the recent document *A Common Word* (2007). We realized, of course, that documents and 'official talks' are very different from the ordinary events of everyday life. We ended our meeting in Indonesia by declaring our vision and convictions necessary for interreligious dialogue:

- Dialogue is not a strategy; it is a way of life, a spirituality. Since dialogue could not be tactically prepared, we also could not program its aims and strategies. In interreligious dialogue, we leave it to the Spirit to lead us.
- Interreligious dialogue starts with interpersonal encounters in the context of personal friendships. We are convinced that dialogue first happens in the 'dialogue of life' and 'dialogue of action' within the personal and grassroots levels. When this basic trust is established, we will then have the courage to dialogue on our common faith convictions and differences (e.g., dialogue of faith and spiritual experience).
- Interreligious dialogue is not a denial of my own faith convictions. It is being fully rooted in its foundations so much so that I can face the other in total openness and honesty. If we could not agree on one area of the dialogue, there are still many other areas in practical life that we can agree on and collaborate. We believe that our differences serve as the basic foundation of our unity.
- These are the personal and communal attitudes needed for interreligious dialogue: presence among the people, the courage to risk, openness, mutual trust, patient waiting, sensitivity to people's needs, and ultimately, the utmost humility to let go.

We were reminded of the words of St. Vincent in the last years of his life to Anthony Fleury when that confrere was sent on mission to Saintes: "[You must] be convinced that God asks of you only that you

cast your nets into the sea, and not that you catch the fish, because it is up to him to make them go into the nets... To this work of patience, you must join humility, prayer, and good example: then you will see the glory of the Savior" (6 November 1658).

3. Pope Benedict on Dialogue

Sometimes people argue that from the time of Pope Benedict onwards the Church in Rome has no longer been so deeply interested in efforts like the intercultural dialogue. We need to see, however, that Benedict took a necessary new step by deepening the preparatory work done by his predecessors. Benedict's pontificate was one of theology, of intellectual seriousness, of reflection, and even the Regensburg lecture must be understood in this context. Benedict apparently wanted to provoke to new thought.

Instead of arguing about his views I simply want to give you some thoughts out of one of his last speeches on December 21, 2012 during his address on the occasion of Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia⁴: Looking back unto the finishing year 2012 the Pope gave some very substantial views that could easily be overlooked:

At this point I would like to address the second major theme, which runs through the whole of the past year from Assisi to the Synod on the New Evangelization: the question of dialogue and proclamation. In man's present situation, the dialogue of religions is a necessary condition for peace in the world and it is therefore a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue of religions has various dimensions. In the first place it is simply a dialogue of life, a dialogue of being together. This will not involve discussing the great themes of faith – whether God is Trinitarian or how the inspiration of the sacred Scriptures is to be understood, and so on. It is about the concrete problems of coexistence and shared responsibility for society, for the state, for humanity. In the process, it is necessary to learn to accept the other in his otherness and the otherness of his thinking. To this end, the shared responsibility for justice and peace must become the guiding principle of the conversation. A dialogue about peace and justice is bound to move beyond the purely pragmatic to become an ethical struggle for the truth and for the human being: a dialogue concerning the values that come before everything. In this way what began

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia_en.html (retrieved January 4, 2013).

as a purely practical dialogue becomes a quest for the right way to live as a human being.

Two rules are generally regarded nowadays as fundamental for inter-religious dialogue:

- 1. Dialogue does not aim at conversion, but at understanding. In this respect it differs from evangelization, from mission;*
- 2. Accordingly, both parties to the dialogue remain consciously within their identity, which the dialogue does not place in question either for themselves or for the other.*

The Christian can afford to be supremely confident, yes, fundamentally certain that he can venture freely into the open sea of the truth, without having to fear for his Christian identity. To be sure, we do not possess the truth, the truth possesses us: Christ, who is the truth, has taken us by the hand, and we know that his hand is holding us securely on the path of our quest for knowledge. Being inwardly held by the hand of Christ makes us free and keeps us safe: free – because if we are held by him, we can enter openly and fearlessly into any dialogue; safe – because he does not let go of us, unless we cut ourselves off from him. At one with him, we stand in the light of truth.

4. Toward Common Lines of Action in the Vincentian Family

As part of the fruit from the Symposium on Dialog with Islam in Indonesia two years ago, a Commission was formed to give continuity to the proposed topics. This Commission is made up of members of the Congregation of the Mission together with other members of the Vincentian Family. The Commission is coordinated by Claudio Santangelo, CM, and its other members are Armada Ryanto, CM (Province of Indonesia); Sister Abeba Hadgu, DC; Christa Foelting, AIC; and Albert Zoghbi, SSVP. This commission met for the first time in October 2012 in the General Curia House. I participated in this meeting as consultant.

Among the aims of this Commission is to awaken interest in this topic in the different branches of the Vincentian Family (FV). It also hopes to be a sign of collaboration among the FV's different branches, as well as a symbol of interreligious dialog, not only working in an academic sense, but also at the practical level, in ordinary life, and maintaining a Vincentian style in addressing the issue of dialog with Islam⁵.

⁵ <http://de.scribd.com/doc/112807539/NUNTIA-October-2012-English>

One projects of this Commission will be to organize the next **International Symposium of the Vincentian Family on Dialogue with Islam**, which is scheduled for **June 29-July 8, 2014**. It will be held at **DePaul University in Chicago**. The motto of this Symposium will be: "That they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Unfortunately and maybe due to a late announcement the participation of European Vincentians in Indonesia was not very numerous. We want to invite from now on for Chicago on all different levels – speaking to you here is one possibility as you might know interested confreres in your provinces.

Other future activities could be:

- A mapping of the places where Vincentian Family members work for and with Muslim, starting with the participants in the 2011 symposium in Indonesia.
- An already existing vindialogue website will be updated⁶.
- A power point presentation on the importance of dialogue with Islam and on the VF Commission was prepared by Fr. Claudio Santangelo, C.M. and Fr. Juventino Castellero Caen, C.M.
- The Commission is reporting to this 2013 Visitors' meeting in New York and the AIC meeting in Bangkok.

⁶ www.vindialogue.org