

# Elements for Reflection: Vincentine Ministry in Parishes

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The 2010 General Assembly approved a request directed to the Superior General, asking him for a study about Vincentine work in parishes and the possibility of drawing up a guide concerning their practice. The General Council studied the subject, and the Superior General sent a questionnaire to all the provinces; from the responses, he sent a letter, asking for all to reflect upon the subject and to send their thoughts in for this meeting. *Here we present a synthesis of what was accomplished, so that it can deepen and enrich our conversation, all this envisioning the possible elaboration of a Practical Guide for Parishes.*

## **PROFILE OF A VINCENTIAN PARISH: *What is a Vincentine Missionary Parish?***

Among the principal elements to form a profile of a Vincentine missionary parish we can say:

- The Vincentine Missionary Parish, in faithfulness to the Spirit of Saint Vincent, must be a **“Mission House”**. It does not simply maintain and animate the faith of the faithful Christians within the ecclesiastical structures and situations that are already established, organized and conventional. Before all it looks to commit itself to the most urgent necessities of the poor and Church.
- The Vincentine missionary parish must be **situated among the poor**, preferentially the poorest, and/or it must be fundamentally oriented to the service of the poor, attending to the new situations of poverty and to the necessities in the formation of the clergy and laity in order to evangelize the poor.
- **It must serve an integral evangelization of the poor**; these are the geographical, social and pastoral places of all vincentine missionary parishes.
- **It must be centered on a profound experience of our Trinitarian Faith** in following Christ Evangelizer of the Poor.

- With a systematic evangelization, and **in a permanent state of mission**, it looks to reach all, especially those who are on the margins. All are missionaries, with an ongoing passion for the mission and for the poor.
- As a Samaritan Church, **with a clear option for the poor**, with organized charity and with actions that will make them true agents for evangelization.
- **With a true sense of being Church**, it inserts itself into the pastoral projects of the particular churches, without losing its Vincentian visage. It is constituted in places where there is a priority for lay formation for the universal Church.
- It is a **community ministry** with an open attitude and mindset, welcoming all, and promoting dialogue to unite all.
- It cultivates a **Vincentian missionary spirituality**, one that emphasizes personal sanctity in light of the secularism and relativism of the present moment.
- It is characterized by a **Marian Spirituality**, living the attitudes of Mary, the Faithful Pilgrim.
- It is undertaken in a commitment that must be characterized by a **great spirit of mobility and availability**.

#### **A VINCENTIAN STYLE IN THE MISSIONARY WORK IN PARISHES: *What should be the style of the missionary work in parishes?***

When we speak of style, we do not presume we are the only ones carrying out these activities and utilizing these methods, but we focus on the particular manner of acting, so that the Church, and particularly the poor, can perceive and identify us as Vincentian Missionaries:

- Its work should be assumed, planned and realized in community; in accord with the instruction given by the local church, without forgetting what specifically is Vincentian.
- Its life and work should be carried out in conformity with the five Vincentian missionary virtues. The commitment must be set for a limited time. Something of our own charism is community and team work. It is not a personal work, it is the Provinces, of the Congregation, and it is done as part of our work with the laity and the Vincentian Family.
- It must develop, in an focused, prioritized manner, Vincentian ministries and pastoral proposals which best conform to our

spirit: the integral evangelization that contains the service of the Word and the practice of charity; the promotion, formation and participation of the laity in the pastoral action, within a participative and ministerial parish; the development of the social and charitable dimension in favor of the poor; the development of prophetic ministries and a special attention to the new forms of poverty, to the excluded minorities and those who are on the margins (mission *inter gentes*).

- In social action, it must promote and encourage the study and application of the methodology of systemic change and the Social Doctrine of the Church.
- It should enable support of the missions and implementation of popular missions; the methodology of the popular mission illumines the concretion of a parish pastoral plan: preparation, planning, realization, evaluation and supporting the process.
- It should give witness to popular devotion and piety knowing that it can help serve the growth of faith and to the Christian commitment of Jesus Christ's missionary disciples in the cultural realities of the people.
- It should support Vincentian Family groups, collaboration and actions with them, and a strong presence with Vincentian-based movements in a fraternal environment that gives us credibility as a family.
- It should promote support and collaboration with diocesan clergy, especially as a parish that always works for vocations in all its fields.
- It should promote the development of a community spirit, collaboration, and the support of the social ministries and popular movements.
- It must cultivate an attitude of nearness, listening and welcoming people to the sacrament of reconciliation and also in providing counsel.
- It should be a parish presence characterized by efforts made to create communities and "networks" of small communities, through person to person evangelization, through home visits.
- It should be a model of fair and just treatment, approachability using simple and affable language to permit all people, especially the poor, to feel closeness and an affective acceptance to the message.
- It must maintain a level of personal and professional formation that responds to the challenge of forming the laity.

**CRITERIA FOR ANIMATION AND EVALUATION:** *What are the criteria and proposals to help us in the discernment of assuming a parish, to evaluate, revise and animate (and if necessary leave) a Vincentian missionary parishes?*

- Our Constitutions and Statutes already offer us these criteria, Constitutions #12: clear preference for the poor, attending the reality of society, some participation in the condition of the poor, availability for the mission, constant looking for personal and community conversion.
- Statutes #10: states things such as lack of pastors; parishes that are situated among the poor, or annexed to a seminary. Parishes that are in consonance with the Provincial Pastoral Plan and with the Provincial Norms.
- There must be a balance between parish ministry and all the other provincial ministries, by not limiting the Vincentian missionary work to the parish ministry.
- The existence of many parishes in the provinces seems to be tied to diverse historical factors and conjunction of the social, ecclesial and provincial realities, and the multiple challenges that today's evangelization offers us. Other questions tied into this arise which must be studied and pondered, for example: the aging confreres and their missionary actions, the financial sustenance of the provinces, the Vincentian presence in the present ecclesial scene of every country or continent, etc.
- We must make an effort to put in place mechanisms and initiatives on the provincial and local level that will animate, cultivate and develop Vincentian identity in the missionary work in the parish, for example: a meeting of confreres who work in parishes, create a Provincial Commission on Parishes, specific preparation for missionaries in vincentian parish ministries; elaborate a Provincial Pastoral Plan for parishes: elaboration and revision of local pastoral plans, etc.
- In an attitude of conversion and Vincentian fidelity, we must deepen, discern and promote reflection in provinces on our parishes. From this reflection we must adopt, with serenity and courage, all the necessary decisions so that our actions can truly be missionary ones.
- We must promote revision of works, closing parishes and creating works with greater Vincentian significance; and establish formal contracts with a diocese, in order to establish a limited time commitment.

- We should constitute an inter-provincial team of mobile missionaries who can carry out popular missions in our parishes.
- We should foster temporary exchange of personnel between Provinces to help us, animate us and enrich us in our ministries.

**CONCRETE PROPOSALS OR SUGGESTIONS: *Towards elaborating a Practical Guide for parishes***

- Every province, essentially, must be missionary; that is why we have to stop making the difference between a missionary one and non-missionary one. We believe our Parishes should be called Vincentian, whether in rural or urban areas, permanent or temporary.
- The guide must have a doctrinal framework that takes into account Universal Church and Vincentian Doctrine.
- The guide must centered in a change in mindset and of structures, not just external forms.
- Develop appendices with practical issues.
- The team that composes the Practical Guide should be composed of representatives of the different Visitors conferences.

**PRIORITIZED CHALLENGES: *That must be assumed in Vincentian parish work***

- Lay formation for the permanent mission;
- Authentic missionary parishes;
- Festive, participative celebrations that lead to a deeper encounter with the Lord;
- Formation of our men for Vincentian ministry in parishes;
- Search for those on the margins, and paying attention to the new situations of poverty;
- Ardent apostolic zeal, the fruit of experiencing God to help us manifest our convictions, and persevere in our vocations;
- A parish that may be a model that motivates other parishes;
- Generating true pastoral processes to carry out concrete plans in specific parishes that reflect the overall orientation of a particular province;
- Pastoral actions that can be a source for vocations;

- An efficient vocation ministry in order to bring new aspirants to the Congregation;
- A community life that makes us credible and becomes an efficient source of team work;
- A prophetic attitude of the Vincentian parish that enables us to give a voice to the poor and the marginalized;
- Promotion in our parishes of systemic change to give the poor a share in their future;
- Family Ministry and the defense of life as a pastoral priority in our Vincentian parishes.