

Communication in the Congregation of the Mission Today

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

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These days the word communication gets a great deal of exposure. We know good communication is essential to insure harmony in all parts of life: personal, interpersonal, communal, apostolic, and of course, the spiritual! We can say a “lack of communication” in any one of the above categories can lead to disruption in our lives.

1. Principles of good communication as lived by our Holy Founder

St. Vincent is an example of a prodigious ‘communicator par excellence!’. In his lifetime, he had a massive amount of correspondence—both formal and informal—and we are told by historians that what we have today is a fraction of what he wrote. Through his letters, conferences, and of course, the Common Rule, we find a man who, as the poet says, knew well both “the things of God and the things of humanity”.

As a communicator, Vincent was inspiring, disarming, charming, blunt, and when needed, ‘brutally honest’ with his audience. All of us can cite favorite passages from his letters, with quotes that lift us up, make us stop and think, and yes, even laugh. One of my favorites was the quote attributed to Vincent after a contentious series of letters with a local superior who had difficulty in the basic everyday matters of running a house. His final response is classic: “My advice is that you sell the horse. That is all I can say”. When I myself was a superior years ago, if we got bogged down in a discussion at a house meeting, one of us would say, “Oh come on, for God’s sake, just sell the horse!”.

“Horse” or not, Vincent gives us valuable framework to reflect on as we consider the need for good communication in the Congregation of the Mission. I believe Vincent shows us in his correspondence the “four C’s” of good, healthy communication.

CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, CONGRUENCY, and CHARITY

CLARITY: Vincent's writing conveys clarity and simplicity at its core. He states his concern, usually in the opening lines, or first paragraphs. He does not mince words or avoid discussion of difficult matters. He states his concerns and offers his opinion on a subject, outlining what he considers the options available. This is the essence of a good communicator. Even when he writes with subtlety to bishops and the royalty, he does so clearly.

CONSISTENCY: Vincent's style of communication is to 'inform' in order to 'transform'. He does not play politics, turning one side against another, or build his case by making others appear in a bad light. And he is focused on his concerns, whether or not the recipient likes it. Once he decides, he communicates it to all concerned and stays the path regardless of opinion.

CONGRUENCY: Vincent's writings reveal an "inner logic" between his ideas and actions, and harmony with his spirituality and human interaction. His words were credible as they were compatible with his actions. They fit who he was and what he believed. As one contemporary said so well: "Monsieur Vincent is ALWAYS Monsieur Vincent".

CHARITY: In the course of his life, Vincent made many difficult decisions. He held positions of great influence. He held sway with royalty and bishops, and could influence outcomes by his approval or denial of their request. In the CM, he was the "court of last appeal" for confreres and superiors, often having to resolve situations he would have likely preferred to avoid. Yet, his writings are filled with concern, compassion, and charity. Even in his admonitions, Vincent displays restraint, not dwelling on past recriminations, but rather focusing on the future possibilities.

2. A Modern Checklist for Communication by the Visitor

- Is my style of communicating **proactive or reactive**?
(Planning and looking ahead vs. looking around or "scrambling")
- Am I **engaged or detached** in the ways I communicate?
(Do I seek out the "best practices" for communication and utilize them?)
- What is my **'theme' for communicating** with my confreres?
(Yearly theme, Bible-based theme, "Vincentian theme"-all work!)
- Am I **"on message"** in how I convey it?
(Do I use Vincent's "4 C's" in my communications with confreres?)

- How often do I **seek feedback on how my message** is being received?
(Formal and informal feedback is helpful, although not easy!)
- What is the **frequency & depth** of my communication with confreres?
(Do I choose the way most effective to do this, not the most familiar?)

Provinces vary in their numbers, works, locations, and resources, but this above “checklist” is adaptable for any Visitor/province. The question we should each ask is:

- *How can I adapt myself in a changing world, Church, and Congregation so I can communicate in ways helpful to me as Visitor and meet the needs of my confreres?*

The Vatican’s theme for “world day of Communications 2013 was: *Social Networks; portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization*”. It’s timely for what we are discussing today. Let’s go through our “new and improved” web site for the world-wide Congregation: www.cmglobal.org. It is our main ‘portal’ to help you with information & formation! John Freund will discuss to “walk the Visitors through” the new web site.

3. Three small steps to crossing the ‘digital divide’

FIRST: Task someone on your staff or provincial council with the responsibility of being a ‘news liaison’ with stories and happenings in your province. *For example, a new work, an anniversary, ordination, vocation stories of the eldest confrere and the youngest one.*

SECOND: Focus on one theme in a calendar year (*ex: 2013 - Year of Faith*). Learn and use a new mode of digital communication: (weekly e-mails, ‘twitter’ prayers & SV quotes).

THIRD: Seek feedback from confreres and Vincentian Family members as to whether it is effective. If yes, try something new, if no, try something new!

How can the General Curia help you in ‘communication’?

In addition to regular correspondence from the Superior General, we offer the following:

NUNTIA: Our monthly publication reports on the travels of the Superior General and the Assistants General, as well as new events within

the Congregation. NUNTIA is available for you to “tell the story” of your province, confreres, and works. Make use of it!

VINCENTIANA: Published quarterly, this journal promotes writing on our Vincentian charism, including our history, spirituality, and specific ‘themes’ relevant to our Congregation and the Vincentian Family throughout the world.

www.cmglobal.org: The initial phase of our ‘new and improved’ web site is complete and available in the three languages of the Congregation. It provides information and formation for our confreres and members of the Vincentian Family. This ‘digital dynamo’ can be a great resource for you, your confreres, and the Vincentian Family. Make use of what we offer!

COMMUNICATION WITH THE CURIA AND SECRETARIAT OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

Giuseppe Turati, C.M.

Secretary General

Premise

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission confer many important obligations on the Visitors, obligations that pertain to the good of their respective province and, above all, obligations that refer to the good of the Missionaries in their province (Constitutions, #125, 1-11). There are other duties that are proper to the Visitor and even though they might not appear to be important for leading the province, they are nonetheless important for the life of the Congregation. I refer here, on the one hand, to the relationship between the Visitor and the Superior General and, on the other hand, to the relationship between the Visitor and the Secretary General. *A Practical Guide for the Visitor* (PGV) speaks about this first relationship in #325-339 and about the second relationship in #340-359. In this report, I will remind you about these obligations and I will emphasize those points that, in my experience, are forgotten at times.

1. Communication between the Visitor and the Superior General

There are three forms of communication that, in order of importance, are the following: petitions for approval, consultation, reports, and information.

Reports and information from the Visitor to the Superior General (PGV, #337)

The information that every Visitor should send to the Superior General is stated in #337 of the PGV:

- Appointments (local superiors, members of the provincial council and provincial treasurer);
- The profession of vows and ordinations;
- Reports after the canonical visitation of a house (many Visitors forget this matter);
- Any matter of special importance, the publication of Vincentian books or some other work by a Missionary. These will be reviewed in *Vincentiana*.

Approbations that the Visitor should request from the Superior General (PGV, #338)

These approbations are listed in #338 of the PGV:

- To remove a local superior or to extend the term of a local superior for a third term;
- To validate any alienation of property or business transaction that can prejudice the patrimony of the province or any expense higher than that which is established in the Provincial Norms or by the Episcopal Conference of the country;
- To modify Provincial Norms or the method for the selection of the Visitor;
- To name a regional superior.

Situations in which the Visitor ought to consult the Superior General (PGV, #339)

Two specific cases are mentioned in #339 of the PGV:

- To erect a house or constitute a local community;
- To begin or suppress an important work.

The ordinary way of communicating with the Superior General is through e-mail that is addressed to the Secretary General (cmcuria@cmglobal.org) The e-mail should not be sent directly to the Superior General except for those rare occasions when dealing with

matters that are specifically reserved to him. This procedure is requested for several reasons:

- Usually the Superior General will send a copy of any correspondence to the Secretary General so this material can be placed in the archives (thus sending material to the Superior General creates double work and utilizes limited space on the server).
- If the Superior General, for whatever reason, does not send the correspondence to the Secretary General, then it is not placed in the archives and is lost.
- Also the Superior General might be in a place where, for an period of time, he is unable to access e-mail. However, the Secretary General does this on a daily basis.

2. Relationship between the Visitor and the Secretary General (PGV, #340-359).

- The Visitor has an obligation to send, on a regular basis, a certain number of documents to the Curia (#334). These documents should arrive on time and in a request format by the Secretariat.
- Three things are important with regard to this commitment:
 - Use the format that was sent;
 - Follow the instructions;
 - Send the documents on time.
- What documents are we referring to here? Basically there are two types of documents: certificate of admission to vows and notifications (an important distinction).
 - **Certificate of admission to vows.** There is only one certificate for vows and this is an official document that is signed by the individual involved.
 - **Notifications.** These notifications (regarding ordinations, appointments, deaths) involve that simple communication of information.
- *How should this information be sent?* The following is the general rule:
 - With regard to certification of admission to vows, this information should be sent first by e-mail (without signatures) and then by regular mail (document must be signed).
 - With regard to notifications these can be sent by e-mail or fax but the form that is found in the PGV should be used.

- Here I want to emphasize two things:
 - *First and last names.* This can appear to be something very easy and yet very often can become quite complicated. Each culture has its own manner of constructing names and therefore attention should be given to distinguishing last name (all capital letters) from first name (all small letters).
 - *"Ipso facto" declaration of dismissal* (cf., PGV, Appendix #6). This is an important form. When there is written proof (civil certificate or documents signed by two witnesses) of a confrere having contracted marriage, the Provincial Council should meet as soon as possible and sign this document (which should then be sent immediately to the curia). This document is only a "declaration" of the fact that the confrere has incurred an automatic dismissal ("ipso facto"): the Visitor does not dismiss the confrere, rather the individual confrere, through his action, has separated himself (the Visitor simply declares that such an event has occurred).
- Specific Documents:
 - **The Catalogue.** Today the catalogue is available in two forms: the printed catalogue (traditional) and the on-line catalogue that requires the time and collaboration of everyone so that it can function properly.
 - **Statistics.** At the beginning of every year the curia sends out a form in order to gather together data relative to each province (data as of December 31st). This form should be filled out and sent by e-mail (not faxed or sent by ordinary mail). It is good to keep a copy of this information in the provincial archives so that it can be referred to when completing the newest form. Such information is also useful for historical reasons. This information is sent to the Holy See and published in *Vincentiana*. Unfortunately we often find that the information communicated by the Province does not coincide with the information that the Curia possesses: as a result on such an occasion the information has to be reconciled.
- In compiling statistical data it is important to be clear about the difference between:
 - One who is on a leave of absence with the permission of the Visitor (max. 1 year).
 - One who is on a leave of absence with the permission of the Superior General (max. 3 years).
 - One who is on a leave of absence with a view toward incardination into a diocese (max. 5 years).

- One who is absent from the community without permission (illegitimate absence).
- On the last page of the form, the Visitor is able to communicate the number of confreres who have left the Congregation and the reason for their departure. In this regard it is good to be clear about the following distinction, that is, a one leaves the Congregation because he has been dispensed or has been dismissed.
- **Dispensation from vows** (at the request of an individual confrere) can be granted:
 1. By the Superior General
 - in order to enter another institute,
 - in order to become a member of the diocesan clergy,
 - for confreres and students who have not been ordained as priests.
 2. By the Holy Father
 - who dispenses the individual from all priestly obligations.
- Dismissal (at the initiative of the Congregation) can be:
 - ipso facto (as a result of marriage or apostasy,
 - through a process (the ordinary manner),
 - without a process (in the case of serious external scandal).In cases of dismissal through a process or without a process the documentation should be sent to the Holy See for approval (in this case it is good to indicate if the Holy See has or has not confirmed said dismissal).
- **Information that should not be sent.** The Visitor should not send information of a personal nature (Sunday homilies, videos, power point presentations, etc.) so as not to overload the internet provider at the Curia (the Visitor should also tell the Missionaries to do the same). John Maher will speak about sending information to the Curia for publication in *Nuntia* or *Vincentiana*.

3. Final Observations and General Questions

Communication from the Curia to the Province. Every day the official e-mail account of the province should be checked because it is there that any correspondence from the Curia will be sent (requests, circular letters, etc.). There have been cases in which a Visitor has waited for a simple authorization for months and yet the information

had been sent to the official e-mail address of the Province but said account had not been checked.

If there are problems with the official e-mail address of the province (for example, if the password has been forgotten) please inform the Secretary General so that a solution to the problem can be found. If nothing is said the Secretary General will continue to send correspondence to said address and if there is a problem said correspondence will not be able to be read.

If some serious problem arises the Secretary General will designate some other e-mail account (as has been done with the present Visitor of Ecuador).

Communication from the Province to the Curia. Why? It is important to send timely and official information to the Secretary General regarding changes of address, appointments of the confreres, establishment of new houses and/or communities. If the Secretary General is not informed about changes of address then documents are sent to the wrong address and there is a loss of time and money. Today it should be easy to contact all the confreres by cell phone and/or e-mail and yet very often we do not know how to contact some confreres.

Address. When sending documents use the official address of the curia (cmcuria@cmglobal.org) or that of the Secretary General (secgre@cmglobal.org)... but not both (this avoids useless duplication of messages on the server).

How? When sending e-mail

- one should be clear about who is sending the correspondence, the purpose of the correspondence, and to whom the matter is to be referred (date, subject matter, to whom, from whom). It should be remembered that the documents are filed in our archives. Thus all official documents (and personal letters or letters addressed to friends) or any correspondence written by Visitor and addressed to the curia is placed in the archives. (therefore nicknames should be avoided: Greg, Pete, Johnny).
- the text of any correspondence should be checked for possible spelling errors because all correspondence is filed in our archives and also because this insures that others will be able to understand what is being said (very often correspondence is read by individuals who might not have as their first language the language in which the letter is written).

Visas. With regard to letters needed in order to obtain a visa to travel to Italy it is better for the Visitor to make this request and then receive a response in the name of the individual confrere. When requesting

such a letter, the purpose of the visit should be explained and also such requests should be sent at least a month before the expected arrival in Italy.

Provincial Norms. When these norms have been modified, such changes should be immediately sent for approval. Also as soon as possible, the complete text of the Norms (with all the changes) should be sent by e-mail or ordinary mail.

Permissions from the Visitor (Constitutions, #67). When a confrere is given permission to live outside the house or the community for one year (Constitutions, #67), this information should be made known to the Curia. When the year is completed the Curia should also be informed about the return of the confrere... otherwise the individual is listed among those who are illegitimately absent from the community.

Permissions from the Superior General (Constitutions, #70). The Superior General can grant a confrere, for a serious reason, a leave of absence from the Congregation. Nevertheless it is not enough that the confrere writes to the Superior General (nor is it enough that the Visitor tell the confrere requesting a leave a absence to write the Superior General). Two other letters are necessary: a letter from the Visitor expressing his own view and the opinion of the Council on this matter, and a letter with the written consent of the Ordinary where the confrere will reside.

Petition for Incardination. In this case three letters are needed:

- a letter from the confrere addressed to the Superior General in which the confrere expresses his desire for incardination;
- a letter in which the Visitor and the members of the Provincial Council express their opinion;
- a letter from the benevolent bishop in which he expresses his intention to immediately and definitively incardinate said individual into his diocese or in which he states that the confreres will be admitted *ad experimentum* (max. 5 years).
- **N.B.** In both of these situations (permission to live outside the Congregation and the petition for incardination) we always receive the request from the individual confrere and then the Secretary General responds by explaining the requirements so that the Superior General might take the request under consideration. In reality the Visitor (as explained in PGV, #123-126 and 145-154) should accompany the confrere in this process.

Conclusion

I understand that it is not easy to follow all these processes and communicate to the general curia all of this information with precision. Nevertheless the Visitor has the obligation to do this. This is not something that is on a secondary level of the office of the Visitor as he serves the province and the whole Congregation. I want to conclude this report by thanking those Visitors who do this so well and thus facilitate my work which, as you can imagine, is not always easy and/or enjoyable. I believe that the spirit of service with which we fulfill the duties that have been entrusted to us is revealed in the efforts that we make to assist and provide for the well-being of others. Thank you.

A PRIMER ON PROVINCIAL PLANNING

Joe Agostino, C.M.

- Context:* *Practical Guide for Visitors, Chapter III*
- Article 1: The Provincial Assembly and Other Provincial Meetings
- Article 2: The Provincial Council
- Article 3: Provincial Administrative Offices
- Article 4:** **The Provincial Plan**
- Article 5: Visitations
- Article 6: The Visitor and the Local Superiors

***Where there is no vision, the people perish.
If you do not plan, you plan to fail!***

The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor (C&S, 1). The Provincial Plan will enable the Visitor, working in collaboration with his Council and the confreres of the province, to identify and prioritize its provincial commitments, utilizing both long and short term goals. Provincial planning is a multi-faceted process by which fundamental decisions are made and concrete actions are taken to shape and guide the community as it grows into its future.

Rationale

Provincial planning is an essential task for the future vitality and viability of the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission. We are called to create new ways and to use new means (C&S, 2) to renew our

energies and thus enable us to fulfill our mission into the next generations of Vincentians.

The Provincial Plan, by which this will be accomplished, will unite a province even more closely to the Paschal Mystery, for it will involve both a dying to what is now so that it might rise with Christ to a new life. As St. Vincent told us: "And that was the beginning of your Company. As it was not then what it is now, there is reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it as he wants it".

Desired Outcomes

The implementation of the Provincial Plan will facilitate a province's evaluation of its works and ministries so that it may remain in a continual state of renewal (C&S, 2).

The Provincial Plan will enable the confreres to seek, as a province, the will of the Father. Through an ongoing process of dialogue and consultation common directions will surface and develop, which will lead to making decisions about the future ministries of the province. (C&S, 37) Thus confreres will choose their future and not have it simply thrust upon them. The Provincial Plan affirms that all of our confreres are our most valuable resource.

The Provincial Plan will empower community life, fostered by the mission, and thus promote both personal formation and communal development for the work of the evangelization of the poor (C&S, 21.2).

Methodology

See

- The process begins with the involvement of all the confreres, giving their input into the general themes that have been chosen as the focus of a plan.
- The incorporation of as many confreres as possible in all stages of the planning process is essential for the buy-in of the province in the plan that will be promulgated.

Judge

- There are many possible strategies that can be utilized in the drafting of a plan. Right from the start, it is important to make clear:
 - a) How the process will work,
 - b) The parameters (mandate) within which the confreres are asked to work,

- c) The “untouchables” which are not to come to the table for discussion, and
- d) The fact that the recommendations received are advisory, dependent upon the Visitor’s approval in consultation with his Council.

Act

- It is important to give the confreres an opportunity to respond to a proposed plan before its promulgation. A Provincial Convocation or Meeting is a good vehicle for such a process.
- It is also important that the confreres see a concrete plan for implementation, with those responsible for implementation clearly named and empowered to do this work.
- Professionals in this field would usually advise that any plan, to be effective, should not last more than three to five years.