

# International Visitors Meeting: Final Remarks

July 13, 2013

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My dear brothers in St. Vincent:

It is hard for me to believe that our time together has drawn to a close. It seems like just yesterday that we arrived and were first finding our way around this beautiful campus. As our here ends, I want to share some of my thoughts with you, so that together we may better discover how to put the “Lines of Action” into action, enhance our future as Vincentians. As you return to your provinces, I offer a summary of my observations on what I have ‘seen and heard’ here.

## **Lines of Action in action**

As you know, this was our theme, and I ask myself: how fervently and consistently is this happening in the provinces of the Congregation? I have listened intently at the large group sessions, in individual meetings, and in informal exchanges. I believe that what we began together at the 2010 General Assembly is alive and well. I ask each of you as Visitors to continue to so all within your power to put the “Lines of Action” into action however you can.

## **Movement toward unity**

A concrete example of the “Lines of Action in action” that I observed in our time together was a movement from ‘provincialism’ to a greater appreciation of the international nature of the Congregation, as manifested in our varied languages and cultures. I encourage you to continue to become a more unified and organic unit for the good of the Church and the advancement of our Vincentian charism. We can solidify this reality concretely by:

- Sharing our resources (personnel being the most important) and entering into economic solidarity, so that together we may better realize what we have and share is the patrimony of the

poor. Let me provide you with a simple example of economic solidarity that one Visitor shared with me. In his province, they take a yearly collection from confreres in all works, asking them to contribute whatever they can. The proceeds go to the poor. Imagine the level of economic solidarity we as a Congregation could attain if each province did the same! When I was a seminarian, we were encouraged to enroll in the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, costs 25 cents – the same amount since it started in my province over 75 years ago! As small a sum as this is, these funds, gathered from ordinary people, enabled us to run seminaries, a mission in Panama, and help those in need. Thus, monies from the MM became the patrimony of the poor which has supported our province.

- There were a number of inventive ideas about how we might share economic solidarity. I would encourage you to explore ideas and to dialogue about them in your Visitors Conference meetings.

### **Ratio Formationis**

We spent a significant amount of time on formation, and in particular the *Ratio Formationis*, which has been in the process of revision for over two years. As the committee of confreres that put it together can attest, this has been a grass roots project from the start, seeking ideas and input from confreres. As the Visitors have requested, further revisions will now take place, as per your wishes. Thus, while the promulgation of the final document may be delayed, we are confident that the end result will be satisfactory to all.

### **Reconfiguration**

In terms of our discussion on reconfiguration, I reiterate what I said earlier: at its core, it is about renewal, not reduction. Although the necessary outcome of reconfiguration is not necessarily fusion, there are provinces represented here today that simply will die if they fail to come together. This sentiment was echoed in comments from many of you. To quote from our presentation on provincial planning, **it is time to see, judge, and act**, so that you can make reconfiguration a reality in your provinces and Visitors Conferences. Another aspect of reconfiguration is renewal for mission, and as Dr. Carolyn Woo of Catholic Relief Services told us, there are many new faces and ways of poverty that call us to dialogue with the poor and to listen to their cries. To make the “Lines of Action” a true reality, we must find ways to walk more closely with them and to respond to their needs.

## **Systemic Change**

I hope you made the connection (as did I) with the phrase Carolyn used repeatedly to describe the CRS methodology for service: **Integral human development** (IHD). It is quite like our methodology of systemic change. I know that for some confreres, there is concern over the specific phrase of “systemic change”. I urge you not to get stuck in rhetoric, but instead to embrace the reality of what both IHD and systemic change stand for: a lasting way to evangelize the poor and live out our charism.

## **Collaboration**

A lasting benefit of putting the “Lines of Action into action” is not only accepting the reality of reconfiguration, and the essential importance of systemic change, but the call for us to be collaborators with one another as confreres, with members of the Vincentian Family, and with God’s poor. Our discussions should lead us to not only encourage, but to model collaboration. This is in line with our Constitutions, vows, and Vincentian virtues. Although we are a well respected and long-standing Society of Apostolic Life, we must not allow ourselves to assume a position of superiority, but rather to enter into in a circle of solidarity with other branches of the Vincentian family. At the center of that circle are Jesus and St. Vincent, who lead us to Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. They are the source of our energy and charism.

## **Leadership**

Collaboration demands good solid leaders, called forth in both initial and ongoing formation. Here we affirmed the need to develop the next generation of servant leaders in the Congregation. Therefore, I encourage you to seek out at least one confrere in your province with leadership potential and consider sending him to the series of Vincentian Family Collaborative Action programs, the next one being held in Paris in June 8-13, 2014.

## **Vincentian Missionary Parishes**

Regarding our theme, “Creative Fidelity in our Ministries” from the 2010 Lines of Action, in our discussion on Vincentian parishes, I heard from many of you that to formulate a practical guide for parishes is not practical, due to the variations on how we carry out this apostolate.

artificial barriers of class and societal status. He reminds his listeners that ultimately they belong to God, his loving Father, who will always care for them. To move from fear to faith, one needs trust and transparency: "Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be made known" (Mt. 10:26).

Both readings are about the call to be fearless in faith as we go forth from here today. In the Genesis passage, Joseph twice tells his brothers, "Have no fear". In the Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples three times "Do not be afraid". And so it should be clear that message is meant for us as well. But perhaps we should delve more deeply into the meaning of these fears and their remedy.

The fear portrayed in Genesis is best characterized as a fear of the past, a recurring guilt and anxiety Joseph's brothers are held captive by because of their sins against him. It is Joseph who helps them to make peace with their past. In your role as Visitor, I am sure you have had to be 'Joseph' to your confreres who find it difficult to make peace with their past. Perhaps at times you have even found yourself in similar straits to that of your brothers. Like Joseph with his brothers, we must help our confreres move beyond guilt, past recriminations, and to seek God's grace so that in time, they may see what has occurred in their lives as part of a plan of the Lord's loving Providence. In the challenges and changes that we face as confreres, provinces, and as a Congregation, we must help one another to become reconciled to the pain of the past to face the possibilities in the present. Only then can we embrace and enter into a future filled with hope.

This is where the daily Eucharist, reflection on God's Word, St. Vincent's life and our Constitutions will strengthen you and your brothers in deepening our Vincentian vocation. These gifts, along with our rich Vincentian spirituality, can enable God's grace to break through our human limitations, freeing us from the bondage of self-centeredness and fear that it generates. And so today I say to each of you: tell my confreres, our brothers in your provinces: have no fear of the past, as the Lord Jesus and St. Vincent call you forth and accompany you now and always!

In the Gospel, Jesus bids his disciples to be unafraid of the future. Using familiar images, Jesus reminds his disciples that they are watched over by his heavenly Father, a caring, provident God. His repeated words: "Do not be afraid" are not only words of consolation; they are a command to go forth in quiet confidence and total trust, as Christ vows to always accompany us.

"Do not be afraid". These are words we need to hear and heed in these days. The mantle of leadership all of you have so generously assumed can be heavy and difficult. In a time of so many challenging problems in our world and Church, they no doubt affect your provinces

and local communities as well. It is easy to see how one can become overburdened!

Yet, both the words of the Gospel and the Eucharist we share give us the strength and grace to continue to trust in God and to live our lives with the belief that he wishes, in the words of the prophet Jeremiah to give us "a future filled with hope" (Jer. 29:11). That 'hope' is not a far-away wish or passing idea, but it is embodied in the charism we bear, and the life we share with our brothers in community and all members of the Vincentian Family. Let our time together be one in which we resolve to 'have no fear' and to allow the life, words, and way of St. Vincent to guide us, as we all follow Jesus Christ, our way, truth, and life.

In my opening talk, I used the story of the Transfiguration to focus on our time together, referring to Peter's words to Jesus upon experiencing the glorious events they saw: "Lord, it is good that we are here!". They are, I believe, a fitting description of our gathering here at St. John's. Now, as we depart, I offer you Jesus' final words to his disciples from that same story: "Jesus touched them and said, 'Rise, and do not be afraid'" (Mt. 17:7). We have all been 'touched by Jesus' in this time together, and so as we leave this 'mountain of meeting' to return to our own provinces, let us pray that the transforming love of Jesus, so real in the life of St. Vincent, will be ours as well so we may share it with our confreres and God's poor, who are our portion.

Rise, my brothers, and do not be afraid.