

VINCENTIANA

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July-September 2013



Highlights from the 2013 International Meeting

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

This issue of *Vincentiana* is devoted to the proceedings of the International Visitor's Meeting held from July 1-13, 2013 at St. John's University in New York City. This event, which occurs midway between General Assemblies of the Congregation, is important. It brings together Visitors and the General Council for a time of dialogue, instruction, and mutual sharing. It also provides an opportunity to see how the work of the 2010 General Assembly is being implemented, and to assess what must be done to fulfill these tasks before the next Assembly.

The articles herein are representative of the main proceedings, but not all-inclusive. For those wishing to view the entire proceedings of the International Visitors Meeting, please go to our web site www.cmglobal.org. Happily, (and for the first time!) you will find them accessible in English, Spanish, and French all at the same time. Fr. Giuseppe Turati, Secretary General and the "team of translators" made this possible. I thank the tireless efforts of Fr. John Freund, web master for "Fam-Vin" and "CM-Global". By his use of digital media, we captured the meeting in "real time", with many added features that enriched our experience of community and charisma.

I hope these articles in *Vincentiana* will not just be a chronicle of this meeting, but a gauge to measure our progress in implementing the work of our General Assembly: "*Creative Fidelity to the Mission*". Its key constructs: *dialogue with the poor, systemic change, re-configuration, formation, and engagement with the Vincentian Family* are not only words on paper, or duties of Visitors and Councils, but the responsibility of every confrere. By re-reading and reflecting on this *Vincentiana*, may we renew our commitment to embrace these goals *now*.

Although not overtly visible in these pages, any participant at the International Meeting of Visitors will agree that the event was flawless in its planning and execution. The Preparatory Commission, headed by Fr. Joe Agostino, did a wonderful job in its planning. The hospital-

ity provided by St. John's University was outstanding in every aspect, as the confreres present will readily attest. Bernadette Lavin and her staff at SJU were attentive to every detail and readily and generously responded to the needs of every confrere. Fr. Michael Carroll, Visitor of the Eastern Province, USA who graciously hosted the event, and Fr. Donald J. Harrington, President of St. John's who not only hosted but underwrote the massive cost of this meeting, deserve our thanks.

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter of the Superior General to the Vincentian Family

*"Let us persevere in running the race that lies
before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus,
the leader and perfecter of faith".*

(Hebrews 12:2)

To all the members of the Vincentian Family:

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill our hearts,
now and always!

Brothers and sisters, each year at the time of the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul we reflect on a theme that enables us to deepen our spirituality and to strengthen our commitment to the poor. This year we want to reflect on faith, the central theme of our Christian identity and a theme that has been proposed by the Church.

In the context of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, the great *"agglornamento"* of the Church in the twentieth century, Pope Benedict XVI has called us together to celebrate a Year of Faith (a year that was initiated on October 11, 2012 and will conclude on the feast of Christ the King, November 24, 2013). Pope Benedict, in his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, tells us that this is a time *to set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance* (#2).

Throughout the history of the Church Christians have been called together to deepen their understanding of some specific theme – all of which are important and necessary for faith. This time, however, our coming together is most important because we are being called to reflect upon that which is the central theme of our relationship with God, namely, faith.

It is impossible to believe in God without faith and it is impossible to follow Jesus Christ without faith and it is also impossible to be a member of the Church without faith; all of this is obvious. What is so obvious, however, on the one hand, is not always that obvious as we live out our life. Therefore, to celebrate a year of faith implies that, as Christians, we celebrate Jesus Christ as the center and the culmination of our faith.

The starting point and the objective of faith is Jesus Christ. The letter to the Hebrews tells us: *Let us persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith* (Heb. 12:2). Jesus is the basis for our faith and is also the content of our faith. Jesus, the Son of God who reveals the Father to us. As a man Jesus is also the model believer. He is *the leader* because he has initiated a new manner of believing in God. He is *the perfecter* because he lived the fullness of faith. Jesus is truly man because he is a true believer and, as the letter to the Romans tells us, through his faith we are saved (Rom. 3:21-26).

Throughout the history of the Church there are many people who have walked the way with Jesus and, as a result, these people have become models for us. One of these important models is Mary, our Mother. The gospels highlight Mary's faith when it is stated: *Blessed are you who believed*. (Luke 1:45).

Vincentian spirituality is centered on Jesus. Vincentians are those men and women who ask: what would Jesus do in this situation? Therefore, with regard to this theme of faith, Vincentians should ask: how did Jesus live his faith? We see that Jesus unconditionally handed over his life to God, to the one whom he called, "Father". Jesus' life was one of absolute trust and abandonment to the Father's hands. Even during times of great suffering Jesus remained confident and overcame every temptation to renounce that trust and thus rely on his own effort.

For us this means that Jesus is not only a person in whom we believe but he is also "the way", a model of how to believe. In this, then, Jesus is a leader who goes before us, who points the way. Indeed Jesus himself is the way, the leader, a man of faith. Therefore our situation as believers involves an act of profound confidence. Like Jesus, we are invited to abandon ourselves to the hands of God, even when we experience loneliness and suffering.

Throughout the history of the Vincentian Family, many individuals have given this witness of faith and today some of these persons are honored as saints, blessed and/or servants of God. These same individuals have become reference points for our life. Therefore with Jesus Christ as our starting point, we are invited to live our life from the perspective of God; we are invited to live in the same way as Jesus did.

Vincent reminds us that *faith means seeing in the way that God sees* and that *faith allows us to discover Christ in the poor*. The poor are the beneficiaries of our spirituality and Jesus is the means to reach them, but only through faith in Jesus and through the faith of Jesus can we open the path that allows Jesus to enter.

Therefore, as we seek to find Jesus we discover the poor because we cannot understand Jesus without establishing a close relationship with those who are poor. Jesus said the same thing when he told the people that he had come to be good news for the poor. Saint Louise also reminds us of this fact when she writes: *The neighbor has been given to me in the place of Our Lord, by means of a love which his goodness knows and which he has revealed to my heart, although I am unable to put it into words* (SWLM: 821 A. 26).

Jesus Christ teaches us the way of fidelity that enables us to live our life from the perspective of God; faithfulness to God in Jesus Christ and faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the poor. Elisabeth de Robiano (the founder of the Servants of the Poor of Ghysseghem) tells us: *“God will not fail you if you have truly handed yourself over to God... and have done this forever”*. Our commitment to God is not time limited but is done forever. This is the most difficult dimension of faith because ever before us we see things that are disposable and temporary. We would like our commitment to have some specific time limitation but true faith is forever.

Thus fidelity involves self-sacrifice, self-renunciation and the handing over of oneself. Fidelity, also, involves courage to endure all things for the love of God who is revealed in the poor. Ignatia Jorth (the founder of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Zagreb) refers to this idea when she tells us: *“We are at the service of the poor. The poor are children of God and we are called to serve them, which is a most noble task. If our ministry results in a lack of gratitude and insults, it is because this allows us to follow more closely in the footsteps of our Divine Teacher”*. It is not always easy to be faithful to God. Being focused on God results in a certain satisfaction but also involves the cross and not everyone is willing to confront the cross. Therefore the way of faith is a path that requires daily conversion.

Today, Vincentians, revitalized by faith, must make a contribution to the world. In some places people believe in no one and nothing and in other places people believe in too much... but material things do not give life but only result in death. Our creative fidelity ought to be a living witness of faith in the midst of a world that needs to be strengthened and healed in so many different ways. We are invited to live a faith that is capable of transforming the world. Blessed Frederic Ozanam stated: *“Our faith, always young, is able to satisfy the needs of every era and heal the wounds of all people”*.

Let us allow Jesus Christ to be our teacher and let us allow Jesus Christ to be the path that leads us to the Father. May we not only believe in Jesus Christ, but rather may we believe Jesus Christ. May we also follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ that enable us to be faithful to the God of life, to the God who wants to give life to those who are impoverished.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

Tempo Forte Report

June 2013

Rome, July 2013

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

This is a synthesis of our June 2013 Tempo Forte meeting, held at the provincial house of the Province of Naples. We greatly enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of our confreres in Naples!

Updates

- We discussed our "final preparations" for the July International Visitor's meeting in New York at St. John's University. Much time and preparation has gone into the planning of this event, and we are grateful to all who have worked so hard to bring it about.
- We discussed another event related to being a Visitor: the January 2014 workshop for New Visitors, which will be held in Rome, 2014. We asked Fr. Claudio Santangelo to be coordinator of this workshop. He will be assisted by Fr. Zeracristos, Assistant General. We have a number of former Visitors invited to this workshop. Some have been at re-nominated as Visitors, either in their province of origin or for other provinces, so they can share their wisdom and experience of being a Visitor for the benefit of all present.
- We submitted a proposal to the Franz Foundation for a project to transform Vincentian parishes into 'missionary parishes'. In so doing, we hope to stimulate a deeper sense of evangelization in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul in our parishes in the Congregation.
- We then had a detailed discussion on reconfiguration being considered in the number of different provinces throughout the Congregation, including Austria and Germany, Brazil, France, Spain, and Italy, and CLAPVI-South, CLAPVI-North. Our hope is that through this process of reconfiguration, provinces may intensify their collaboration for the good of our mission. Some current examples of this include the formation of a popular mission team in the southern zone of CLAPVI (provinces of Chile, Peru, Argentina and Ecuador).

The process of reconfiguration is moving along well among three of the four provinces of Spain. In preparation, they have created commissions for new evangelization, formation, finance, juridical questions, communication, and coordination in general. Fr. Stanislav Zontak has been named to assist the three provinces of Italy as they move toward reconfiguration and eventual fusion by 2016, in time for the General Assembly.

- We formed an executive committee to move forward our European non-profit foundation (called an 'ONLUS' in Europe), and gave it a name: Vincentian Solidarity.
- We continue to move forward with implementing the on-line catalogue. We now have a contract for continual maintenance of the site, drawn up by Fr. Joe Geders, Econome General. Petter Lovaas, the professional technician from Niagara University will assume this duty. He has already contributed a great amount of time and energy to this project.
- We decided to begin the remote preparations to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation in 2017.
- The Superior General gave an update on the recent meeting of the Union of Superior Generals (held twice yearly) which discussed the theme of authority and obedience since the time of Vatican II until today. Fr. Javier Alvarez is now a member of their theological commission, which is planning to organize a Congress of Religious Life in 2015.

News & Reports of the General Curia

- The Superior General and the General Council have named Father Jorge Luis Rodríguez Baquero as sub-director for communications and the Vincentian Family. Fr. Rodríguez is from the Province of Columbia. Fr. Rodríguez will be replacing Fr. Juventino Castellero, who will move on to a new mission when he finishes his time in the Curia in early 2014.
- We also formerly approved naming Fr. Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel as both Procurator and Postulator General for the Congregation. Fr. Shijo will replace Fr. Albert Vernaschi as Procurator General, and Fr. Luigi Mezzadri as Postulator General. I wish to thank both Fathers Vernaschi and Mezzadri for their most generous service to the Congregation.
- I also wish to take this opportunity to thank Fr. Felix Alvarez, who has been a member of our community at the Curia, working as a translator for our offices and publications, and also generously serv-

ing as assistant house superior. Fr. Felix will return to his Province of Madrid. However, he has agreed to continue as a translator, for which I am grateful.

- A meeting in 2014 being planned between the General Councils of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission. This will mark the first time in the history of our two communities that a formal meeting such as this will be held. It is our hope this meeting will reinforce our mutual responsibilities to one another and help us to witness to our Vincentian charism for the other branches and members of the Vincentian Family.

Office of Communications

- We received a report from Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications. Among other things, he reported that there will be a daily report on the proceedings of the International Visitors Meeting in New York via the website of the Congregation: www.cmglobal.org. In addition to daily updates, confreres can participate in an on-line forum to react and discuss in "real time" the different topics discussed by the Visitors at the meeting.
- The Director of Communications also presented several ideas on ways to continue to improve NUNTIA and Vincentiana. A new feature called "Meditation Moment" in which the General Council shares their ideas on the meaning of sections of the Constitutions for the benefit of confreres. The first meditation will be on the chapter on Vocation, nos. 1-9.
- Fr. John Maher will present sessions entitled "Communication in the Congregation" at the International Visitors meeting. He will also make a presentation on SIEV; its goals, objectives and activities, asking Visitors to assess how it can serve the needs of their provinces. He will invite Visitors to evaluate the Strategic Communication Plan, which put the General Assembly's "Lines of Action" into yearly themes with specific strategies.

CIF Program Paris

- We received a report on the Center for International Formation from co-directors, Fathers Dan-Paul Borlik and Marcelo Manimtim. Since Fr. Marcelo will leave at the end of 2013, we officially approved Fr. Borlik as the new Director, and Fr. Adam Bandura, Province of Poland as the Assistant Director. Both appointments will take effect in January, 2014.

Wise Money Management Workshop

- Also, while we are still finalizing the plans for the August "Wise Money Management Workshop" in Paris, we are also looking ahead. We discussed possible international and regional meetings as a follow-up. It is hoped that planning for follow-up will concretize matters discussed in this workshop, specifically to help provinces improve their ability to write grants and develop funding for projects of evangelization and social development.

VSO

- We received a report on the Vincentian Solidarity Office from Fr. Miles Heinen with an in-depth self-evaluation. We are reviewing their report. As always, your support of the VSO is essential to help them continue to assist our provinces most in need.

Economic matters

- We discussed a plan to re-align the mission distribution fund, in an ongoing effort to deal with our limited resources and to help provinces adjust to the economic crisis. As for the realignment, we made a reduction in funds awarded, and had to reduce the number of provinces receiving funding. Our aim is to be just and fair while assisting those most in need. We will seek the help of other provinces to move them toward self-sufficiency.

International Missions

- As part of our ongoing formation, we did a study and renovation of the statutes of our International Missions of the Congregation. Once finalized, they will be sent out to encourage confreres to respond to volunteering for the international missions.
- We received good news from our international mission in **Cochabamba**: finally, the parochial house has been completed. Now, after three years, the confreres finally have their own house to call home, and so the three confreres in this mission can concentrate on the mission which has been entrusted to them.
- In their international mission in **Papua New Guinea**, we were asked by the Archdiocese of Bomana to provide a Rector for the diocesan seminary. I am happy to report that we have assigned Father Jacek Tendej, Province of Poland, who is experienced in seminary work.

Once he arrives, he will adjust to Papua New Guinea and the seminary, joining our confrere, Father Emmanuel Lapaz, who continues there.

- Our confrere, Bishop Rolly Santos of the Diocese of Alotau-Sideia, has informed us that a second member of the Congregation has joined Father Homero. He is Fr. Marceliano Oabel, a former director of the internal seminary for the Province of the Philippines.
- From the Solomon Islands, we have named Father Jose Manjaly of the Province of India-South as the new mission superior. Fr. Tewolde Teclmicael, Province of Eritrea, is to be named the new rector of the seminary. Fr. Greg Walsh, former superior the mission told us of the good work and generous service provided by Polona Berlec, a lay missionary.
- With regard to our international mission in Angola, the new missionary to join the team is Father Jason Cristan Soto Herrera, who is learning the language and applying for a visa.
- In the international mission in Tunisia, joining Fr. Firmin Mola Mbalo will be Fr. Jean-Pierre Mangulu, a confrere from the Province of Congo, former Director of the Daughters of Charity in Haiti, and liaison to the Vincentian Family there. He begins in August.
- Our new mission in the Punta Arenas Chile is underway. We receive regular updates from the mission superior, Father Pablo Vargas, together with Father Gerardo Diaz.
- In a report given by Fr. Zeracristos on COVIAM (Conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar), we were informed that the international mission in Chad, supported by the General Curia and COVIAM, will become the responsibility of the Visitor of Nigeria. There are two confreres in this mission; one from Madagascar, and one from Nigeria.
- We reviewed applications of confreres who volunteered for international missions. Four confreres have been assigned to these missions to begin later this year. We thank those who have volunteered, and continue to remind confreres to reflect and pray to discern if the Lord is calling them to serve in these missions, either for a period of time or longer.
- We received a request from the apostolic vicariate of Beni, Bolivia, (where the Superior General celebrated Holy Week this year), seeking three confreres for the mission: two priests and a brother. Presently, we are not able to begin another international mission, but we are evaluating if the Congregation can assist them in a temporary or partial way.

- We received a request from a Bishop of Musoma, Tanzania to send confreres to work with the Vincentian Family and Daughters of Charity in that part of Tanzania. We also received a request from a Bishop of Benin to send a fourth confrere. However, we had to ask the Bishop to promise us financial support if we succeed in finding a fourth man to go, as our budget is limited. We hope for assistance from this Bishop to assign a confrere.
- A most difficult item to get for missionaries is vehicles for transportation in rural areas where roads are so primitive. Presently, we are hoping to get a car for the missionaries in the Benin and Chad missions. This is not an easy venture: many charitable agencies are unwilling to fund such expenses. **Once again, your contributions to the VSO really count!**
- We were informed that the Province of Venezuela is hoping to sponsor a mission to be located in the Amazon region of that country. The confreres of the Province of Venezuela will invite missionaries from around the Congregation to join two of their confreres in this work. They are seeking a third confrere to assist them in this new mission.

Vincentian Family

- We received a report from Father Joe Agostino on the Vincentian Family Collaboration Project, a group that created and coordinated a week-long symposium held in Paris in May. This was a 'pilot project' with thirty-five participants from a number of countries. It was designed to promote collaboration among branches of the Vincentian Family. Being in Paris at the "cradle" of the Congregation was an added bonus for participants. At the program's end, representatives from the Congregation agreed with the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission to continue; in fact some on the commission volunteered to do a program that will prepare Spanish and French speakers in presenting future workshops.

Visitor Conferences

- We discussed the activities of various Visitors' Conferences throughout the world. The Asia Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC) had a formation session for young confreres less than five years ordained. They have a workshop in September for formators. APVC named Varghese (Biju) Chittoparamban as new executive secretary, replacing Fr. Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel, who now serves at the Curia as Procurator and Postulator General.

- From the Conference of Visitors in Europe (CEVIM), we received information that they have decided to hold the next internal seminary program in Naples.
- In COVIAM, the conference in Africa, besides the recent decision to entrust the mission in Chad to the Province of Nigeria, they are moving forward for the creation of a major seminary for the continent of Africa.

Finally, the coming schedule of the Superior General is as follows: after the Visitors Meeting at St. John's University in July, he goes to Bello Horizonte, Brazil for the Vincentian Family Youth gathering prior to World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro. In August, goes to Paris to meet with Provincial Economes and to give a talk to them as well as to speak at the "Wise Money Management" workshop. Then he vacations in the USA with his family. In September, he visits a mission in Kazakhstan of the Province of Poland, and will visit the Province of Colombia to celebrate the 100th anniversary of their foundation.

As we enter into the summer months I pray that you will find time to pray, reflect, relax, recreate so that you be may renewed in our mission to follow Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

Changes on the General Council of the Curia

Fr. Varghese Thottamkara, C.M.
named Coadjutor-Bishop in Nekemte, Ethiopia

Fr. Matthew Kallammakal, C.M.
appointed new Assistant to the Superior General



The following was released by the Vatican Press Office at the daily briefing on June 26, 2013

The Holy Father has appointed Rev. Varghese Thottamkara, C.M. as Coadjutor Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte in Ethiopia. Fr. Thottamkara, a former missionary in Ethiopia, is currently Assistant to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians). As bishop, he will

be assigned the titular see of Cullu.

Fr. Varghese Thottamkara C.M. was born June 2, 1959 at Thottuva (located in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, India). He joined the Congregation of the Mission in 1982, made final vows May 10, 1986 and was ordained January 6, 1987.

After ordination he held a number of posts in pastoral and seminary formation ministries. From 1988-1990, he was pastor in parishes of Muniguda and Allada, in Diocese of Berhampur, Orissa (India). From 1990-1993, he served Vice-Rector of the Minor Seminary and professor in Ambo, Ethiopia. From 1993-1995, Fr. Varghese was Rector and professor at the Major Seminary of the Vincentians in Addis Ababa. From 1995-1998, he went to Rome for studies, obtaining a Licentiate in Moral Theology at the *Angelicum*. From 1998-2005, he was Director of the Ethiopian College and a Professor at the Theological Institute of St. Francis of Addis Ababa. From 2005-2006, he served at the General

Curia as Procurator General; and from 2006-2010, he was the Provincial Superior of the Province of South India.

Since 2010, he has been an Assistant to the Superior General of the Vincentians in Rome.



The following information was released by the Office of Communications of the Congregation of the Mission on July 5, 2013

Fr. Matthew Kallammakal, C.M., a former provincial of the Northern India Province of the Congregation of the Mission, was named Assistant Superior General, effective September 15, 2013. This announcement was made today by Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M. Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission at the International Meeting of Visitors (Provincial Superiors) of the Congregation held July 1-13 at St. John's University in Queens, NY.

Fr. Kallammakal, born in 1959, entered the Congregation in 1983, and was ordained on January 2, 1988. He received a doctorate in philosophy from DePaul University in Chicago, IL, and has worked in seminary formation and parish ministry in the Northern Province of India. In 2004, he was named Visitor and served in that position for nine years, finishing in February of this year. His current ministry is educator at a youth hostel sponsored by the Province, and he also serves as a visiting lecturer in philosophy at a local seminary.

The appointment of Fr. Kallammakal to this position was necessitated by the recent news by the Holy See in naming Fr. Varghese Thottamkara, C.M. (current Assistant Superior General) as coadjutor Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemete, Ethiopia. Fr. Thottamkara was elected Assistant Superior General at the 2010 General Assembly. He will be ordained a bishop on August 13, 2013 in Rome, and will depart for Nekemete, Ethiopia in mid-September.

Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, noted: "The news of Fr. Varghese's appointment was bittersweet for all of us at the General Curia. We are sad to lose the advice, wise counsel, and presence of Fr. Varghese among us. However, his appointment as a bishop in Ethiopia, where he previously served as a missionary for ten years, is an affirmation of the wonderful work of our Vincentian confreres. I thank him for his dedication and leadership as an Assistant Superior General, and especially for all he has contributed in his thirty-one years of membership in the Congregation of the Mission. I welcome Fr. Matthew Kallammakal to the General Curia. He has shown himself to be a proven and respected leader in the Congregation, and I look forward to living and working with him".

THEME

Highlights from the 2013 International Meeting

Our Vincentian Identity in Today's Church

José Ignacio Fernández Mendoza, C.M.

Visitor of the Province of Ecuador

In 2012 on the feast of the Assumption, I traveled by bus from Santo Domingo de los Colorados to the city of Quito, the capital of Ecuador, a journey of one hundred kilometers (sixty-two miles). During the trip I had an interesting conversation with an unknown gentleman seated next to me. As we traveled toward our destination this man, somewhat intrigued, asked me: *Please, would you tell me who you are and what is your profession?* I explained to him as best as I could my situation: *I am a priest and I belong to a missionary community whose task it is to evangelize and serve the poor.* The man's eyes opened wide and he said: *I thought something like that. Now I understand! When we greeted one another at the beginning of the trip I suspected that you were someone special. So you are a priest! I like the fact that you serve the poor.* This unknown individual had obliged me to reveal, to a certain degree, my heart and to describe in a few words some characteristics of my Vincentian identity.

Identity

The word *identity* is derived from two Latin words: *idem* and *identitas* which means *the same* or, in other words, that which is proper and unique, that which characterizes an individual or a group of people. Individuals have an identity to the degree that they have clothed themselves in the qualities proper to their condition. They have this

identity when they are truly that which others expect of them; when their life and activity bridge the gap between the ideals that they have accepted and the response that they have made in light of those ideals.

Vincentian and Ecclesial Identity

Vincentian identity of the Congregation of the Mission refers to its relationship as a whole: provinces, local communities, and individual missionaries in as much as they are followers of St. Vincent de Paul: the identity that is lived and revealed through word and action.

Within the Church there are various charisms, each one with its own uniqueness. Charisms handed down by the respective Founders and recognized by the Church compliment and give character to the visible presence of the Church in every era. The Holy Spirit gifted our Founder with a particular gift that led him to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. Therefore in the heart of the Church and in every era the Congregation of the Mission must give new life to the charismatic Vincentian identity that it has received from the Founder.

Objective identity

Experts speak about two identities: objective and subjective. I will briefly present some documents which in the course of history gave concrete form to the objective identity of the Congregation of the Mission. I will refer to the writings of Saint Vincent and to historically significant documents, especially our Constitutions formulated after the Second Vatican Council.

The identity of the Congregation of the Mission according to its Founder

The identity of an institution can be expressed in various ways: through its life, activity, events, and customs; through written statements and in particular, through the formulation of constitutions. The Congregation of the Mission is no exception. Our Founder designed a way of being for his most beloved establishment, the Congregation of the Mission.

The spirit that animated Saint Vincent as well as the confreres of the Little Company was the same: to dedicate their lives to the evangelization of the poor, providing for their corporal and spiritual needs. What follows are some words that reveal the personal spirit of our Founder... a spirit that he communicated to the confreres. For brevity

I will cite three passages from Vincent's later conferences that were addressed to the first members of the Congregation.

In the October 15 1655 conference on *Conformity to the Will of God*, we read: *The Son of God came to evangelize the poor. And are not we, Messieurs, sent for the same purpose? Yes, Missioners are sent to evangelize the poor. Oh, what a happiness to do on earth the same thing Our Lord did there, which is to teach poor persons the way to heaven* (CCD: XI: 283-284). We can conclude that a very special characteristic of the identity of the Congregation is found in the following of Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. In the conference dated May 17, 1658 on *Observance of the Rules*, we find the following words: *Our Lord came and was sent by His Father to evangelize poor persons. Pauperibus evangelizare misit me. Pauperibus, to the poor, Messieurs, to the poor, as, by the grace of God, the Little Company strives to do* (CCD: XI: 3).

In the December 6, 1658 conference on the *Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission*, Vincent stated: *Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that's what He did, and what He wants to continue to do through us. We have great reason to humble ourselves here, seeing that the Eternal Father is using us for the plans of His Son, who came to preach the Gospel to poor persons... So then, what a great obligation we have to His Infinite Goodness for having associated us with Him in this divine ministry... but there isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor and never preaching... that's what Missioners profess to do; it's their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor* (CCD: XII: 71).

The identity of the Congregation of the Mission according to some significant documents

On January 12, 1632, Pope Urban VII in the bull *Salvatoris Nostri*, wrote: *The principal purpose and special goal of this Congregation and its members is, by the grace of God, along with their own salvation, to dedicate themselves to the salvation of those who live on the estates, in the countryside, on farms, in hamlets, and in insignificant places* (CCD: XIIIa: 298).

In the *Common Rules* that Vincent distributed to the Missionaries on May 17, 1658 we read the following words: *The whole purpose of the Congregation is: 1] to have a genuine commitment to grow in holiness, patterning ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master himself graciously taught us in what he said and did; 2] to preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas; 3] to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry* (Common Rules, I: 1).

On September 22, 1655, Pope Alexander VII in the brief *Ex Commisa Nobis*, approved vows for the Congregation of the Mission, whose members would dedicate their whole life to the salvation of poor country people (CCD: XIIIa: 417). The Constitutions of July 19, 1953 contain the following text: *Its general purpose is to labor for the glory of God and the perfection of its members; its special purpose is: 1] to preach the Gospel to the poor, especially the country people; 2] to help ecclesiastics to acquire the knowledge and virtues required by their state of life; 3] to carry on works of charity and education* (C, article 2).

According to the 1984 Constitutions: *The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ, evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively; make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR I, 3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (CR XII, 13); work at evangelizing the poor, especially the abandoned; help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor* (C. #1).

Some have said that the Congregation of the Mission has been affected by ambiguity from its origin, with multiple formulations of our purpose. We are known by various names. We are clerics, not religious or diocesan priests. Nevertheless, it is true that subsequent formulations of the purpose of the Congregation reach one dominant point: the evangelization of the poor.

The identity of the Congregation of the Mission according to the present Constitutions

In speaking about the objective identity of the Congregation we should reflect on the new Constitutions, written during the 1980 General Assembly, approved by the Holy See on June 29, 1984 and promulgated by the Superior General, Richard McCullen on September 27, 1984. The Constitutions took effect on January 25, 1985; thus, our Constitutions are twenty-eight years old.

We should give thanks to those confreres who followed the directives of the Second Vatican Council: to return to the original sources and to read the signs of the times; a process of reflection and research that led to the formulation of our new Constitutions. The Congregation, as a whole, made a praiseworthy effort to rediscover and redefine its proper identity. To arrive at that point the efforts of the local communities, provinces and General Assemblies of 1968-1969, 1974, and 1980 were all needed. We must also mention Father William Slattery who initiated the search for our post-conciliar identity by convoking the 1968 General Assembly.

The Little Company as a whole entered into a search for its nature, a search for its place within the present day church and world. Because of the diversity of cultures and ministries and the individual history of the provinces, it was a long and difficult journey. On the other hand during the fifty post-conciliar years innumerable Vincentian studies (the fruit of much research) have been published in various parts of the world. All this has contributed to greater knowledge about the identity of the Congregation. Viewing events from an historical perspective, we can now understand what the Congregation had proposed for herself and what she desired to achieve, namely, to define herself and to clarify her nature and proper identity. What does the Congregation say about itself? How does the Congregation want to be known? What is the Congregation of the Mission? What are its characteristics? During that era these and other questions were experienced and reflected upon by Vincentian throughout the world.

During the process of identifying and clarifying the purpose of the Congregation and, consequently, clarifying its proper identity, the path remained open so that changes and modifications could be made in the various areas that would eventually given form to our new Constitutions. Then and now a satisfactory response was/is required with regard to the proper nature of the Congregation. When the identity of the institution is accepted individuals, in our case the individuals are the confreres of the Congregation will recover a sense of belonging to the Congregation and will experience themselves as protagonists of their history.

In the decree of promulgation, dated September 27, 1984, we read the following words: *Between the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated. We must not be content to leave that delineation on paper alone. The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the gospel to the poor* (C & S, p. 14). The introduction that precedes the Constitutions expresses the same idea in similar words. The Congregation, docile to the will of the Church, revised its fundamental law in order to revitalize its proper identity, its proper purpose, its life and its mission in the present day world.

More about the objective identity of the Congregation

The first part of our Constitutions, entitled *Vocation*, gathers together constitutive elements of the theology and canonical identity of the Congregation. The title, *Vocation*, refers to God's calling of Vincent de Paul to participate in a mission: to establish the Congregation of the Mission in order to evangelize the poor. Under the same heading of *Vocation* the Constitutions deal with matters that refer to our purpose,

nature and spirit. Those three words (purpose, nature and spirit) contain the essential elements of our congregational identity.

We read in our Constitutions: *the purpose of the Congregation is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. Nothing more and nothing less!* To define the purpose is always important. The Congregation has a purpose and everything is ordered around that purpose: its life and its mission. Following Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor (and not the ministries or the three means which Vincent called purposes) unifies and gives a focus to everything. The articles in the various sections of our Constitutions will be fruitful and helpful to the degree that they are related to the purpose, that is, to the degree that they are related to that which is most unique with regard to the Vincentian charism which consists of following Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor.

The facets outlined in the first article of our Constitutions only have meaning in light of our purpose: to put on the spirit of Christ himself to acquire holiness; to work at evangelizing the poor, especially the most abandoned; to help the clergy and laity in their formation and to lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor. According to our new Constitutions our purpose is the arbiter of our apostolic and community life, of the evangelical counsels that are confirmed through the profession of vows and of our prayer life. Our purpose is also the arbiter of the general governance of the Congregation. Our purpose and the other articles in the part entitled *Vocation* beside containing fundamental principles have another objective, namely they provide us with a point of reference that enables us to orient and direct and even evaluate everything in light of the time honored purpose, nature and spirit. The section *vocation* clearly indicates where the present, objective identity of the Congregation is found, where its authentic face, reason for being, personality, and essential constitutive elements are found. All of this is in harmony with and follows the path that was traveled by Vincent de Paul.

Subjective identity

As we reflect on the plans of our Founder and our Constitutions, do we as confreres feel a healthy pride in being members of our Institute? Do we see ourselves as active subjects in our home, that is, in the heart of the Congregation of the Mission? With what degree of empathy do we relate to the Congregation of the Mission? To what degree do we accept (personally and as a community) that which is most unique with regard to Vincentian spirituality.

During a gathering for on-going formation, a group of confreres reflected on Vincentian identity. One of the confreres at this gathering expressed with great simplicity that he preferred to talk about the

activities and ministries he was engaged in on a daily basis rather than speaking of his identity. He said he was aware of the various activities he carried on day to day, but they did not lead him to question his personal identity. He really did not see the difference here.

He said that in the practical order the Vincentian catalogue of ministries includes a great number of activities and nothing seems to be excluded. He said he could not find that which is specifically Vincentian and which differentiates him from others. This comment made by one of our confreres who, without being aware of it, had become a victim of assimilation. He was unaware of the fact that he was a member of the Vincentian community. Unfortunately, the situation is repeated with some frequency among the present members of the Congregation.

Healthy subjective identity

Let us consider the situation of a confrere whose life unfolds in a normal manner. One day he experienced the Lord's call to follow a certain path. He became a member of the Vincentian community and with the passing of years he experienced the normal "ups and downs". This confrere leads a lifestyle that provides for his growth. Like so many others, he belongs to a local community and engages in a specific ministry. Consciously and unconsciously he identifies himself with the Vincentian charism and despite some difficult moments, he never ceases to affirm his Vincentian vocation as a member of the Congregation. As time passes he has internalized the community values that give meaning to his life as a member of the Congregation. His house, his home is the Congregation of the Mission. There is no doubt that this is a confrere with a very clear Vincentian identity.

In my opinion the confrere I have just described is well represented in the Congregation. These confreres are satisfied and identify themselves with the community that gives meaning to their life. Their subjective identity, ever more explicit and intentional, is maintained despite the changes that occur as times passes and new circumstances affect the Congregation. This group, a majority of the confreres, is men who love the Congregation with their whole heart.

Mediocre subjective identity

There is another situation that is not uncommon among confreres of the Congregation. In this group, I include confreres who, because of certain acquired habits, have come to a standstill in their personal identification as Vincentians. They find themselves in no man's land. The book of Revelation describes such individuals as 'lukewarm'.

We might characterize these confreres as men with no depth. They have been incorporated into the Congregation of the Mission and are content with doing the bare minimum, and view as suspicious any innovation or change. They consider too theoretical anything related to the objective identity of the Congregation and view St. Vincent's writings and our new Constitutions as pure theory. These confreres are caught up in mediocrity and often move about in a small circle of friends. They have no vitality and are not involved in the new congregational horizons that are the fruit of collective reflection. As I put these thoughts into writing, it seemed right to classify as mediocre the Vincentian identity of this group of dear confreres worthy of our consideration.

Broken subjective identity

Here I describe the situation of vessels of great value that are broken. Experience has shown us this. We have all lived with excellent confreres, grounded in their vocation and identified with the purpose of the Congregation. Their life unfolded over a long period of time in more or less acceptable parameters. Then one day, for no detectable reason, these confreres lost their first fervor. Their initial plan collapsed. Allow me to say that in those cases (which occurred in the past and occur today) the deterioration was usually gradual, slowly surfacing, and then at a specific moment expressed itself in all its harshness. What happened? The subjective identity of those confreres faded. In their personal world, they began to experience psychological separation from that which is central to Vincentian spirituality. Then came the break. Their loss of identity can be attributed to multiple factors, including:

- An activism that has claimed not just a few confreres as victims. With the passing of time these individuals become impoverished interiorly, and consequently no longer feel identified with the Vincentian community.
- A lack of on-going formation. What is not known cannot be loved. The lack of information about our history and our present evolution as a Congregation leads certain confreres to a state of disinterest and isolation from the community, which often results in separation from the Congregation. Thus, we must deal with this issue of on-going formation so as individuals and as a community we can grow in our Vincentian identity.
- The deterioration of community life produces a great restlessness and/or discomfort in confreres, and ultimately he wants to distance himself from the Congregation to find a healthier environ-

ment. There is no doubt that personal and communal Vincentian identity must be strengthened through the re-creation of a fraternal spirit in local communities.

- As a result of spiritual inertia and a neglect of their prayer life, some confreres become disoriented and lose their Vincentian identity. In these cases, the decision to leave the Congregation of the Mission looms on the horizons.
- The desire to break with congregational structures that one has not freely accepted produces in some confreres a loss of Vincentian identity. This leads some confreres to abandon the Congregation to become members of the diocesan clergy.

The identity of the Congregation of the Mission is dynamic

I refer to objective and subjective identity of our Congregation as understood and accepted by confreres as members. Both types of identities are dynamic and active, not static. The proof of this is found in the Constitutions, formulated during the General Assemblies of 1968-1969, 1974, and 1980, and later Assemblies (even though they were more pastoral in character). We do not exaggerate when we say that today the objective identity of the Congregation is found in recent documents which must be taken into consideration. The Spirit blows where it wills. We must certainly include in the currents and signs of the time guidelines presented in the past twelve years, specifically in the Lines of Action 2010-2016 approved by the 2010 General Assembly and subtitled: *Creative Fidelity for the Mission*.

This being understood, the following concepts that have been universally accepted now have a place within the Congregation of the Mission:

First, the concept of systemic change as an adequate method to provide charitable assistance to the poor. At the present time, there is nothing worse than to approach those in need with methods that were useful yesterday, but today are no longer valid. We therefore have an obligation to emphasize this method and a similar obligation to accept it wholeheartedly. The 2010 General Assembly gave a decisive impulse to systemic change as "the" method to evangelize the poor. We must understand the needs of the poor, and be aware of structures that create situations of poverty and marginalization. We must also remember that the poor are agents of their own liberation.

Second, reconfiguration of the Congregation of the Mission. Here, we are dealing with a profound concept that involves both individual confreres and institutions of the Little Company. Some confreres

reduce reconfiguration to the union of provinces without seeing the superficiality of such a view. Reconfiguration suggests a profound reform of communities, individual persons, works and the institutions, and is always mindful that the purpose of the Congregation consists of following Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor. The General Assembly of 2010 approved a text which refers to "intra"-provincial and "inter"-provincial reconfiguration.

Third, another congregational sign of the present era is seen in the emphasis that for some years has been given to the Vincentian Family, composed of those who follow Jesus Christ in the same way as Vincent de Paul did. Decisive steps have been taken in this regard. Nevertheless as a Congregation we must become more involved in this activity to make our evangelization of the poor ever more effective. In terms of our participation in the Vincentian Family, there is no room for clericalism or indifference. Indeed, the Congregation must encourage collaboration among the groups and associations inspired by the charism of Vincent de Paul. At stake here is our role as Vincentians in the evangelization of the world.

Fourth, the Regional Conferences of Visitors came into existence for practical reasons. Today we view these conferences as an accomplishment of interprovincial collaboration in various places throughout the world, for example, in the area of initial formation and interprovincial missions. We have only to recall Statute 79:1-3, approved by the XI.I General Assembly, which includes wise consideration to the Conference of Visitors.

Fifth, initial and on-going formation. In accord with the 2010 General Assembly, we, as confreres of the Congregation need to give a new impulse to the process of integral formation in order to evangelize the poor. We need to give a new impulse to formation of aspirants and on-going formation of confreres. This will strengthen our identity, guarantee Vincentian fidelity, and promote creativity in ministry. Creativity concretizes our identity for the mission.

These are some concepts (by no means a comprehensive list) that the Congregation has assumed ownership of in recent years. In the context of this presentation, I would include those elements I have referred to in discussing *objective identity*. In accord with our creative fidelity for the mission these new rays of light have become part of our renewed and dynamic identity.

At this time of retreat allow me, the Visitor of a small province, to question myself and to ask you, members of the General Curia and Visitors of various provinces, if the new concepts and directives that have been embodied in recent documents: have these ideas been accepted readily and wholeheartedly by the confreres? Let us sincerely

ask ourselves if the subjective identity, that is, if the warm acceptance on the part of confreres remains assured in various areas of the Congregation of the Mission.

The acceptance of these new concepts is not an act that is accomplished in one single moment. We need time, and we also need to renew our commitment, and to renew it again and again. Let us reflect on the depth with which the confreres of the provinces have accepted the new institutional signs that are proper to the present era. It is good to engage in this reflection in order to set out once again upon our journey, and what better moment to do this than during this day of retreat.

Whatever our situation, we as Visitors have before us a wonderful task, namely that of serving and encouraging the confreres of our respective provinces; and to do this, we can rely on the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES FLOCK, C.M.

Opening Address to Visitors

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

"Celebrating our charism: Lord, it is good that we are here!"

My dear brothers in St. Vincent,

"Lord, it is good that we are here".

This is a familiar quote from Scripture, one that captures perfectly how I feel in being here with you today. The full quote is: *"Peter said to Jesus 'Lord it is good that we are here!'"* (Mt. 17:4). I echo Peter's poignant sentiment: **it is good that we are here!** We have come from all over the Congregation throughout the world to pray, reflect, study, and learn from one another. **It is good that we are here** to explore more fully our Vincentian vocation and charism. **It is good that we are here** at this mid- point between our 2010 General Assembly and our next one to discern together what we have accomplished and what still needs to be done to fulfill the Lines of Action we agreed upon for the good of the Congregation in 2010.

As you know, this scriptural quote is from the story of the Transfiguration, a feast we celebrate next month. This story fascinates me on several levels; perhaps it intrigues you as well. Whenever I hear it, I find myself wondering about several aspects of the story. For example: why did Jesus take only three of the Twelve with him up the mountain? Why was Peter so quick to want to build tents (or booths) there? What moved the disciples to go from awful fear to awe-filled faith in so short a time? And why, after such a powerful experience, did Jesus tell the three not to say anything about this experience until after he was raised from the dead?

Please relax: I am not here to engage in a full-throttle scriptural study and exegesis! But I would like to use this beautiful story as a backdrop to reflect on how we can deepen our love and practice of the Vincentian charism today. The "Transfiguration" is a story that presents us with ideas and analogies for our faith journey both as individuals and as a community. It is a lesson on how to open ourselves to Jesus' transforming presence so we can live our charism more fully.

It is my hope that our time together in these days will be a 'transfiguration' of sorts, that our meeting will be a transforming event, deepening our love of Jesus and St. Vincent. As you know, at the 41st General Assembly, we agreed on a way forward we called "*Creative Fidelity for the Mission*". We identified and committed to strengthening our three essential benchmarks:

- To "recognize our responsibility for a great heritage, from St. Vincent and the first missionaries up to our day";
- To be "docile to the Holy Spirit, who wishes to make more dynamic our fidelity in creativity to the Mission";
- To "commit ourselves to recreate the charism, attentive to the signs of the times".

Simply put, I believe these benchmarks encompass our past heritage, present realities, and future hope. Thus, in our time together, I encourage you to reflect and engage this question:

- ***How do I help the confreres in my province exhibit 'creative fidelity for the Mission' in the personal, communal, and apostolic dimensions of their lives as Vincentians?***

As you know, the 'Lines of Action' are the actual means by which we put into practice these ideals. So it is essential that we review and reflect on them in our time together. The areas we will focus are all in the Lines of Action. They include: formation, reconfiguration, dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the Vincentian Family, creativity in our ministry, and the methodology of systemic change. For each area, the Assembly listed desired broad-based goals, which could be adapted according to the various sizes and needs of provinces.

In 2011, the General Council approved a strategic communications plan by our Office of Communications that organized the Lines of Action into yearly themes. By doing so, we hope to assist provinces and visitors' conferences in developing strategies to raise awareness and to better assure their implementation on local, provincial, and inter-provincial levels. Each of the five years of the strategic plan focuses on a main theme approved by the General Assembly. In taking this approach I, myself, and the assistants general use every opportunity we can- be they talks, homilies, and canonical visits to raise awareness of this yearly theme among the confreres.

Consistent with our Vincentian heritage, we decided that besides the yearly themes, there would be one over-arching theme running for the length of the plan: "Dialogue with the Poor". It serves as a constant reminder to focus on our mission and charism. We believe that this theme and the yearly ones from the "Lines of Action" are a viable way

to keep the work of the General Assembly before Visitors, Conferences of Visitors, local communities, confreres, as well as members of the wider Vincentian Family.

In addition to the annual theme of "Dialogue with the Poor" 'Systemic Change' was the theme in 2012. This year it is 'Reconfiguration: Pathway to Creativity in our Ministries'. In 2014, the theme will be 'Initial and Ongoing Formation', and in 2015, 'Vincentian Family Dialogue'. As 2016, we will use the time before the General Assembly to evaluate the "Lines of Action", both in their implementation and effectiveness.

But neither the words of a General Assembly or a thematic communications plan are transformative in itself. That is why we gather here for these days. Perhaps a return to the Transfiguration story is helpful. Like the three disciples chosen by Jesus to go up the mountain, you, as representative leaders in the Congregation, are but a small sample group embodying the hopes and aspirations of our 3,000 confreres. So, I hope our time together will be a true experience of community, one in service of our mission as we follow Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the poor. And from this encounter, it is my deep desire that it will lead to a re-kindling of the Vincentian charism in our confreres, communities, and apostolates.

"Lord, it is good that we are here". We did not come here to escape or detach ourselves from the realities of community life and ministry in our provinces or in the wider Congregation. We are not here to build booths of self-congratulation, but to pitch tents of mutual sharing and fellowship. Like the disciples, we may feel overwhelmed at the challenges before us in our provinces. But like the disciples, we know the Lord Jesus always accompanies us, and that the charism of St. Vincent will inspire and guide us as his spiritual sons. May these days strengthen our bond as brothers; may they be a time for rich exchange of ideas and experiences; and may they bring about a renewal of hope so we may more fully "become what we are called to be".

As you can see from our ambitious schedule, we have much to do! Our daily schedule, while full, allows time for prayer, Eucharist, learning, dialogue, and reflection. I urge you to make the most of this time for your own growth and for the good of your province. Last summer, I had the good fortune of spending time with our confreres who serve as Directors of the Daughters of Charity. As you know, this is a service of the Congregation provided to the Daughters that you so generously assist, often at the expense of your own personnel needs. When I spoke at the opening session, I made a request of the confreres that I will make to you today.

I proposed that their time together be governed by what I call the "three R's": **Reflect, react, and re-integrate**. I offer that same frame-

work as we begin this important meeting today. Take time to reflect on what you read and hear, carefully listening and processing not only words but ideas. React to what you hear and think; speak your mind formally and informally, whether it be in your small groups or our plenary sessions. And finally, re-integrate: discover how, what you see and learn here, can benefit your confreres and assist you in your work as their Visitor.

"Lord it is good for us to be here". Now, let's get to work!

Economic Solidarity in the Congregation of the Mission

G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Joe Geders, C.M.
and Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

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.

Panel Presentation by the Assistants to the Superior General

A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE CONGREGATION

Javier Álvarez, C.M.

The sense of belonging to the Congregation is directly related to the Vincentian identity. When there is a Vincentian identity, the sense of belonging to the Congregation is assured; but when there is no identity, belonging may sound like celestial music. In reality, the two, identity and belonging, point to the same and only reality: identity relates more to the charism; belonging, to the institution. They're two sides of the same coin.

I have chosen this subject, along with the Vincentian identity, because it seems to be of utmost importance to go deeper within. I believe that here lies the root and explanation of a few problems that affect the Congregation today. For example: why is it that there are confreres, who, after being ordained for a few years, happily decide to be incardinated into a diocese? Why is it so difficult for Provinces to help the confreres grow so that they may better harmonize the demands of our charism in today's church? The lack of vocations and the aging members of the Congregation do not explain it all, because in the places where there are vocations and the average age of the confreres is not high, they have the same resistances. Is there is a lack of Vincentian identity that makes it difficult to see, as something natural, the plight of the poor, the evangelizing orientation of the all our ministries, and mobility as a permanent instrument to helping us continuously refocus on what is essential to our vocation?

What is our sense of belonging to the Congregation?

We understand by belonging, not only the feeling of being tied to an institution (being local, provincial or worldwide), but to live that sentiment with concretes gestures or points of interest that unite us.

We can distinguish three levels of belonging: local, provincial and general. When we speak of the local level, it is difficult to calculate the grade of belonging of our confreres, talking about the number and variety of our communities. It's not easy to speak about the provincial

level either. It's true that there are evident differences among them, that confreres are not linked to some as they are in others, and that even the manner in which the Province and the community is conceived is not the same in America as in Africa, Asia, or Europe, even though we're guided by the same Constitutions and the same Vincentian spirit.

In spite of all of this, we can say – I believe – that in the last 50-60 years there has been a noticeable change on this subject: from having a very strong centralization on the worldwide level to a great autonomy among the Provinces, with the consequential displacement of the sense belonging from the worldwide level to the provincial one.

The Second Vatican Council notably developed themes like 'theology of communion', 'ecclesiology', 'subsidiarity', 'shared responsibility', 'dialogue', and 'participation'. In the light of this new ecclesiology and the different way of understanding government, the Congregations revised and adapted their Constitutions. One positive result was decentralization in favor of the provinces in subjects like government, which were manifested in the Norms and the Provincial Assemblies, in consultation and in dialogue. In this manner, we have involved all in the life of the Province. Putting all these means of participation in place has made all the confreres feel like actors of their Provinces and not mere spectators, which could have happened in other times of lesser participation. Another achievement was that the provincial government can govern more realistically and be much more inculturated.

Therefore the consequences derived from the decentralization of governance in the Congregation have been very positive for the Provinces. On the other hand, there has been a loss of belonging to the Congregation on the general level. When we center our vision of a certain objective, we run the risk of weakening other ones; only in illustrating this decrease in the feeling of belonging to the Congregation, do I present these following symptoms:

- With some provinces, there is a difficulty in maintaining correspondence. I hear the Secretary General lament when Visitors don't answer correspondence from the Superior General and his Council in a timely manner. Is this related to belonging?
- Sometimes there is not enough communication between Provinces and the General Council. I refer to the collaboration requested concerning parishes after the 2010 Assembly. Another example: when the General Council sent a circular in February, 2012 about "Confreres in Difficulty", only 10 provinces responded.
- We know that some Visitors aren't diligent in sending circulars or communications sent from the Superior General to all of the members of their Province. At times, they can seem to sleep eternally on your desks.

- Some difficulties that come from the reconfiguration are caused by the excessive attention to the provincial level, and little to our missionary vocation that is more in harmony with the universality of the Congregation, not just a part of it. When the provincial feeling is exasperated, it can foster provincialism, an attitude that doesn't help us see and to be open to other realities that exceed the frontiers of a Province.

I don't want to continue with the casuistry, because it's only a symptom of a deeper problem we should get to; namely the sense of belonging to the Congregation. We are not trying to reduce the legitimate autonomy of the Provinces, but we must not neglect the general sense of belonging, where all of the Provinces should be, according to number 98 of our Constitutions.

Two Convictions to Fortify a Sense of Belonging on the General Level

1. The Congregation is formed by only one body

This is how Saint Vincent expressed it in the Conference given on June 27, 1642: *"We are all missionaries and form only one body, and as there is a narrow relationship between the parts of the body, this is the same union that has to exist between the members of the same Congregation..."* (XI, 44) Number 322 from the Practical Guide of the Visitor echoes Saint Vincent's conviction. It states that *"the Visitor must always take into account that the Congregation, notwithstanding its division into Provinces, is Universal, forming only one body"*. In the following numbers from the Guide, it invites all Visitors to have a clear understanding of such universality and to act according to it (Numbers 323-324).

It's important that the candidate who starts the Internal Seminary is instructed in being a part of the Congregation (Const. 83 & 1); and our vow formulas emphasize that it is in the Congregation of the Mission where we live our vocation of evangelizers (C. 58). Above all, as we have heard from Vincent, we're missionaries who belong to the Congregation of the Mission. It's important to feel we're a part of this body that has received one mission in the Church. The provinces are governmental structures that can change easily and must do so for a better efficiency and a greater fidelity to the charism to animate its works. When we stress provincial identity, we greatly impoverish our missionary vocation, create difficulties in interprovincial collaboration, and make it impossible to see the Congregation as a "body". We're also reminded of this in GA 10, as it invites us to "cultivate a sense of belonging to the Congregation, farther than the local and provincial community" (GA 10, Second Line of Action, 2).

2. *Our missionary vocation*

Here is what Vincent told a group of Missionaries in the Conference given on May 30, 1659: "Our vocation consists in going, not to a parish, not only to one diocese, but all the earth" (XI, 553). It seems clear that to be open to the Congregation facilitates that ability to not lose sight that we are missionaries and that in accordance with that, our lifestyle must be different than the diocesan priests. Here lies one of the most important features of our identity and surely our capacity to attract more vocations. Continuing with the same train of thought, I believe that the international missions and the requests that Superior General makes to the Provinces is a true sign that reflects our missionary vocation in the Church.

OUR MISSIONARY IDENTITY AS EXPRESSED IN INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Varghese Thottamkara, C.M.

The Origin

Jesus commanded his disciples after the Resurrection, "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15). St. Vincent, motivated by the spirit of Jesus, considered this commandment addressed also to him and to the confreres of the Mission personally and directly. So he named the society he founded "Congregation of the Mission" and wanted that his confreres go wherever the Divine Providence calls them. Vincent was convinced of the call of the Congregation for the foreign missions and spoke about it very eloquently. He once said "*How happy is the missionary who has no limit in this world on where he can go to preach the Gospel. Why then do we hesitate and set limits, since God has given us the whole world to satisfy our zeal?*" (Please consult "Ratio Missionum": introduction). The missionaries are not to be limited or restricted to one parish, diocese or nation, but to be sent to the whole world.

Over the centuries the Congregation remained faithful to this legacy of St. Vincent overcoming all tides and currents. One of the latest expression of our commitment to foreign missions is the "**international missions**" of the Superior General initiated by former Superior General Fr. Robert Maloney to respond to the call from all over the world. With firm conviction of the merit and need of it, Fr. Gregory Gay the current Superior General continues to pursue it as a goal and to expand and fortify the mission.

Today's International Missions

Today we have the following international missions:

1. In Bolivia, we have two communities:
 - a) El Alto: with three confreres, mainly engaged in pastoral and social activities.
 - b) Cochabamba: with four confreres; engaged in pastoral and social activities.
2. In the Solomon Islands, we have six confreres engaged in the formation of the diocesan seminarian. Lately we have started our own formation too. There are pastoral activities and spiritual direction for women religious. (This mission is principally supported by APVC in providing personnel).
3. In Papua New Guinea, there are seven confreres serving in 3 dioceses. In Port Moresby confreres teach in seminary and do pastoral activity in one parish. In Woitape, 2 are engaged in parish work in the mountains. In Trobiand Islands (Alotau diocese where Rolando Santos CM is the bishop) another two are engaged in parish works.
4. In Tunisia, we have two confreres are engaged in pastoral work and direction of sisters.
5. In Angola, we have two engaged in pastoral work, charity, and spiritual direction of sisters.
6. In Chad, we have three confreres engaged in pastoral works. (This mission is taken up in collaboration with COVIAM).

We also have confreres in international missions working in collaboration with the provinces such as Puerto Rico (in Haiti), Poland (in Benin) Sts. Cyril and Methodius (in Ukraine), Mozambique and Cuba. There are also confreres working in missions from various provinces.

Some missions which started as international missions have been handed over to the responsibility of provinces. Southern India taking up Tanzania is the best example. Some missions are being supported by Visitor's Conferences such as Solomon Islands by APVC and Chad by COVIAM. Many provinces have understood this Vincentian character of our mission and established missions in many places. The Congregation always remained missionary and that is the reason today we find ourselves in all the continents and more than 84 countries.

The provinces continue to take up missions and support it. When a province alone cannot take up a mission, this is an opportunity to the provinces and confreres to share in the international missions. It makes

our missions and communities truly international. This international and missionary character of our identity and charism should be inculcated and promoted from the time of formation. Some provinces have personnel resources to share; others have financial resources to share. With the sharing and collaboration, the international missions continue to fulfill the legacy of St. Vincent.

Obstacles

There have always been obstacles for missions going back to the time of St. Vincent. Towards the end of his life, he made a passionate plea to maintain the ministries that had developed in the Congregation, especially the foreign missions. He defended them by pointing out that they responded to our basic call to evangelize the poor. He warned against those who would seek to curtail or abandon difficult missions because of distance, lack of personnel, or loss of missionary spirit. *"There will be men who coddle themselves, men who have a narrow outlook, who confine their views and designs to a limited sphere within which they shut themselves up as in a tiny circle and are unwilling to leave it"* (SV XII, 92).

"Ratio Missionum" speaks elaborately of the need for selection and formation for missions. The Visitors are requested to select the best members for international missions and give them adequate preparation and formation within the province, so that they adapt to the missions easily. Some sort of help in adaptation and inculturation is given in the mission and at international level. But the basic formation from the province cannot be neglected.

Criteria for selection

The following points will help in selection and formation of confreres serving in international missionaries. Although policies may differ in their description, these qualities are essential.

1. *Missionaries must have emotional stability.* Missionary work is hard! Those ministering cross-culturally, if they are to be effective, must learn to speak other languages, learn new cultures, and speak God's eternal message in changing earthly contexts. Interpersonal relationships with co-workers, confreres who are also going through cultural stress and work anxiety, amplify tension. Only the emotionally stable should make the commitment for long-term, cross-cultural missions.
2. *Missionaries must have spiritual maturity.* They cannot effectively preach the Gospel by their own initiative and power. They are

mere "jars of clay", who demonstrate that the "all-surpassing power" employed in Christian ministry is "from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). They join God in His work rather than God joining us in our work. Mission is thus a "supernatural work" done by the power of God. Therefore, missionaries must be people who are on their knees before God in prayer and who study the Bible not only to prepare sermons and lessons, but also to reflect upon God's will in their own lives. Missionaries must have an intimate relationship with God, which influences who they are and how they relate to others. They are increasingly transformed into God's likeness as they look upon Him (2 Cor. 3:18).

3. *This spiritual maturity will lead missionaries to be effective teachers of the Word of God.* Teaching a Christian worldview as revealed by God in scripture is integral to the missionary task. Therefore, missionaries being sent to foreign mission fields should be those who have taught the Gospel in their own culture and country and have empathetically nurtured disciples to Christian maturity.
4. *Missionaries must have the ability to adapt to the local situations.* While trying to build-up churches effectively, nurture new Christians to maturity, and equip national church leaders for Christian service, they should always look for acculturating the Gospel values into local traditions. They should not transport their cultural church to the mission; rather allow the Gospel values to get implanted in the culture of the place. Missionaries must be thoroughly trained to enter new cultures and lay the foundations of the Gospel.
5. *Missionaries must have effective interpersonal communication skills.* These interpersonal abilities are largely formed through parental, sibling, and other relational influences as we are growing up. They are difficult to learn as adults. Cultural personalities also vary from continent to continent and from country to country. Despite personality fit, however, all missionaries must have the ability to empathetically enter into the culture where they will minister. This will include also the capacity to work and collaborate as a team.
6. *The missionaries should have pure motives.* A missionary having a clear and direct motivation of evangelization, development of the mission, service of the poor and the glory of God alone should venture for a mission. The dubious motives of personal gain and vain glory will always defeat the purpose and do harm to the mission and the missionary.

Understanding these qualities is essential to the important task of selecting long-term field missionaries. Mission leaders and provincial

superiors must comprehend and carefully employ these criteria to ensure the quality of the missionaries they support. No missionary task in the local church is more important than this one. Without qualified missionaries there can be no effective missions on the field. Today, more than ever, we meet with difficulties and obstacles, but the need is also overwhelming. We as a Congregation and you as Visitors need to find the ways and means of overcoming the challenges to answer the universal call to be faithful to the legacy of St. Vincent.

Some questions we need to reflect upon:

1. *Is there a need to reawaken our confreres on the goal of being missionaries ad gentes? Is there any lethargy among the confreres to leave aside their comfort zone and go to the unknown lands? If yes, how can we help them to re-discover our missionary legacy?*
2. *Is the international and missionary character of our Congregation sufficiently emphasized in our formation programs? Is Vincentian Missiology part of the curriculum?*
3. *How can the provinces participate more concretely and specifically in the international missions of the SG?*
4. *Is there any program in the provinces to prepare the volunteers going for the international missions? (Such as language study, inculturation materials, and missiological dimensions).*

FORMATION FOR THE MISSION

Stanislav Zontak, C.M.

I am aware of your great responsibilities in fulfilling the role of the visitor of your province. I know that you have many problems and difficulties to resolve and projects to start to help your province and each of your confreres to make progress. I am grateful for your service and I offer my sincere thanks. Allow me to share with you my reflections about the area of formation, the area that the Superior General confided to me as assistant general.

I have visited various provinces and followed the situation of formation in the Congregation, and I handle material about formation in the general council. For this reason, I would like to lay out the main points for your attention and a deeper reflection to improve our commitment as formators (as you realize, the visitor is the main formator of the province).

The Place of formation among provincial priorities

Despite official declarations, formation does not figure among the most important priorities of various provinces. As we read the reports of provincial councils that you send to the curia, we see clearly that greater attention is given to the works of the province (of course, this is right), followed by economic matters, and then issues of discipline after other material concerns. But formation ranks among the last and the least matters being treated.

Organizing formation and preparing formation programs are left to a formation commission, but it does not always function adequately and actively. We forget that the visitor and his council should take the initiative, follow the development of formation, and make decisions that should be carried out, supported, and supervised.

Preparation of formators

The complex demands of formation, and the fragility and weakness of those aspiring to consecrated life today require competent formators, well prepared for this important task. I must share with you my concern about how formators in many provinces are being prepared for this responsibility, since we often find that, in the formation of unprepared confreres, certainly good and zealous men, they are incompetent and commit irreparable mistakes. We see a major drift of formators, who, although prepared for formation, are assigned other tasks (certainly important for the province). This indicates something about the real priorities of the province. If someone is clearly good in the area of formation, he should offer his service for at least ten years in this area. Frequent change of the formation team causes confusion for those in formation. Unfortunately, it often happens that the confreres who have studied formation work in another area.

I would like to emphasize that specialized studies in theology or philosophy are not a preparation for formation. Confreres who teach in these specific areas are not automatically capable of also being formators. If we want to put them in charge of formation, they will need other studies and specific formation. There are certainly many institutions that offer programs to prepare formators, and we should profit from them more than we do. I think that we should reflect seriously on how to make our formation communities more stable and solid.

The choice of candidates and their proper preparation

The experience of initial formation teaches us the importance of a good choice of candidates for the Congregation. In countries where we experience a lack of candidates, we especially note the danger of tending to accept with more benign criteria all the candidates who show up. In provinces with more candidates, the choice is relatively easier, but it is often marked by little knowledge of the candidate, of his personal story, and of his main motives. We rely on a report from his pastor or from the base community where the candidate is coming from, or where he has lived for some time.

Still, what is often lacking is regular contact with a confrere with one of the formators of the province. A candidate accepted without clear motivation or without the necessary human maturity impedes the whole group and creates many difficulties for the formators. Often, such a candidate has to be sent home, and this causes much upset for the entire group in formation. Over the long term, it may influence the group's relations with the formators and openness to future formation. It is much better to avoid these difficulties and prevent them by a more careful choice of candidates.

The candidates who are accepted should be well prepared before entering other phases of initial formation, novitiate (or internal seminary), and philosophy studies. However, the preparatory period in the first step of formation (the pre-novitiate year), has not always been considered with sufficient attention. This period requires the presence of competent and wise formators, able to receive the candidates with all their strengths and weaknesses, and to help them face courageously their own personality. This service helps them to start on the path of formation. The new *Ratio formationis* will devote a chapter to this issue, and I recommend it to your kind attention.

Formation of young confreres

Something else for our consideration is the formation of young confreres in their first years of service after priestly ordination. We see that, in many dioceses, during the first one or two years after ordination, the bishop meets his priests monthly to continue their formation and initiation into ministry. By contrast, in some provinces of the Congregation, we find the situation of confreres who are left to themselves after ordination with no formal initiation into ministry. Certain provinces organize yearly meetings for young confreres (up to ten years of ordination), but these meetings cannot replace the formation needed during the first year after ordination.

Knowledge of the official documents of the CM

Another area that can be improved is knowledge of the official documents of the Congregation, such as the Instruction on the Vows, the *Ratio Missionum*, and the Practical Guide for the Local Superior, and the *Ratio formationis*. These can contribute to the ongoing formation of the confreres. They certainly learned about these documents during their initial formation and they kept them in their personal library, but they never look at them again. These documents, together with the letters of the superior general, deserve to be studied and used more often, and they should form the basis for our ongoing formation. I think that we should do something more to motivate our confreres to study these documents, either personally or during community meetings.

A strategic plan for the specialization of the confreres

We know that confreres need to continue their professional post-graduate formation in order to work well and respond to the needs of the poor, and to take up the assignments that the province gives them. To accomplish this, each province should prepare a strategic plan for the specialization of its confreres which should coordinate with the strategic plan of the works of the province for the future. Specialized studies should be considered as flowing from the needs of the province. The province itself should ask appropriate confreres to continue their formation.

It often happens that the confreres themselves ask to do some studies since they are happy to deepen their knowledge of some material that interests them. The criterion for discernment is to judge how this desire of theirs corresponds to the province's own needs and plans. A good strategic plan for specialization, prepared by the province, can be very useful to channel the interests of the confreres, and to harmonize them with the works of the province.

Dear Visitors, these are the themes that I wish to share with you. I have no intention of criticizing the way in which you carry out your task in the area of formation. Quite the contrary, I only wanted to offer you some materials for your reflection, and in this way to improve the formation given in your provinces. If I can be useful to you in any way and help you with my own modest contribution, I am at your service.

TO DEVELOP THE VINCENTIAN MISSIONARY SPIRIT

Eli Chaves dos Santos, C.M.

Let me share a concern I have with you, one which I feel is important and relevant for our missionary work. At the present time, the Church invites us to a new evangelization and the Congregation proposes us to develop our faithful creativity for the mission. This strong missionary spirit that marks our present moment reminds me of a statement from our 2004 General Assembly: "Congregation of the Mission, I know what you are! Do not conform to mediocrity... work and untiring spread the frontiers of the mission...".

Within a Church that has a growing conscience of being missionary, this call originally made in 2004 continues to be true today. There is a concern today among many confreres that ask themselves: Do Bishops, clergy and other people in general identify us as true missionaries? Why is there a great absence of the Congregation in the initiatives and the missionary and charitable organisms of the Church? We have very few confreres who specialize in Missiology, and more so in Vincentian Missiology. How can we speak of stability and of a sense of belonging if we don't have a well-defined missionary identity? Our pastoral action seems more in the line of conservation and of a limited participation in parish settings. We risk centering all our energy in what we call "ordinary pastoral work". Which I define as a work tied to a territory (parish), centered on the liturgy, catechesis and parish services; a work that absorbs the confreres' best energies and which can become an obstacle instead in giving impulse to a more decisive and missionary evangelization.

Pope John Paul II said in Palermo in 1995, "The time has come to go from conservation to mission". What can this mean? The Synod about New Evangelization dedicated Proposal 50 to the Consecrated Life saying: "Consecrated life... can make a great contribution to evangelization. That is why the Synod asks the Orders and Congregations that they make an effort to reach geographic, social and cultural frontiers in the new evangelization. The Synod also invites the consecrated to take risks in the Arcopagus of the mission. In this same spirit, I feel that the statement made by Jon Sobrino continues to be true: "Consecrated Life must be in the periphery, in the frontiers and in the desert". Those consecrated must be in the vanguard of the mission: in the periphery, with the poor and the excluded, there where the call of the poor is most urgent: in the frontiers, where the church encounters the new and difficult problems missionaries may encounter in the new Arcopagus; in the desert where the gospel is not really known, where the church is poor, is a minority or is in its first steps.

A few years ago, Paulo Sues, a German missiologist who lives in Brazil told a group of confreres: "You Vincentians must be experts in mission, be careful you don't sin where you're called to be the most virtuous". Within a Church that is becoming more missionary, I believe that the missionary witness of St. Vincent calls us to prioritize and deepen our missionary work among the poor, inviting us to be on the vanguard of the mission. To be able to widen the mission frontier, I think we must ask ourselves: Who are we with, where are we, how do we work and what are our true objectives? What relationship should there be between "ordinary pastoral work" and "missionary dynamics"? From where can we give the mission its impulse? Are we doing what we have to or are we prisoners of a scheme that inhibits us from thinking or acting in a different manner?

The mission implies a dynamic of displacement, a movement towards the other, a penetration into society, we have to decentralize, have exit strategies. I feel that a revision of our works is necessary, of our commitments, of our plans and pastoral structure, especially in our parishes, so that we can increase the frontiers of our mission among the poor. I feel it would be in richening if our provinces, and the whole congregation, could implicate themselves more with these approaches. Without a doubt, these are a lot of questions; there is no easy and magical solution. But I would like see us making greater efforts in revising our "ordinary missionary activity", so that we may assume decisively our preoccupation for the mission as a criteria to evaluate and energize our activities (not all that is done is necessary nor the need to evangelize in the same manner), we need to develop a formation in a more missionary and Vincentian strategy, along with trying new and more significant missionaries experiences.

I recognize that a more decisive choice for the mission, lived from a true Vincentian Missiology, is an indispensable necessity so that in a spirit of faithful creativity, we can construct the future of the Congregation and the Congregation of the Future.

VINCENTIAN PRESENCE IN AFRICA: WAKE UP AND WALK!

Abba Zeracristos Yosief, C.M.

Introduction

As some of you may recall, the 2010 General Assembly did not accept what was called "*continental representation at the General Council of the Congregation of the Mission*". I chose the above theme to honor my color and African identity, and not to be 'lawyer of lost causes' for

African concerns. My objective in this presentation is to introduce this topic and to stimulate reflection and discussion. Our Vincentian presence in Africa is not yet very mature, solid, and consistent, yet it is emerging. But how?

In this way, I want to draw your attention to the troubled and suffering continent we call Africa. At times, we Africans are criticized for our rhythm of life, as some say that we are not 'punctual' and lack 'precision'. While there is some truth here, there can be unjustified exaggeration and generalizations of some particular issues. A very fundamental question we need to ask ourselves: *is Africa the "ENORMOUS SPIRITUAL LUNG"* (to use Pope Benedict's language in *Africae Munus* n. 13), *for the future of the Congregation of the Mission?* If yes, do you think this future is bright or dull? Of course, even in the international Congregation, I am not sure about Africa's good name and reputation. Its members are often accused of a lack of moral and financial transparency, accountability and fidelity, especially with the vow of Chastity!

I have begun by asking *a very provocative question*: Is Africa the time bomb that will one day burst, or a beautiful flower waiting to bud? Obviously, the position of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was to say that Africa is: "An enormous spiritual lung for a humanity that appears in crisis of faith and hope".

Some hints on the sufferings of the African continent!

The actual situation of the African Continent is very complex and complicated. Today, Africa and its colors represent many realities, including: *poverty, misery, various illnesses (AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis...), wars of various kind, political and economic instability, corruption, illegal immigration towards the west looking for freedom and comfort...* in short, it is everything. It was right what a confrere said to me at the 2004 General Assembly: "*In today's western society it is most unfortunate to be black and poor!*" (actually he said in Italian: *nella società occidentale odierna, è una sfortuna essere neri e poveri!*). I believe this affirmation is true at all levels.

Generally, we speak little of Africa and Africans, and when we do so, it is often in negative terms. There are prejudices and stereotypes we need to avoid when speaking about Africa. For example: "On a train, there were French, English and Africans", as if Africa were a small country like Switzerland! In fact, Africa is three times bigger than Europe; after Asia, it is the largest continent in area and population. In Africa, we have more than 2,500 spoken languages. And this is a continent embracing all skin colors: black, (the large majority), white, people of brown and yellow skin, as well as people with straight noses and crushed ones! Africa deserves our *love, respect, attention and sensibility!*

Africa: Black gold, victim of its own gold and diamonds

Unfortunately, *"the status quo"* on the African continent has some puzzling data. Just to give you an idea, reflect on these facts:

1. Thirteen percent of the world population lives in Africa. However, twenty-eight percent of the worldwide poor live in Africa, especially in *Sub-Saharan Africa*.
2. Of all AIDS patients in the world 62% are located in Africa. In some African countries in recent years, thank God, the number of newly infected people is declining; but in other countries, up to forty percent of a national population is infected with the virus. In the USA one AIDS patient needs \$13,500.00 for medication yearly, but in Africa it is \$8.00 dollars per person.
3. Every year, 344 million Africans suffer from malaria; tuberculosis seems unstoppable.
4. Over 260,000 women die every year during birth-delivery. 4 million African children die before reaching 5 years of age. Unfortunately, in Africa, every day, we assist the death of 12,500 children for curable sicknesses.
5. Over 45 million African children are deprived of the opportunity of education.
6. In the "G-8" countries" average life expectation is 78 years, but in Africa it is 46 years.
7. The annual income of an African is \$450 USD, 57 times less than in "G-8" countries.
8. After the end of the cold war, (1989 onward), 90% of wars, skirmishes, conflicts and senseless deaths in the world occurred in Africa. Why?
9. The GPA of forty sub-Saharan African Countries amounts around \$450 million per year, half of what Spain alone could produce.

There are many other things one could list, but suffice it to say that the above paints a clear picture on what we're talking about. However, this is not the only picture of Africa. In fact, the African face is radiant and its soul beautiful. We Africans:

- Despite all the difficulties, problems, and hardships of life, we LOVE CELEBRATING LIFE & SOWING HOPE! The African soul knows how to smile and bear one's own cross while singing and dancing. Where else but Africa could you find people who smile, sing and dance even on graves? It is a value of great worth to be shared with you.

- Are generous, hospitable and good!
- While some engage in tribal or cultic practices (stereotyped as 'witchcraft'), the African soul is always seeking the Transcendental One, the "**Totally Other**", our God.
- While we are very rich in natural resources, unfortunately, our richness is often misrepresented by the most powerful. Instead of taking advantage of our natural resources, we Africans are becoming victims of our minerals. In our midst we have 'Lords of war' (often instigated and supported by powerful countries). The social injustice endured by many Africans is best characterized by the philosophy of Machiavelli: the ends justify the means!

The Presence of the Congregation and its Role in Africa

If the name and fame of Africa is associated with *poverty, misery, various sicknesses (like AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis...), wars of various kinds, political and economic instability, corruption, forced child labor, illegal immigration of many young Africans towards the West who look for freedom and comfort...*, as Vincentians, it is time to ask ourselves: *what shall we do to change this image of Africa?* Again, keep in mind that the Vincentian presence in Africa is not yet very strong. At the moment, we have 6 provinces (Madagascar, Ethiopia, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Nigeria); 1 vice province (Mozambique); 3 regions (Cameroon, Ruanda and Burundi), and 8 Missionary areas (Egypt, Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Chad, Benin, Angola and Tunisia). Except for Madagascar (founded in 1647) and Abyssinia (founded in 1839), the others are relatively young (the late 20th-21st Centuries), as Christianity is young in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, I can safely say the Vincentian presence in Africa is still in its 'adolescent' stage. Using this analogy, is it tolerable that some 'teen-age' growing pains be there?

What is our role as Vincentians? Is it to educate young Africans, revitalize and significantly increase our presence? I strongly believe, and in fact I am convinced that **EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO WAKE UP AFRICA!** And it is precisely in this that we could have a very fundamental role. If corruption, the struggle for power, and money are the cancers of our African society, we can fight them by educating the young generation. A good, solid, human and intellectual formation is the answer. We should make education our target and do so on two levels:

1. While I am aware we cannot address all the educational constraints Africans face, we can actively participate in its revitalisation. In this worthwhile, ambitious project, our well-known and

respected Vincentian Universities, with united forces or separately, could be of great help: *DePaul University, St. John's, Adamson, Niagara, All Hallows, along with Franz Foundation.* How and where? There are some relatively democratic and constitutional African Countries (Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, to start) where we could try to form a model university to grant quality education.

2. In the Congregation of the Mission in Africa, we can assure a solid formation of our candidates by choosing to locate it in one of the relatively peaceful countries where we have our seminary formation. For example, our seminary in Nairobi, Kenya could be one of the best options, because there are already good universities in the area, most notably CUEA and TANGAZA. In fact, for the first time, in nineteen years of its existence, COVIAM members unanimously approved of having a common theological formation for their candidates. This could be of great benefit, especially for the new missions and regions, who often have many difficulties in properly forming their candidates due to a lack of infrastructure and personnel. I believe all of us, particularly provinces with "grey hair", could actively collaborate in this project, so this COVIAM dream come true! As President Obama would say, "Yes, we can!"

Conclusion: "Africa: A Continent of the Future & Hope"

Africa is not only the land of drama, wars, sickness and premature death, but Africans also know how to laugh, sing, and dance to life. Yes, we sing and dance even on day of death, so to speak! We laugh, sing and dance on the graves, because we know and believe that death is a transformation and passage to eternal and everlasting life. On February 10, 2012, Pope Emeritus Benedict said: "*Africa is described, in a very reductive way, and often humiliating, as a continent of conflicts and the endless and insoluble problems. On the contrary, Africa is, for the Church, the continent of the FUTURE AND HOPE*" (Africae Munus, 13).

In conclusion, let me quote **Jean Guilton**, a well-known French philosopher, who, in dialogue with Senghor, an African philosopher said the following:

"Africa is the continent of the future... of the next century? It never needs to fix the dates of the future. But how can you believe that? It is my political trainer/teacher who taught me! Who is your political teacher? This is a 'State secret', Senghor, it is a 'State secret'. Oh! My goodness! What did this illustrious Stranger say? He said: 'Look what happened to the Gauls after the Roman de-colonization:

political chaos, economical regression, difficult sanitary situations, absence of the State. But, the rational culture of the Greek Romans went the way of assimilation. The renewal of life, fed by the Barbary's flow, is preparing. Powerful nature, solid culture, family life, deep-down evangelization are the jewellery under big trees. ***One day, the circumstances will bring to the political stability, so that the whole of Africa will be a creative jet of unpredictable novelty***'¹.

This is my hope and wish too.

In the past few decades, Archaeological researchers have tended to allocate the origin of human existence somewhere in East Africa [Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya...] some 10 million years ago. If man is created in the image and similarity of God as Scripture tells us [Gen 1:27], we can safely conclude that God is also black or brown! It is the African who resembles God; therefore, we owe them love and honour and must reserve for them our care and respect. Thank you.

¹ JEAN GUITTON, *Il mio Testamento Filosofico*, Mursia, Milano 1997, p. 92.

Ratio Formationis Presentation to Visitors

Gerard H. Luttenberger, C.M.

SESSION 1: *Goals and Objectives of Vincentian Formation*

I thank Father Stanislav Zontak for his kind and very clear introduction to our sessions concerning the *Ratio Formationis*. I thank him for his careful and attentive assistance to me and to the Commission entrusted with the Revision of the *Ratio*. We can offer you this material today here at the Visitors' Meeting due to his assistance to us. I invite you to help us move to the final draft which we hope to eventually present to the General Council. There are five areas about which I would appreciate your reflection and input.

The five areas we will treat at this meeting are all drawn from issues considered in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 8. These are areas where the cultural diversity manifest in our provinces must be most carefully recognized and honored. The *Ratio Formationis* seeks to foster the unity of the community which exists only in a diversity of cultures, is enriched by that diversity, and must foster the development of the Vincentian charism within those cultures. Within each one's culture, the various provinces as well as the Congregation as a whole can learn from the other cultures and walk the paths of ongoing formation together. So, I invite your reflections so that we, on the Commission for the revision of the *Ratio*, can be sure that we have understood adequately the gifts, the needs, and the challenges which exist in each of your provinces.

The theme of this session revolves around "A Consideration of the Goals and Objectives of Formation and Consideration of the Characteristics of Vincentian formation". You will need to refer to the draft of the *Ratio*, Ch. 1, pp. 3-7, 19-23. Please treat each of these two questions:

- Do you agree with these goals as the basic goals of every stage of formation? (Would you add to or delete any of these goals?)
- Do you agree with the characteristics of the process of formation? (Would you add to or delete any of these characteristics?)

SESSION 2: *Vocation Ministry*

The work of this second session is more focused. I ask you to help us by focusing on two areas of formation: first, the goals and objectives of Vocation Ministry; and, the criteria which a candidate must meet in order to be accepted into a house of pre-internal seminary formation.

Both concern the early stages of bringing young men into the Congregation. Because these concern early stages, there is considerable need for careful screening of candidates even as we strive to reach out broadly in inviting persons to consider a calling to the Congregation. Offering criteria which will help us to address these needs effectively becomes more difficult when we begin to consider the diversity of the cultures in which we live and labor.

Differing elements of Christian maturity may be presumed in one culture but not presumed in another; but no culture can presume all elements of Christian maturity in those who inquire about a vocation. What we have sought to present in these two sections are some sound avenues of recruitment and sound criteria for the selection of candidates which can serve in every culture. But we would be significantly helped by your own reflections on what we propose. I would ask that you refer to Documents 1 and 2, pp. 1-8. Please consider these two questions:

- Do you agree with the goals of vocation ministry as stated? As you lead the confreres in your province, do you think these goals are too demanding, or too lenient, or helpful and appropriate?
- Do you agree with the profile of a man acceptable for admission and the criteria for accepting a candidate into a house of formation in your province? (What would you add or delete, if anything from this profile and criteria?)

SESSION 3: *Pre-Internal and Internal Seminary Formation*

This third session focuses on consideration of the goals and objectives of Pre-Internal Seminary Formation and a consideration of criteria a candidate must meet to be accepted into the Internal Seminary. The reason for our presentation in this section of the *Ratio* is twofold: first, it will enable us to formulate guidelines for pre-internal seminary formation truly appropriate and effective for beginners regardless of their cultural background; second, it will help us fine-tune the criteria for entrance into the Internal Seminary, so that we do not admit persons who are not ready for the Internal Seminary. To facilitate discussion in this session, refer to Documents 3 and 4, pp. 9-14. In the light of these two documents, please consider these two questions:

- Do you agree with the goals of Pre-Internal Seminary Formation as stated? As you lead the confreres in your province, do you think these goals are too demanding, too lenient, or helpful and appropriate?
- Do you agree with the profile of a man acceptable for admission and the criteria for accepting a candidate into the Internal Seminary in your province? What would you add or delete, if anything from this profile and these criteria?

SESSION 4: *Ongoing Formation*

Our focus for this session is consideration of the goals and objectives of Ongoing Formation. A reason to reflect upon this area and to offer some suggestions is because this is an area of formation which has received the least attention in the past. As a result, it will be most helpful to learn concretely what different provinces of the Congregation actually think and do in this area. To facilitate your discussion in this session, please refer to *Constitutions* articles 12.6 and 81. In the light of these articles, please consider these four questions:

- How would you distinguish ongoing formation from ongoing education for confreres of your province?
- What would you name as the goal or goals of ongoing formation as you view your province?
- Does your province have a "Director of Ongoing Formation"?
- In what ways does your province seek to support confreres in their efforts at ongoing education and ongoing formation?

SESSION 5

This is our last session for the *Ratio Formationis*, as we consider the 'Profile of a Formator' and ways of 'forming the formators'. Admittedly, provinces vary a great deal in ways they select persons for formation ministry and how they prepare confreres for that ministry. This may be the most important of all the areas of the Ratio, because a program of formation is only as good as the persons who direct it. What we seek here as we share our reflections is making an effort to underscore the importance of formation ministry. We are concerned with encouraging provinces to support confreres in this ministry with training to enable them to do their work effectively. To facilitate your discussion in this session, please refer to Ch. 1, pp. 10-13. In the light of this material, please consider these three questions:

- Do you agree with the profile of a formator as stated in this draft of Chapter 1? (Would you add or delete any of these characteristics from the profile as you think of the confreres and the ministry of formation in your province?)
- What do you do in your province to support the formation of formators?
- What do you think needs to be done for the formation of formators beyond what you already do in your province?

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 charisma. 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 conferees 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 conferees 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 conferees 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 Niccda, 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 \$ 3000 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 Confreere 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 peoples.

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)*¹.

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 conscientiously 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 Islam².

² <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 dialoguc 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

“Reconfiguration: Taking stock of the storeroom of our souls”

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

I want to begin this reflection on reconfiguration with a short quote from Scripture that I find it most appropriate for what we are about to discuss today. It is from Matthew's Gospel.

“Jesus said, ‘Every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old’” (Mt. 13:52).

This short quotation in Matthew occurs at the end of a chapter filled with parables. In fact, it is so brief that it may appear out of place with the previous parables of the ‘mustard seed’ the ‘sower and seed’, and the ‘weeds and the wheat’. However, I believe it is a perfect description of our topic today: namely, the reality of reconfiguration. The New American Bible, the Catholic edition in the USA that serves as the official translation for scripture and the lectionary, has an interesting heading above this passage: *“Treasures New and Old”*. Perfect!

In my opening address, I mentioned how our strategic communications plan focuses on a theme each year until the 2016 General Assembly. As you know, this year we are highlighting **reconfiguration**. So in my talks, seasonal circulars, and visits to provinces, I have kept this theme before conferees to remind them of its importance not just as a strategy, but as a tool for personal, communal, and provincial renewal. It will foster inter-provincial cooperation and collaboration, but that is a secondary gain that I will say more about later.

From our “Lines of Action”, and subsequently in the strategic plan for communications, we defined reconfiguration as “a pathway to creativity in our ministries”. That last phrase is not a ‘thrown-away’ line, but a central idea to this project: namely, that reconfiguration does not just involve change, upheaval, and loss, but it points us towards renewal, opening our minds and hearts to new challenges. Here are some of the applicable strategies from the “Lines of Action”:

- *To explore locally, province-wide, and Visitors' conferences reconfiguration both as an "intra" and "inter" provincial sense, and its importance for the future of the CM;*
- *To cultivate a vital and concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the local and provincial communities;*
- *To create spaces for inter-provincial collaboration administratively, and to share human and financial resources;*
- *To foster personal availability and mobility to participate in new missionary projects;*
- *To review our ministries and the structures of our community life to enhance their missionary dimension;*
- *To go to the most distant (Ad Gentes) and to draw near to the most withdrawn.*

As you read and reflect on these strategies, notice their variety and adaptability. They are meant to assist you as you assess the 'big picture' for the future of your provinces, local communities, and confreres. The suggested strategies invite us to reflect on where we are as provinces, local communities, and as individuals, and how we can go forward together. For those present at the last General Assembly, the mindset behind these strategies for reconfiguration was not that of bureaucrats realigning provinces, pruning away apostolates, or cutting budgets. No, it was that of the Gospel householder who prudently integrates the best of the old and the new.

Some of the ideas expressed in the above strategies tell the true meaning of reconfiguration that you as Gospel householders should heed:

- *A concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation;*
- *Fostering personal availability and mobility for participation in new missionary projects;*
- *Sharing human and financial resources;*
- *And reviewing our ministries and structures of community life to enhance their missionary dimension.*

As you can plainly see, the focus here is on fusing the abilities and energy of confreres, provinces, and works for a greater good; namely to be in service to our charism and the Church.

Yet, I know that the word reconfiguration can seem an odd, burdensome term. Its origin is from the world of computer technical jargon, a place I do not often venture. And given the past negative words (at least in English) often employed to describe it in religious and

secular circles, perhaps the word 'reconfiguration' is at least a neutral, if not user-friendly term. But to truly understand its import, we must acknowledge and examine its inner and outer dimensions.

The 'outer dimension' of reconfiguration is plainly evident: it involves change, moving from an established, comfortable pattern of doing things, be it community life or the apostolate, to venture out into new, unfamiliar ways of living and ministering. Whether it is the union of local apostolates or community houses, or merging regions and provinces, reconfiguration is an unsettling proposition. It forces us as individuals and as community to come to grips with changes that often close a door definitively on a part of our past. A first reaction is often fear, loss, or uncertainty. And when these feelings grow stronger, they can indicate an inner struggle.

This is where each one of you enter the picture. As leaders called to serve your confreres and the Congregation, you are not only the teachers spoken of in today's scripture passage: you are 'householders'. It is your role to assess and inventory your own 'storeroom', be it a local community, apostolate, region, or province. You realize that what you handle is not just property, but persons; not only a apostolate, but a faithful apostle to a work; not only a new location, but an enduring vocation; in other words, as the 'householder' it is your responsibility to honor the established order, while helping your confreres to embrace new ways of living community life and contributing to the Mission of the Congregation. But to be a 'Gospel-based householder' you must first be willing to be instructed in the 'kingdom of heaven'.

That is why I entitled my talk today "*Reconfiguration: taking stock of the storeroom of our souls*". We must be sensitive to the concerns and needs of confreres, especially our elders, as we make changes that, while unsettling in the short term, will bear "fruit that endures" in the long term. To do this properly, we need to listen and learn from one another – to candidly share our plans, experiences, challenges, and yes, even the drawbacks we have undergone in moving toward reconfiguration. As the 'householders' of the Congregation, it is your difficult, but indispensable responsibility to make sure that confreres are always informed, invited, and included into the process of reconfiguration. It is not easy, nor simple, but when done well it yields a renewed and strengthened community with a deeper sense of identity and purpose.

This entire day is devoted to the topic of reconfiguration, focusing on its various aspects and approaches in provinces and regions. I urge you to reflect seriously and to dialogue earnestly on this topic. As an example of this, look to the shape and contour of the lives of Saints Vincent and Louise, people who accepted the challenge of reconfiguration first in their own lives, and then repeatedly, in the unfolding of Providence in many unexpected ways, as they sought to serve the poor

in Christ and Christ in the poor. I have often thought that perhaps the most appropriate quotation on this topic might be a phrase St. Vincent used to describe the foundation of the Congregation: "Who would ever have thought that all that was to develop into what it is today?" (Vol. XI, 4-5).

The scriptural passage I quoted from Matthew at the start of this talk occurs after the parables of the mustard seed, the "smallest of all seeds, yet when full-grown is largest of all plants" (Mt. 13:32), the small batch of yeast once mixed with wheat was leavened (v. 33), the "treasure buried in a field" (v. 44), and the "pearl of great price" (v. 46). In these simple, homespun tales of Jesus called parables, we find lessons for Christian living and new ways of thinking. Taken to their fullest, the parables are a paradigm for life together as a community of dear friends in service of the charism of St. Vincent.

Let our discussion today on reconfiguration be not only about parables but possibilities, so that we may all embrace the Mission entrusted to us by Jesus and St. Vincent.

Elements for Reflection: Vincenian Ministry in Parishes

Stanislav Zontak, C.M.
and Eli Chaves dos Santos, C.M.

The 2010 General Assembly approved a request directed to the Superior General, asking him for a study about Vincenian 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 VINCENIAN PARISH: *What is a Vincenian Missionary Parish?*

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

- The Vincenian 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 Vincenian 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 vincenian 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.

The Vincentian Family: Development and Perspectives

Eli Chaves dos Santos, C.M.

During the past fifteen years that has been a joint effort to articulate the life of the Vincentian Family. In order to have a more complete vision of this work and in order to evaluate and plan our activity in this regard we attempted to pool those persons who are working directly with the Vincentian Family. We received very few responses and as a result we are not able to provide a broad and precise overview of the current situation and present development of the Vincentian Family. Nevertheless, the few responses that we did receive contain enriching and enlightening information. Thus, in light of this data and our own experience in this ministry, we present some data and reflections on the development of the Vincentian Family.

In over eighty countries across five continents there are **initiatives of rapprochement and cooperation** among the branches and members of the Vincentian Family. The intensity and level of the development of this activity vary greatly from one country to another and even from one region to another in the same country. This depends on the social-pastoral situation of each place and the presence and the number of branches. This collaboration includes the participation of more than sixty local groups and a countless number of people.

There is a growing **awareness of belonging to the same family** with a common spiritual heritage of service to the poor: one lived out in a broad variety of organizational and service structures that result in various spiritual experiences. The diversity and uniqueness of each branch is understood from the perspective of values that ought to be respected and promoted and that therefore help one to understand the richness and the breath of the Vincentian charism.

The organization of the activity of the Vincentian Family is developed with a more pastoral dynamic without major structures and legal weight:

- a) on the *International Level* we have: the International Committee of the Vincentian Family; the Formation Meeting of the International Leaders; the Vincentian Family Office in Rome; the Zafen project/collaboration effort of the Vincentian Family in Haiti; the

Systemic Change Team; Collaboration Commission of the Vincentian Family; Commission on Islam;

- b) on the *National Level*: the majority of the countries have a national coordination team and there are many diversified initiatives on this level;
- c) on the *Regional and Local Level*: there are many diversified organizational initiatives: regional or local coordination teams, specific service teams, common calendar of activities, centers for formation and animation, etc. In some regions or countries the organization revolves around the participative collaboration of the various branches while in other countries and/or regions the activity and the organization of the Vincentian Family is still dependent on the initiative and the leadership of the Congregation of the Mission and/or the Daughters of Charity.

The awareness that we are a family that is constantly growing and is very diversified in accord with the different local realities has led to the development of a series of specific initiatives and activities in order to share and deepen the Vincentian charism, in order to better understand the reality of the poor and in order to promote mutual help in service of the poor. Among the activities that have been developed we highlight the following:

- meetings and gatherings for Vincentian formation,
- joint celebration of the feast of Saint Vincent and other Vincentian feasts,
- meetings for mutual understanding and deepening our life together,
- actions and proposals for collaboration and mutual help among the branches,
- joint action on behalf of evangelization and service of the poor,
- development of advisory services especially for the lay branches,
- publication of materials and providing subsidies for studying and spreading the Vincentian charism... All of these activities vary in scope and intensity and also vary according to the different situations and locations.

The activities have produced many significant fruits of Vincentian collaboration. These include, deepening and living out the Vincentian charism and our Vincentian spirituality; growth in the spirit of collaboration and mutual learning in service of the poor; increased knowledge with regard to the reality of the poor, the new forms of poverty and collaborating together in joint projects of service on behalf of the

poor, thus providing better quality services with a broader outreach; support for the lay branches, as seen in the growth of these branches and the development of the importance of the laity in the Vincentian mission; greater collaboration in the area of formation, especially with regard to providing advisory services for the lay branches; and forming alliances with church groups, government and social agencies in order to carry out projects of service on behalf of the poor.

There are various **difficulties and challenges** that must be confronted in order to develop stronger and more fruitful action and union among the branches of the Vincentian Family;

- a) there is still a need for greater participation and commitment among the branches and the members of the family; many branches and individuals remain caught up with their personal and/or group interests and there is still much ignorance and indifference; the proposals with regard to collaboration have not reached the base and in many situations and places it is restricted to a small group of people;
- b) formation continues to be an important challenge in order to deepen our understanding of the Vincentian mission. As a result, there is a need to search together for the criteria that should guide cooperation and service on behalf of the poor;
- c) the implementation of joint projects of service on behalf of the poor is still very limited. There is a need for leadership and better preparation in order to work together... interest and perseverance in common activities, especially those activities that respond to the new forms of poverty and that utilize the methodology of systemic change are very limited and need to be encouraged and supported;
- d) the lack of sufficient human and financial resources in order to promote collaboration among the branches is felt on a deep level;
- e) there are difficulties as consecrated persons (priests, brothers, sisters) and laity work together; there can be difficulties in recognizing and promoting the value of the laity;
- f) there is need to grow in our spirit of collaboration and mutual respect. Many times the smaller branches are not properly valued. There are conflicts in personal relationship and areas of competence and there are power struggles;
- g) there are difficulties in the relationships between the Vincentian Family and other church institutions (dioceses, parish, pastoral groups) especially in places where the Vincentian Family is very small and mostly lay;

h) in the promotion and the realization of concrete collaboration, there are many practical and operational difficulties: distance, lack of time and persons to engage in this ministry, unorganized and lack of commitment, lack of effective means of communication, lack of supervision, the frequent change of priests and Sisters working with the Vincentian Family, the misalignment of programs and interests among the branches and the joint action of the Vincentian Family, the limited participation of younger people.

I believe that the experience of cooperation among the branches of the Vincentian Family has created new pastoral horizons in which the experiences and the fruits of this joint ministry always present **new demands and challenges**.

The activity of the Vincentian Family is a true historical process of revitalization of the Vincentian vocation. It is a fruitful reality and a promising approach. It needs to be encouraged, assumed, deepened, and concretized by all; it is an horizon to be desired and sought after in order to revitalize the Vincentian mission. It is necessary to engrave this proposal on the heart and in the life of the members and the branches of the Vincentian Family (existential and spiritual assimilation) and express it in our daily life through effective and significant action and commitment. As a result of this conviction, there is a strong imperative, especially on the part of the leaders of the various branches to promote in an effective manner this proposal and to make available the necessary human and financial resources for its implementation and development.

From the perspective of the common ideal and an awareness of mutual cooperation, **it is necessary to broaden and deepen the participation and the organization of the Vincentian Family.** Experience has shown that when the awareness of being a family is promoted and when coordination teams are organized on distinct levels and mechanisms are created for joint action, then the activity of the Vincentian Family grows and achieves greater depth, relevancy and effectiveness in deepening and living the Vincentian mission. This presupposes participation and organization, respect and acceptance of each branch so that the spiritual and institutional boundaries are surpassed and enriched. The rich perspective of living a common ideal and the possibility of broader and more enriching activity on behalf of the poor are the incentives to address the difficulties and deepen collaboration, organization and joint action.

Today, in accord with the reality and the specific call of the poor, **the Vincentian Family is called to deepen its understanding and its expression of the Vincentian charism and mission.** The branches and the members of the Vincentian Family have as their challenge the

need to reinterpret the Vincentian charism, looking for ways to explain its relevance and significance at this precise historical moment. We live at a time when there is a change of era, a time that demands profound, solid and on-going formation. The Vincentian Family is a new and privileged place and a new school that enables the members to deepen and revitalize the Vincentian charism through a process of mutual learning. Each branch has its proper contribution which enables it to obtain a broader, more current and consistent understanding of the Vincentian charism. This in turn allows for the revitalization of the Vincentian vocation, indicating in a clear and prophetic manner its nature and its apostolic destination on behalf of the poor, as pointing out the nature of the Vincentian vocation in the church and in society.

It is important to share and promote the Vincentian charism with the laity who today are emerging more and more as the true subjects in living out and promoting and revitalizing the congregational charisms which before were restricted to religious congregations. In the Vincentian Family, the laity have a significant presence which demonstrates the relevance of the Vincentian charism and its power to bring people together. In this effort the laity have a role of being active participants in the development of a proper expression of living out the Vincentian charism and our Vincentian spirituality. In other words, the laity are not merely "consumers" in this regard. As we share the Vincentian charism with the laity, young people and women merit special attention, since they can provide great help in rejuvenating the Vincentian practices and organizational structures. Sharing and developing the Vincentian charism with the laity gives strength to the members of the Vincentian Family so that they can be a leaven of charity within the Church and society and at the same time give witness to God's preferential love for the poor.

The proposal with regard to the activity of the Vincentian Family, lived out within the context of an ecclesiology of communion and in a relationship of reciprocity that brings together diverse forces... this requires **the promotion and the intensification of proposal and projects for common action that utilizes the methodology of systemic change**. In light of Saint Vincent's practice with regard to serving the poor in their "material and spiritual" needs and with regard to "affective" and "effective" love, the members of the Vincentian Family are challenged to assume the methodology of systemic change as a important force for growth and for the revitalization and the development of the Vincentian charism. This methodology consists in understanding service on behalf of the poor in an integral manner, articulating the service of charity and the word and seeking to transform the reality and the causes that generate poverty. To learn this method well and apply it to concrete projects of service on behalf of the poor is a challenge for the Vincentian Family and is also a possibil-

ity for creative and transformational service that goes beyond assistance and other conventional methods.

Collaboration with the Vincentian Family and as members of the Vincentian Family is for the Congregation of the Mission a rich and satisfying horizon of reconfiguration. Being a practical aspect of creative fidelity, reconfiguration seeks to translate the fundamental charism into new attitudes and practices and structures that are suited to the present reality. Collaboration with the Vincentian Family and collaboration as members of the Vincentian Family allows us to develop a process of on-going interaction between the Vincentian/gospel ideal and the present historical challenges. This collaboration moves forward from the perspective of creating a new manner of being, a new historical manner in living out the Vincentian mission.

Activity with the Vincentian Family allows the Congregation of the Mission to move out beyond its own works and therefore, with an attitude of humility, it can join together with the other members of the Vincentian Family in the pursuit of and the deepening of a significant, updated doctrinal foundation in order to understand, justify and encourage itself on the level of being and on the level of acting in a Vincentian manner. We can learn much from other Vincentian Congregations and from the laity. This new knowledge expands, individually and collectively, our sense of belonging and broadens the horizons of the mission... it also creates new sentiments and experiences and commitments that give us new strength to take up the Vincentian cause of service on behalf of the poor.

Activity with the Vincentian Family allows the Congregation of the Mission to better define its place and its role within the Church, for example, to take up anew and with even greater strength the traditional practice of popular missions; to develop its ministry in formation, especially with the laity; to intensify its service with the poor, etc. In collaboration with the Vincentian Family, the Congregation of the Mission can better situate itself in the social and ecclesial arena as an effective agent involved in missionary service on behalf of the poor.

The areas open to activity for the Vincentian Family place the Congregation of the Mission in new pastoral situations, open new horizons for ministry, require a new relationship with other men and women religious and with the laity (resulting in team ministry and networking). The newness of this collaboration moves us beyond conventional practices, provincial and congregational boundaries and requires new practices, methods, and structures for this activity. Revision of our works, new needs in formation and human and financial resources are needed to create new goals and objectives for collaboration with the Vincentian Family.

Confreres in Difficulty

Javier Álvarez, C.M.

On January 13, 2012, Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., along with the General Council, sent a reflection to all the Provincial Councils of the Congregation with on this subject: "Confreres in difficulty". In 2010 the Superior General gave me this mission, complicated and difficult, but one that deserves our attention, respect, and help because it deals with our brothers. We should not forget that behind this title ("confreres in difficulty") lie actual confreres who suffer, and who unfortunately also cause suffering. It is here, more than any other subject, we need everyone's collaboration: the General Council, Visitors, local Superiors and confreres charged of helping these confreres that are going through this special situation.

We can't think about these confreres in difficulty without thinking about the communities where they reside or about the houses where they are assigned, if they live outside the province. In truth, confreres with difficulties contribute in creating communities in difficulties and vice versa. It wouldn't be a bad idea for all of us who exercise some authority in the Congregation to frequently review how we exercise that authority, in the light of cited document, of Saint Vincent's writings and specially the Holy Scriptures.

The reflection that I'm offering will touch on these three points:

- Responses from provinces to the January, 2012 letter from the General Council;
- Confreres who are absent from the community-province;
- The confreres "in difficult situations" who live in community.

I will conclude this last section by offering some concrete proposals.

I.

RESPONSES TO THE JANUARY, 2012 LETTER OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL TO THE PROVINCES

This letter was directed to the Visitors, so that with their respective provincial councils they could study and respond to these two questions in writing:

- What is the province doing to help these confreres that live in difficulty?
- What more can the province or must the province do for them?

Only ten provinces responded to these vital and current questions. The majority responded to the first question by presenting the reality of their provinces in what refers to the confreres in difficulty. Some of the actions that are being taken to help these confreres, specialists in appropriate centers to help cut the unbalances, establishing a provincial commission to accompany and mentor these confreres who decide to abandon the Province.

The following suggestions were made to the second question ("concerning what the Province can do or should do for them"):

- *Create or establish a "Community in Dialogue" model, according to the style of "Trivigliano" run by Fr. Matteo Tagliaferri, as step for overall precaution.*
- *Fortify community life in all ways: prayer, common formation, relaxation, etc.*
- *Offer confreres the help of specialists.*
- *Pay special attention to the different formation stages: initial and ongoing.*
- *Fortify the meaning of belonging to the Congregation.*

II.

CONFRERES ABSENT FROM THE CONGREGATION: SOME PRECISIONS

1. How many absentee confreres are there?

Actually the total number of confreres who are absent from the community are 192. In 2010 there were 211. In one way or another, there have been 65 cases resolved since the 2010 General Assembly, but another 46 have been added. So the result is 19 cases less than in 2010.

In this number we have included all those who have the permission of their Visitor for a year (cf. C. 67), those who are outside with the permission of the Superior General (cf. C. 70), and those who are illegally absent, although their number has decreased. The majority of absentees are between 40 and 60 years of age. The most often cited reasons for absences are: "discerning their vocation", "a desire to be incardinated", and "disagreements/problems with the institution".

2. Why has the number of confreres absent from their communities increased?

The number has increased since 2002 and since then, the number has maintained or has grown year after year, even though the total number of confreres has decreased little by little.

It not easy to find the causes for this phenomenon. We may think that, for example, that a cause is an aversion to all that is institutional and control, favored by today's cultural currents which invites us to live and work in a free, individualistic way. In reality, there are many confreres seeking incardination into a diocese because they desire to live and work with greater liberty and seek an independent economy. We can't discard that in many cases, this may be due to the psychological factor of many of our young who tire and exhaust easily, or in by unstable behavior which reminds us of the consequences of the broken families or difficulties they encountered in their early childhood.

We also have to mention the possible question of their deficient formation as another cause, which did not help them to distinguish what is fundamental and incidental. Along with a lack of personal identity and inability to grasp what it means to belong to the Congregation, this person has often lived very poor vocation discernment.

It's also possible that in some determined cases, some of the young decide to leave a province or the Congregation because they find communities stagnant or who have lost their identities, and living out the charism no longer attracts them. Our young don't support mediocre communities that disillusion them. It is also possible, that in a few cases, there is a confluence of various causes that we have seen here or other ones that we can't comprehend.

3. Practical orientations offered by the General Council

Before all else, this must be our first principal: the Congregation and provinces must be very sensitive, patient and merciful with each confrere who is absent, but must also it must look to the common good of the Congregation and the respective province. A certain balance must be achieved between the institution and the person. If the person is the greatest good, then that should not diminish the common good of the community, the province, and the Congregation.

How can we translate or see this balance within this current subject? Every absentee confrere should be treated with great respect, even when he does not manifest it, or tries to lie and manipulate for his own interests. Through dialogue, we must help him know what is best for him and for the Congregation, and let him clearly see it. And finally

we have to be clear about the periods of absence, and his accountability to the Visitor or his delegate.

In the larger group of absentees, we have to distinguish the following four subgroups:

- **The biggest subgroup is composed of confreres who work and live in a diocese with the intention of being incardinated. Some of these have not exceeded their permitted time to carry this out (5 yrs); therefore, they have a legitimate absence. On the contrary, others started working in a diocese with their provincial permission (1 yr), but the year finished and they continue to live and work without the permission from the Superior General. Therefore, they are in an illegal situation. For this group of confreres, it's very important to control the time allotted and regulate the situation, so that the number of illegitimate absences can be the least possible ones.**
- There are a number of men who live outside of the community and desire to be dispensed from the priestly state or are already in the process. The procedure is described in the Practical Guide for Visitors (No. 163). In these cases, the Visitor must choose a judge and a notary for the interrogations with the interested person. The general council must collaborate with the Visitor and with the Procurator General.
- Another group is made up of older confreres that have been in this situation for many years. These are men who can't live in community, due to a psychological imbalance or because of conditions that are very complicated and particular. In these cases, it's clear that we can't establish a common criterion, but we must see what is most possible to do, always desiring the best for the man and that of the Congregation.
- Finally there is another group we must pay special attention. These are confreres who are young, who are absent illegally, and who don't desire to be incardinated, because they don't want to work in any diocese. In reality, they are out of the Congregation, even though they may be in the catalogue and legally belong to it. They have no intention of returning, they're living in situation which is contrary to our spirit and to priestly lifestyle: civil work, a partnered life, children...

In the case of these men, we must start a process of expulsion, because they are a hindrance to the Congregation, a negative example for new vocations, and even a certain danger for the Congregation, since they belong to it. The General Council is willing to collaborate; clarifying the objections that you may have about the most effective

way to reach the expulsion. The most effective way is, as it is stated in the *Practical Guide of the Visitor*, "center on obedience, because the most stubborn disobedience is easily proven". (In the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, the process of expulsion from the Congregation may be found in the section Nos. 165-190).

It is true that, in some cases, the Visitor may find it difficult to confront a confrere in an irregular situation, as he doesn't want to see him leave the Congregation. They may have some kind of friendship. In these cases, the Visitor may seek the help of the General Council: the confrere in question can receive an assignment from the Superior General. If he doesn't accept it, they can initiate the process for expulsion from Rome, which begins after the second canonical notice. The General Council knows that an expulsion is always difficult and very unpleasant, but when there's no other solution, it must be undertaken with charity, but with firmness.

As long as a confrere is absent temporarily, he belongs to the Congregation, even if he may have lived many years outside the community, or if illegally absent. Therefore, we can't erase him from the catalogue, and if he continues to belong to the Congregation and the province we must be in contact with him to help him to discern, to sustain him, to guide him, so he may not lose contact with the Province. This is a special task of the Visitor.

III.

"CONFRERES IN DIFFICULTY" WHO LIVE IN COMMUNITY

It's evident that within this group, we can find a wide array of situations and problems. Some have said, and with reason, that all of us, at some time in our lives, have passed through difficult moments. The object of this reflection is not those difficulties that are common in our daily lives, but those that live in prolonged or permanent situations of difficulty. In the January, 2012 letter, we made a distinction between the confreres that live in community, and that within them struggle with their difficulties and those others who are present in the community, but in reality are absent from the same.

1. Those who strive to overcome their difficulties

As mentioned before, these are integrated members participating in both community and apostolic life, but who are passing through moments or stages of difficulties. These difficulties can very diverse; as we know they all come from important breakdowns. All confreres who go through these difficulties and struggle to overcome them deserve

respect, solidarity, closeness and our support, because as St. Paul said, it's a great fraternal sign "when we carry the weight of others". These confreres expect to find the "Good Shepherd" in the authority (general, provincial or local) that has the supportive word and is interested in them, as John's Gospel describes (cf. Jn. 10:1-21). We should also recall Pope Emeritus Benedict's words to Superior Generals on May 22, 2006: "To all of you, Major Superiors, I ask that you transmit a word of support to all those who are in difficulty, to the elderly and those who are sick. To all those that are going through moments of crisis and solitude, those who suffer and feel they're lost..."

2. Those placing themselves at the outskirts of community and take of advantage of it

These are the ones who "present but absent", those who are absent but physically present". These confreres, who at times may have great difficulties, at the same time, create difficulties in the communities. They exist in all provinces; some go from house to house. In some provinces, especially larger ones, they seem to be a "cushion house" (provincial house or another) where the difficulty caused by the confrere begins to be dissolved by the environment, softening the wounds provoked in the rest of the confreres.

- Confreres who isolate themselves and lack a sense of belonging, to the Province and the Congregation.
- Confreres that live at the edge of the community and with their own criteria.
- Confreres who give no accountability for their actions.
- Even more serious, confreres who lead a double life, in regard to the vows of poverty and chastity.

What can be done to help these confreres in situations of difficulties who live in community? The letter of January 2012 that we developed posits possible ways:

- *Special attention must be paid to formation.* The need for adequate formators; for a discernment of motivation; all part of good initial formation. This is a preventive action that, in the long run, has good results. A solid accompaniment at the start of vocation discernment and community initiation is the basis to avoid difficult future situations.
- *It is better to prevent than to cure.* This phrase is probably best used in this case. Prevention can be the initial discernment, initial

formation and also permanent formation. We have to learn from our pasts; frequently the most serious difficulties could have been prevented if we would've put greater attention to the initial discernment, when with the help of experts we could have seen the indications of future problems.

- *Specific attention to each case.* There are some basic, general outlines, but each person requires specific treatment, as what is useful for one person may not be so for another. In doing this, we have to provide some hope to the person. This is based on the possibility of giving them some appropriate help, whether spiritual, psychological or both. We can't discard help from professionals in treating concrete problems, even though it could economically expensive. What one requires from each confrere in difficulty is openness.
- *The role of the local community.* Here, the superior and confreres play a fundamental role in accompanying a confrere in difficulty, as in many cases, local communities are the umbilical cord between the confrere and Congregation. Thus, a fraternal environment can benefit the confrere in difficulty, along with a superior, who is welcoming and attentive.
- *The Visitor's role or the delegated confrere.* His mission must be to look intensely and seriously in recuperating the confrere, and by using adequate ways without giving up. These are some ways: a sabbatical year, permanent formation, spiritual direction, medical-psychological help, to name a few. In a case where the confrere has decided to leave, it is important that they receive help from the Visitor and guidance in the corresponding process, whether it's incardination, a dispensation petition from all the priestly duties etc; then in his new way of life: some economic help at the beginning if it's necessary, help him find a job, so he can continue to function as a member of the Church and society.

Sometimes the Visitor may be forced to utilize a confrere who is a friend as a bridge between the confrere and the community. This friend can assist the Visitor in carrying out functions as such frequent communication, accompaniment, and other practical matters.

3. Two specific initiatives for confreres in difficulty who live in community

These are two specific proposals useful for this subject. The General Council asks Visitors to choose the viability (or not) of each of the following initiatives.

3.1. *Creation of a help center to refocus one's vocation, community life, and ministry*

- a) Place: "Saint Vincent de Paul Theologate House, Xoxhimanca – Mexico.

The Mexican Visitor, with the consent of his counsel, will give this house for this purpose. It is a relatively large house (for at least 30-40 people) and is comfortable, with large garden spaces, and near the city. The objective of this center is to attend to confreres of the Congregation, with the agreement of their respective Visitors and Superiors, who want and need to revise their lives and vocations, following a spiritual-psycho-therapeutically program in a community, whose goal is to reach a balance a human and vocational identity balance which enables them to carry out the proper ministries of our Congregation. We would not include confreres with deeper problems who are incapable of minimal community living.

- b) Concrete problems that the center is committed to treating:

- Constant vocational doubts
- Discontent in ministry and/or in community living
- Affective-emotional-sexual imbalances (no pedophilia cases)
- Addictions
- Depression, anguish, stress
- Community conflicts

- c) Program organization:

It will be a three month session held specific times of the year. Upon evaluation, we can determine if a longer time is needed. A minimum of five confreres are required. The personnel needed to run the center include:

- Two confreres with knowledge of Vincentian spirituality and of psychology.
- Two psychologists (male and female) part time, who are capable of working with a Christian orientation.
- One staff person for house maintenance
- One religious volunteer

- d) The program can have the following activities:

- Daily liturgy of the hours and Eucharist.
- An hour of Vincentian spirituality from Monday to Friday.

- Personal daily therapy with the psychologists
- Personal time for Reading and meditation...
- Monthly spiritual retreats
- Community events: exchanges, recreation, trips...

3.2. *Fr. Matteo Tagliaferri's "Community in Dialogue" in Trivigliano (North Italy)*

This Center is located in the surroundings of Trivigliano, Italy. This place currently has 4 confreres. The community and work are led by Fr. Matteo, a confrere.

- The objective of the "community in dialogue" is to help heal those imbalances in the person. As the name indicates there is a great emphasis on dialogue, co-existence and personal relationships. There is professional team: doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and Fr. Matteo as the animator and spiritual accompanist. In the Trivigliano Center there are 80 people who are receiving therapy. In Italy there are other centers that depend on this one. There are even two other centers outside of Italy, one in Lima and another in Bogota.
- Problems that "Community in Dialogue" face:
 - Diverse behavioral imbalances.
 - Personal immaturity that can derive from alcohol dependencies o other chemical substances.
 - Affective dependencies.
 - Immature vocation.
- This therapeutic program is aimed at laity, but a confrere has participated in it, along with diocesan and religious priests. Fr. Matteo is willing to receive a confrere who asks to go, but no more than 2 at a time. They can live in the community and also participate in the activities of the therapeutic center.

3.3. *Other possibilities*

Obviously, the above two means don't replace the resource of the specialized centers whose goal is rehabilitation. For more complicated cases, we have no other remedy than to go to them, which on the other hand exist in many other countries.

Communication in the Congregation of the Mission Today

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

John T. Maher, C.M. and John Freund, C.M.

Visitors Meeting, 2013

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).
- *"Ipsa facto" declaration of dismissal* (cf., PCV, 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 conferees 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 conferees 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.

Systemic Change: A Way to a Fuller Vincentian and Ecclesial Identity

James Claffey, Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
and Giuseppe Turati, C.M.

Why is a Systemic Change mentality so important for us as members (and leaders) of the Congregation of the Mission? Might you, as Visitors, help promote a Systemic Change mentality among the members of your province and within the wider Vincentian Family? We suggest to you two reasons why a Systemic Change mentality is so important for all of us as members and for you as leaders of the Congregation of the Mission: 1) the New Evangelization to which the Church is calling us today; 2) some seeds of Systemic Change in the life and writings of St. Vincent.

I.

THE CHURCH'S CALL TO A NEW EVANGELIZATION

Last October bishops from all over the world gathered with Pope Benedict XVI for a Synod on the New Evangelization. They were not discussing a new theme.

The Medellín document, which had dramatic effects in Latin America, called for a re-evangelization of human existence¹. It envisioned a Latin American Church as an Evangelizer of the Poor, committed to living in solidarity with them². The final document at Puebla continued this emphasis of a renewed evangelization³. The Santo Domingo document, building on the experience of two decades, provided an extensive development of the contents of "new evangelization"⁴. By the time of Aparecida (2007), the term "New Evangelization" was taken for granted⁵.

¹ MEDÉLLIN, VIII, 8.

² MEDÉLLIN, XIV, 8.

³ PUEBLA, 340f.

⁴ SANTO DOMINGO, *Conclusions* 23ff.

⁵ Aparecida, *Message to the Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3.

Almost all commentators agree that Paul VI, while not using the term "new evangelization" is one of its principal architects. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* provides some of the richest source materials for the new evangelization⁶:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.

Evangelii Nuntiandi had a great influence on our Vincentian Constitutions of 1984. In fact, it is one of the few documents our Constitutions cite verbatim⁷. I will return to this point shortly.

Last year's Synod, in its final message on October 26, 2012, gave a brief summary of what the New Evangelization asks of us. In paragraph two, the message states: "The changed social, cultural, economic, civil and religious scenarios call us to something new: to live our common experience of faith in a renewed way and to proclaim it through an evangelization that is 'new in its ardor, in its methods, in its expressions', as John Paul II said" (Discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince, 9 March 1983, n. 3). Paragraph 12 of the final message added forcefully: "The... symbol of authenticity of the new evangelization is the face of the poor". Placing ourselves side by side with those who are wounded by life is not only a social exercise, but above all a spiritual act because it is Christ's face that shines in the face of the poor: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

We must recognize the privileged place of the poor in our communities, a place that does not exclude anyone, but wants to reflect how Jesus bound himself to them. The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful: "It changes persons more than a discourse does, it teaches fidelity, it makes us understand the fragility of life, it asks for pray, it brings us to Christ". That synodal statement certainly sounds very "Vincentian"!

All the modern popes have insisted that gestures of charity must also be accompanied by commitment to justice. Hence, the social doctrine of the Church is integral to new evangelization. Looking back over the last hundred years, Pope John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: "To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian mes-

⁶ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 63.

⁷ *Constitutions* 10, 11, 16.

sage"⁸. He adds: "The 'new evangelization'... must include among its elements *a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine*"⁹. Those are strong words. It would be hard to put the matter more clearly.

To us, it is fascinating to analyze how strongly *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the terminology of the New Evangelization have influenced our Constitutions and other official documents of the Congregation of the Mission in recent years. Our documents over the last 25 years have a number of significantly new accents, placing emphasis on:

- following Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor
- seeing the poor as not merely the object of evangelization, but its subject
- being evangelized by the poor
- teaching the link between evangelization and action for justice
- searching out the causes of poverty and concrete solutions
- investigating new forms of poverty
- becoming specialists in the Church's social teaching
- forming basic Christian communities
- acquiring a global world-view.

We suggest to you today that Vincentian Family emphasis on Systemic Change is a concretization of the call to a New Evangelization.

II.

SOME SEEDS OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ST. VINCENT

The concept of "systemic change" is a modern one. It was unknown to St. Vincent and his contemporaries. Like all of us today, Vincent accepted as given, and sometimes as God-given, many of the structures that surrounded him. They were like the air he breathed. For the most part, he simply took them for granted. Vincent was born and died in a multi-tiered society, with a monarchy, nobility, clerics and peasants. He would never have dreamed about changing those structures radically, as revolutionary France did 150 years later.

But, within the context of his time, Vincent expressed many ideas related to systemic change. It is useful for us to examine these seminal thoughts, since they help us to situate a systemic change mentality in

⁸ *Centesimus Annus* 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the spirituality of the Vincentian Family today. So, today I want to describe eight seeds of Systemic Change in the life and works of St. Vincent. I will give each of the seeds a name, using the terminology that St. Vincent used and then I will relate it to the terminology found in systemic change projects today. One could do similar things in regard to the life and works of Louise de Marillac, Frederick Ozanam, and other heroes in the Vincentian Family.

1. Affective and effective love: changing social structures

You are all familiar with the phrase, which Vincent repeated over and over again; we are called to a love that is both "affective and effective". He says, for example, "The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender; it is effective, because they serve the poor concretely". Today, we are conscious that sin affects not just individuals; it deeply affects social structures. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. Many of these unjust societal structures keep the poor living in poverty.

Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan dramatizes the principle that love of God is displayed in love of neighbor. But today we recognize more and more that effective love involves not just binding up the individual victim's wounds and pouring oil on them, but also making sure that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is safe for all in the future.

2. Integral evangelization by word and work: witness, preaching and human promotion

Vincent was deeply convinced that what we say and what we do must reinforce one another. Witness authenticates words. What we say is credible only if our actions corroborate it. In other words, Vincent sees witness, service, preaching and teaching as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process. Today, the unity between witness, evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of Vincent's spirit, is one of the main emphases in the Church's social teaching. First, do. Then, teach. That is Vincent's rule for "effective" evangelization. So, Vincent encouraged his followers to examine various elements in the lives of the poor to see what their most urgent needs were: nourishment, health care, education, job opportunities, and spiritual care. He focused on the whole person and wanted to treat the person holistically.

3. The “Chatillon” organization

When he gathered the initial group of women to form a “Confraternity of Charity” at Chatillon-les-Dombes in November 1617, Vincent stated, in the Rule he composed for them, that the poor sometimes suffer more from a lack of “order” in the help offered them than from a lack of charitable persons who want to help. So, he organized them. He believed that well-intentioned charity must also be well-organized, that it must be planned and executed with precision and care. Vincent was a precise planner and organizer. This was one of his greatest gifts. It helped make his works effective. Vincent wanted quality, competence, gentleness and respect to characterize the service provided in a project. He insisted that not only should we do good, but that we should do it well, with adequate resources and at the same time with warmth and concern.

4. Writing contracts and rules: establishing solid foundations as a basis for sustainability

Through his life, Vincent negotiated detailed contracts and wrote precise rules as he set up all the groups he founded. He wanted those groups to be firmly established so that their service to others would be long-lasting. The contracts provided for the financial stability of the groups. The Rules conveyed the structure and described the charism and the spirit of the groups he founded. Both contracts and the Rules played a foundational role in preserving these groups into the future. It is helpful to note Vincent saw no conflict between trusting in Divine Providence and providing for the future by laying firm financial foundation and setting up structures that would make his projects last. Today, all organizations that are initiating project put great emphasis on sustainability.

5. Simplicity & transparency

Vincent tells us again and again that the poor are attracted to those who speak and live simply, who are transparent in what they say and do. This is also one of the fundamental aspects of successful systemic change projects: their leaders have developed the ability to listen to the poor, to speak with them simply and transparently, and to involve them in the project at every stage, from initial discernment of needs, to planning the project, carrying it out, and evaluating and adjusting it. Today, transparency in formulating budgets, in using resources and reporting to others, (including the poor); about how those resources are being used is one of the key themes of Systemic Change.

6. *Petites écoles*: education and job-training

Vincent and Louise de Marillac were deeply committed to the education and formation of poor young people, especially so that they might have the skills to work. For that reason, with Vincent's support, Louise founded the "petites écoles" and made the instruction of poor young people one of the principal works of the first Daughters of Charity. So, right from the beginning, schools have been a part of the charism of the Vincentian Family. Louise taught in these schools herself. She insisted that the instruction given should be clear and practical.

Today, schools of the Vincentian Family have over a million members. Beyond the schools, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups offer formation to more than 120,000 young people. Education and job-training are extremely important to bring about systemic change. In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI wrote: "Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit". St. Vincent and St. Louise were concerned not only about the education of the poor, but about the education and formation of the servants of the poor; that is, of us, the members of the groups they founded or inspired. The formation of leaders is crucial in systemic change projects.

7. Collaboration in all strata of society: networking

Vincent knew how to network. He brought together rich and poor, young and old, clergy and lay, men and women. He had the ability to recognize and call forth people's gifts. He saw that collaboration was the key to success in serving the poor. So, he forged bonds, built bridges, and fostered unity among very diverse groups of people. He knew how to draw these people into his captivating vision of life. On his one side was Anne, the Queen of France, a woman of broad culture and also of political intrigue; on his other side was Marguerite Nascau, a peasant girl who did not know how to read or write. He drew together women and men of every rank in society, by sharing his vision with them and getting them excited about it. He was a wonderful networker. Networking and collaboration are crucial in successful systemic change projects, not just within the Vincentian Family, but with other religious and civic groups, foundations, and governments on various levels.

8. His role at court: advocacy

While Vincent is best known for his practical works of charity, he also served as an advocate for the poor before the highest authorities, at times at considerable risk to himself. On several occasions he inter-

vened personally to try to bring about peace, when war was wrecking the lives of the poor. He went right to the top.

One of Vincent's biographers relates a striking episode, taken from an account written by Vincent's secretary. In 1649, during the civil war, Vincent left Paris quietly, crossed battle lines (at almost 70 years of age) and forded a flooded river on horseback to see the Queen and to beg her to dismiss Mazarin, whom he regarded as responsible for the war. He also spoke directly to Mazarin himself. But his pleas went unheeded. Vincent attempted to speak with leaders on both sides and at times felt that a settlement was near, but ambitions and intrigues thwarted his efforts. His attempts at peacemaking earned him the enmity of Mazarin, who, in his secret diary, records him as an enemy. By the time peace finally came, Vincent had been removed from the Council of Conscience.

All those involved in systemic change projects today emphasize the importance of advocacy and building a shared vision with diverse stakeholders: poor communities, individuals, donors, churches, governments, private sector, unions, media, international organizations and networks.

Those are eight seeds of systemic change in the life and works of St. Vincent. I encourage you today to reflect on these eight seeds, which are fundamental in a systemic-change mentality. Seeds are small. They develop only gradually. Like seeds, creative beginnings are recognized only later when they have grown into full-scale creative works. A seed is beautiful not when it is thrown into the ground, but when it blooms as a flowering tree. So too, a germinal systemic change project, like a seed, will bear fruit only if it is nurtured, watered and tended patiently. All of the Commission engaged in successful systemic-change works say: Start small. Move forward patiently step by step.

So we urge you to encourage the confreres of your provinces: sow many seeds. As you work with them, let your ears be open, as were the ears of St. Vincent and St. Louise, to new, creative ideas. Urge the confreres to support new initiatives begun by others. In these challenging times, encourage creativity, and be courageous and persistent in putting creative ideas into practice. Examine with the confreres of your province the plight of the poor in its concrete context, but examine it as a whole field, a system. Then, seek, with the confreres and with the poor, to plant seeds that will transform the entire field and make it blossom anew.

III. THE 'HOW' OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE

We suggest that we can promote a systemic change mentality in three different areas: formation, collaboration, action. Regarding *formation*, let's consider formation and some tools.

Teaching systemic change in initial and ongoing formation: Systemic change is not something ("content") that we have to learn, among other things ("knowledge"). Rather, it is a way of working or, even better, an approach, a style of working (a "mentality"). As such, it is acquired in the course of life, especially in the formation process. We acquire a systemic change mentality in two ways: by studying it (theoretically) and by experiencing it (practically). For this reason, training in this methodology is very important over the course of one's whole lifetime. It should be part of the initial and ongoing training programs of the confreres. It is very important that our confreres be acquainted with this methodology at every stage of formation. We believe that knowledge of and training in a systemic change methodology should not be missing at any stage in the formation process of our confreres. A concrete way to do this would be to insert a chapter (or a section) on this issue both in the *CM Ratio Formationis* and into formation programs formulated at a provincial level. Of course, concrete experiences "in the field" by the confreres, both during their initial formation, as well as afterwards during their ongoing formation, have an important role if this methodology is to become a natural and spontaneous mentality among our confreres.

Some means and materials that are available: One of the goals of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change is precisely to make available materials that can be used both on a personal and provincial level for the training of confreres and communities. Among the tools that the Commission has developed since it began in 2005, I would like to recommend to you the book *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*. It is now available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. It is currently being translated into Korean and Vietnamese. It is not a theoretical study, but it begins with successful stories of systemic change projects. Then, from the stories, it deduces 20 strategies that made the projects successful. Here is a summary of the table of contents:

Prologue

1. Akamasoa, a Community of Good Friends
2. I Have a DREAM
3. Mission-Oriented Strategies
4. The Perfect Storm

5. AIC Madagascar, a Story of Systemic Change within an Association
6. Person-Oriented Strategies
7. The Story of the Passage
8. The Homeless Peoples' Federation of the Philippines
9. Task-Oriented Strategies
10. The Clancy Nighshelter
11. The Mindoro Project in the Philippines
12. Strategies Directed toward Co-responsibility, Networking and Political Action
13. The Vincentian Mission at the United Nations

A Tool Kit. To accompany the book, the Commission offers tools for teaching others about systemic change. At first, they envisioned a box containing documents, brochures, questionnaires, and DVDs with films and PowerPoint presentations, etc. But, finally, they decided on a 2 gigabyte memory stick containing all those same materials. This choice proved very advantageous, since it enabled the Commission to encourage those receiving it to modify materials to fit their own culture. It was distributed in Mexico in 2009 and is available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

Regarding *collaboration*, we suggest two issues: collaboration within the Vincentian family and the organization of systemic change workshops. These two issues illustrate an important aspect of how a mentality (at a personal level) and a culture (at a social level) are formed. The importance of collaboration within the Vincentian Family in promoting a systemic change mentality: A mentality is a personal way of seeing, judging and acting. But none of us can form our own mentality by ourselves; rather, it is formed in primary and secondary relationships that helps develop our individuality. A mentality is not the result of just one person's influence on us. It is a vision influenced by many persons.

St. Vincent would not have been what he was, without the relationships he had with many people, including many lay people. A mentality develops through concrete experience; i.e. through the experience of those who work "in the field". Today, among the persons "in the field" most committed to eliminating the causes of poverty and promoting the welfare of the poor are our Vincentian lay groups. Lay Vincentians are, in large number, the "operational arm" of the Vincentian charism and have significant experiences to share with us regarding systemic change. If we really want to open ourselves to this mentality, we cannot fail to collaborate with them.

Furthermore, poverty today is complex, and in our efforts to eliminate its causes, can only be through collaborative action. That is why networking is so important. For this reason, today fund-raising activities aimed at obtaining (public and private) contributions are usually successful only if we can demonstrate that the project is a shared one, carried out in partnership with others. As Vincentians, we have a great potential to act together against the causes of poverty, but often we do not use that potential, as we don't know how or because our formation has not prepared us to do so.

A major challenge for our Vincentian works among the poor in the years ahead will be our ability to work together as a Vincentian Family and overcome individualism, skepticism, and resistance, so that our Vincentian action in the world in the serving the poor will be truly effective. I am convinced that, beyond what we write in our documents statements about what we intend to do, in many provinces much still needs to be done to foster collaboration.

- Organizing systemic change workshops in your Province for members of the Vincentian Family. I encourage you, when you return to your Provinces to organize systemic change workshops for the members of our Family.
- A mentality develops from shared endeavors, both theoretical and practical. It is experience that forms a mentality. As Vincentians, common formation is very important for unified, shared action. Good formation programs enable us to create a Vincentian mentality among and around us. A mentality is not theory, but a concrete way of seeing life. As Vincentians, we need to move from the notion of systemic change to its practice. A process of "inculturation" is needed. To move toward this goal, the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change organizes local workshops wherever it is invited. The Commission has had good experiences in this regard. We have a great role to play as animators of the various Vincentian Family branches, especially you, the Visitors. As Visitors, you can appoint the Spiritual Assistants or Councilors for the Vincentian Associations, and verify that their service is adequate and in line with the demands of the Vincentian charism and the Church.
- From its experience and from the evaluation of the participants, the Commission sees that the workshops it has given have been a very effective way of adapting the systemic change methodology to different local realities. At the same time, the Commission is convinced that the role of the Visitors is a decisive factor in the success of the workshops organized so far.

Regarding *action*, we focus on projects and consider two possibilities: transforming already existing projects into systemic change projects, and formulating new systemic change projects.

The worldwide Vincentian Family has projects against poverty on five continents, but not all are systemic change projects. There is a big difference between what we call assisting projects to help the poor and systemic change projects. "Assisting" projects focus solely on the relief of immediate needs. Such projects are good and at times necessary, but they are not enough. The second kind of projects, systemic change projects, meets certain criteria. The most important criteria are:

- that the project promotes change in the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it (long-range social impact);
- that the project creates social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the life of poor (sustainability);
- that the project can be adapted to solve similar problems in different places (replicability);
- to involve the poor themselves, especially the young and women, in every phase of the project;
- to have a broad vision of the human person; in other words, the project should meet a series of basic human needs, such as jobs, money, food, health care and education;
- to have shared goals with diverse stakeholders (interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, union, media, international organizations and networks...).

These criteria are useful not only in setting up new systemic change projects, but also as criteria for assessing existing projects and transforming them into systemic change projects. How? By periodically reviewing our projects to assess their positive and negative aspects. As problems arise or circumstances change, we must have the courage to adjust our goals, methods and means.

Right now, the Congregation of the Mission is engaged in a process of reconfiguration. It is very important at this moment in our history not only that we commit ourselves to live and work within new juridical boundaries in our provinces, but that we commit ourselves to create new forms of ministry as we re-dedicate ourselves to mission and charity. In this context, a systemic change methodology can be a powerful new approach to our works among the poor, as we address current needs from both an ecclesiological and sociological point of view.

To sum up, in works among the poor, systemic change aims beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate the immediate needs

of the poor. It focuses on assisting the needy to change the overall structures within which they live, so that they can emerge from poverty.

As Visitors of the Congregation, you have a very significant role. Together with your Provincial Council you will make decisions about which projects to promote, to support financially, to modify (and how to modify them), and which ones to abandon. This is a great responsibility and we believe that in taking on this responsibility you will be contributing to the New Evangelization which the universal Church commits us to in the present era.

We close now with a prayer for systemic change:

A Prayer for Systemic Change

*We praise and thank you, O God,
Creator of the Universe.
You have made all things good
and have given us the earth to cultivate.
Grant that we may always use created things gratefully,
and share them generously with those in need.
Give us creativity in helping the poor
meet their basic human needs.
Open our minds and hearts so that we might
stand at their side and assist them to change
whatever unjust structures keep them poor.
Enable us to be brothers and sisters to them,
friends who walk with them in their
struggle for fundamental human rights.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

AMEN.

International Visitors Meeting: Final Remarks

July 13, 2013

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

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 do 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.

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issue...**

Reconfiguration and Remembering our Spanish Martyrs