

The Vincentian Family in Action

India, Haiti, Hunger Initiative, and VFCC

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY IN INDIA

Joseph Maniangat, C.M.

Visitor, India North Province

Since the time of St. Vincent, several hundred diverse groups of women and men, laity and religious were fascinated by his spirituality and his work. Consequently, they have accepted his mission, spirit and rule or adapted it to suit the cultures of various nations and peoples around the world. It is encouraging to note that men and women who are inspired by him come together to learn from one another and to continue his work much more efficiently and fruitfully through a united effort. More than a desire to come together under the patronage of the great man, it is his spirit of service to the poor and the abandoned of the society that draws the branches of the Vincentian Family close to each other. Vincentian family in India is no exception to this.

The actual formation of the Vincentian Family in India dates back to recent times – to the year 2006. A few Congregations/Societies having St. Vincent as their Founder or Patron decided to come together and get to know each other and their charism. The movement gradually gained momentum and necessitated meetings at various levels. Some seventeen Congregations/Societies/Associations have participated in the movement to this day.

The Aim of the Movement is

- To promote a spirit of mutual collaboration, solidarity and networking among the various branches of Vincentian Family in India respecting, at the same time, the autonomy of each group;
- To strengthen common apostolic endeavors among the members of the Vincentian Family;
- To recognize and become aware of the challenging reality of those who live in poverty;
- To collect and circulate information about the present day realities, needs, hopes and fears of the people living in poverty;
- To undertake common ministries in the light of the emerging realities of the people who live in poverty;

- To develop new forms of collaboration in the formation program among the members of the various branches, through our knowledge of St. Vincent and his charism;
- To ensure the participation of other branches and to organize and develop the VF in places where it is not present;
- To deepen the Vincentian spirit and charism in the light of present day needs.

Organization

The Vincentian Family gatherings and activities take place at various levels: national, regional, zonal and local. Obviously those involved at the national level are the Major superiors, whereas members (Confreres/Sisters/Lay people) from the remote parts of the country come together at the local level gathering. Each body has its own leader or co-ordinator to monitor the activities at that level. So far, seven annual gatherings at the national level have taken place in different parts of India. At other levels, meetings are called depending on the convenience of the members concerned. All these promote closer ties, unity, formation and collaboration among the members and branches of the Vincentian Family.

Activities

- The Vincentian Family in India organizes annually a 5-day on-going formation program for the members of the various branches. It has been conducted four times by now, and has seen a steady increase in the number of participants from various branches of the Family.
- A major coming together of the members of many branches was witnessed this year in Ranchi, in North India, where a seminar on Systemic Change was conducted by Fr. Robert P. Maloney and his team. A follow-up of that program is being planned.
- Various branches have come together also to realize the house-building projects of 100 families affected by the recent religious riots in the State of Odisha.
- Possibilities are being explored to start a centre to care for the HIV-AIDS patients.
- We have also published booklet containing the names and addresses of the branches of the Family and their communities in India.
- The website for the Vincentian Family in India is: www.vincentianfamilyindia.org
- There is also a News Bulletin published, named 'vinfamindia', disseminating the news of the VF.

It is our hope that besides developing a sense of belonging to a world-wide Vincentian family under the patronage of St. Vincent, we might be able to put our heads and hands together to realize the Vincentian charism of serving the most abandoned people. For the time we are getting to know each other's presence and activities across India, and for the short period since we began the movement, the result has been very encouraging.

VINCENTIAN FAMILY COLLABORATION COMMISSION REPORT

Joseph Agostino, C.M.

Coordinator, VFCC

The Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission (VFCC), created two years ago, exists to assist the Superior General in promoting collaboration among branches of the Vincentian Family. The Vincentian Family Project Design Team (PDT) has as its purpose the creation of a curriculum for formation in collaboration. It was launched at the "Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program" (CAP) in Paris on Pentecost in May 2013. Thirty-four people came from sixteen countries, representing thirteen branches of the Family. It was a great mixture of laity and religious from many walks of life, as Vincentian Family 'beginners and veterans'.

The Design Team put together a program utilizing adult learning methodologies, balanced with input and process. In its own words, their vision was "to call forth and galvanize the next generation of Vincentian family members to collaborate and help people and communities to emerge from poverty".

The program was comprised of five modules comprised of presentations, discussion, case studies and dialogue. There were pilgrimages to Vincentian sites and shrines in Paris which helped to "fill out" their understanding of the Vincentian charism. The "curriculum" of the five modules was as follows:

- *Module One: Re-awakening.* A Vincentian is a visionary who allows the charism of the Founders to be alive and incarnated in oneself. This will lead to being grounded in Vincentian roots and the tradition of collaboration.
- *Module Two: Re-rooting.* A Vincentian is a contemplative rooted in a relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ. This contemplation is a discipline of love. It roots one in the five characteristic Vincentian virtues, which guide our relationships with one another and the poor.

- *Module Three: Re-discovering.* A Vincentian re-discovers the power of collaboration as the only way to affect systemic change. As a result, a Vincentian chooses to act collaboratively to build relationships with the Vincentia family and beyond it to help us fulfill our common vision.
- *Module Four: Re-Igniting.* Vincentians will re-ignite their passion to be catalysts of change, so that they can help people and communities to emerge from poverty. Vincentians will invite and motivate others to collaborate and create new opportunities for systemic change.
- *Module Five: Re-Imagining.* Vincentians will re-imagine themselves in their ministerial roles so as to be energized in service to the poor. By adapting ways of collaboration, systemic change, and creating a personal action plan, they engage in personal transformation as better collaborators.

Based on the Commission plan and feedback from the thirty-four participants in Paris, the program will be repeated again in 2014 to “train the trainers”. They, in turn, will translate and acculturate it into Spanish, French, and Portuguese for use in subsequent years. The members of the Project Design Team represent Vincentian colleges and universities in the USA, and ministries in the Vincentian Family, specifically, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and some branches of the Vincentian Family.

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY HAITI INITIATIVE

Joseph Agostino, C.M.

Coordinator, VFHI

This is an outline of comments that will be made, giving a brief summary of the work of the Vincentian Family in Haiti, which started with a focus on *Zafen*, the micro-credit project. Our work in Haiti began as the special project to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Vincent and Louise. Upon being named its Coordinator in January 2012, I was informed that the Vincentian Family in Haiti had little contact with or use for the work that had been undertaken in the area of microfinance. Their needs, as well as that of their service populations, were much more basic.

As a result of meetings with the Vincentian Family leaders in Haiti and the VF Board, we addressed those concerns. It is no longer correct to call our efforts in Haiti by the name *Zafen*. Rather, we will be referring to the **Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative** from this point forward.

In collaboration with the Haitian leadership and the Board, a 3 year Strategic Plan was developed containing 4 major components:

1. ***Fostering human development through highly tailored education programs.*** We are currently collaborating with Mary's Meals of Scotland in to provide one hot meal per day to students in a consortium of schools both in and around the capital. We also hope to further enhance our efforts with the highly successful CLM program (which is currently on track to move 300 women and their families out of poverty).
2. ***Funding existing Vincentian Family projects to ensure their continued success and sustainability.*** Right now we are focused on a Bakery sponsored by the CM's and a sewing cooperative sponsored by the DC's.
3. ***Launching business initiatives, sensitive to social realities, in order to create jobs, develop job skills and generate revenue to be reinvested in other projects in Haiti.*** In the hope of moving toward the creation of economic empowerment zone, in which we will cluster these efforts, we are starting with a fish farm and a breeding center.
4. ***Continuing support for Zafèn,*** an internet-based funding mechanism to support social projects and generate capital for entrepreneurs lacking access to usual sources for loans

Furthermore, the plan calls for a National Implementation Council (NIC), which has been formed and whose work is underway. They were formally commissioned for their ministry at a Eucharistic Celebration in Haiti on February 2, 2013.

The Council is composed of 2 representatives from each branch of the Haitian Vincentian Family, appointed by local leadership. The Council helps design and evaluate strategies, offers advice to the Board for the growth of the mission, and serves as communication ambassadors to their branches of the Vincentian Family and all those we serve.

The Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative Board is composed of a representative of each branch of the Vincentian family, appointed by its international leader. The Board is responsible for safe-guarding the mission and is solely responsible for finances, in the name of the international heads of the Vincentian Family.

The members of the VFHI Board are:

- Joe Agostino, CM (Chair and Coordinator of the VFHI)
- Gene Smith (SSVDP)
- Yasmine Cajuste (JMV)
- Jacqueline Casseus (AIC)

- Joe Foley, CM
- Rosa Maria Sanchez, DC
- Raphael Verluxe, CM (CM Regional Superior)

A Foundation has been formed as the legal and fiscal entity that makes this important work possible by holding funds inside the country to finance projects and enable the hopeful reinvestment of profits so this work becomes self-sustaining.

So this question remains: what can you as Visitors do, and what can your confreres and the members of the Vincentian Family in your provinces do to make the Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative a truly successful, long-lasting, and life-giving endeavor? I offer you some suggestions:

- Visit our Vincentian Haiti Initiatives website on a regular basis for news and information and visit the “Zafen” “Facebook” page and share loan opportunities with your contacts;
- Share your email address and that of your funders for our newsletter;
- Mention the Vincentian Haiti Initiatives in the public forums you attend;
- Pray for the Vincentian Haiti Initiative as well as for the Vincentian Family efforts in Haiti that we may ease their burden and empower the poor;
- Pick one of our strategic objectives that you find meaningful;
- Connect us with expert who may advance our goals;
- Alert us to funding opportunities from foundations or grants;
- Make a donation from your own province or personal resources;
- And finally, help to empower the poorest of Haitians, encouraging self-reliance, while creating long-term sustainability.

VINCENTIAN FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

Jozef Noga, C.M.

Visitor of Slovakia

In Slovakia, a community life style for the confreres developed after the fall of the Communist government in 1989. We have begun to work in parishes and in ministry for the poor. Little by little, our confreres who had for years worked as diocesan priests started to work in areas unknown to them: prisons, hospitals, homes for the sick, and, in general, areas covered by social services. The situation was similar for the

Sisters. They, too, had been able to organize a common life, open houses, create missions, and look for places that were congenial to their service.

These two branches of the Vincentian family began a close working relationship with lay Vincentian groups. Gradually they too created their own structures, defined their role in the environment of the world of the poor, and enriched their perspective by international experience. "From the one who to whom much is given, much will be demanded" (Lk. 12:48). Aware of this fact, we have sought to help those most in need of our help. We have sought, as a result, and found possibilities of close collaboration and unity to help at least some of them.

Why these two countries?

The answer to this is simple: for practical reasons. One of the Sisters had worked as a missionary in Haiti. It made sense that her friends in the Vincentian Family wanted to help her. And our confreres began a mission in Honduras, which needed money for various projects. Haiti and Honduras are the two poorest countries in Latin America. The people experience hunger. The majority of the population knows extreme poverty, both material and spiritual. It is amazing to realize how many illiterate people there are. Daily life in Haiti is marked by various hurricanes that have made the situation after the 2010 earthquake even worse. Our Sisters are carrying out major projects of feeding, education, and even hygiene.

Fund raising

Fund raising began in 2007 with an initiative of the Vincentian Family. Today, we have reached our seventh year, and in the last six years, we have raised **1,536,675** Euros for the poor. The fundraising efforts are being done not only from a practical perspective, but also from a spiritual one. At the beginning of each year, a Mass is celebrated for this intention. The members of the Vincentian Family pray for all the people involved.

Division of the funds

In Haiti, at the time of the January 2010 earthquake, some 300,000 people died, and more than 100,000 simply disappeared. Millions there still live in temporary tents. About half of the population has no clean water, and a third of the children are malnourished. In Honduras, help has been given to the Slovak mission who has been in Honduras for the last five years. In the last two years, it is working in the parish of Sangrelaya, in the diocese of Trujillo. The effort is to support agricul-

tural projects, beginning with a sewing program for abused girls and woman, then a fishing program, a clean-water project, cooking lessons, and management skills for a barber shop. In the near future, we are thinking about beginning an English course and social work.

Participating in the collection

"Fight against Hunger" happens through the sale of small honey candies in the shape of hearts. The entire process takes place with the help of volunteers. Many members of the various branches of the Vincentian family, both young and old, prepare, package, and sell them. On the streets, in front of major supermarkets, in ordinary places. They also go to schools, recreation centers, universities, etc. In this way, the union of the Vincentian family in Slovakia is being strengthened.

In recent years, a report was prepared for Catholic radio, Lumen, as well as a program for TV Lux. Journalists were able to meet the organizers of *"Fight against Hunger"* and concluded with a meeting with the apostolic nuncio who had done his diplomatic work in Haiti. Interestingly, young people also took part in the major music festival in Slovakia, Pohoda. It must be said that the majority of those attending were not inclined toward the church. In other words, this was a dangerous and unbelieving environment. A woman, the former prime minister of the government, took an interest in this work.

Slovakian Mission in Honduras

In the past, our province had no overseas mission. In the 1990s, we answered a challenge from the general curia to help Christians in Eastern Europe, especially in Ukraine. This was a foreign mission, where many confreres experienced this kind of service.

Honduras is another matter entirely. We did not look for it. We can say that this has enriched our province. Despite difficulties and various weaknesses, we can still serve needy people. In 2008, the first two missionaries arrived there from our country: Fr. Jaroslav Jaško and Brother Ján Zemanovič. They found people of three ethnicities: Garifuna, Indichena, and Miskito. The territory of the parish lies in a region often struck by tropical storms and hurricanes. This is the poorest part of Honduras; people here live from agriculture, cattle raising, fishing, and, unfortunately, from trafficking in weapons and drugs.

After long years of service in the parish of Sangrelaya, where the Daughters of Charity are now working, and where our Spanish confreres from the province of Barcelona worked from 1912 to 1970, our men built a fine wooden church. They also founded an old priests' residence that had completely fallen apart. After some years, with the

help of God and several donors, now there is a house that welcomes lay volunteers and the parishioners.

Our missionaries are working not only in the spiritual field but also in social and educational formation. To reduce a high level of criminality, they are taking an interest in human dignity, in the development of a culture, and of personal growth. They are working in a project of a kitchen for hungry children. At the same time, they are working on the development of infrastructures. In close collaboration with the government, they have begun building a bridge, and are now talking about an aqueduct for the people. With these little steps, they are trying to help the people who lack roads and bridges. In our mission center, they are thinking about preparing two multi-use classrooms for teaching English and the rudiments of computer literacy. The residence has room for lay collaborators, in close collaboration with Doctors without Borders. In our parishes, AIC and Miraculous Medal Association groups are growing.

Working with the Vincentian Family is bringing concrete results in the parish, but especially in the daily life of the poor.