

Presentation

Through the initiative and invitation of the Superior General of the CM and the Daughters of Charity, Robert Maloney, CM, an invitation was addressed to all the provinces of the two Communities to participate in the First **Vincentian Month for Advisors of the Lay Groups of the Vincentian Family**, which was held in Paris, 7-26 July 2002. The response was very positive with 64 Daughters of Charity, 44 members of the CM, two religious from other Congregations and one laywoman participating. We were able to count on the leadership presence of some of the branches of the Vincentian Family who accompanied us, especially during the second week of this meeting.

The Organizing Commission (Roberto Lovera, CM, representing SIEV; Sr. Margaret Barrett, DC; Marina Costa, AIC; and Benjamín Romo, CM) began preparations by selecting topics that would most likely help participants reflect on the Advisor's role and tasks in today's Church. The Commission set the meeting's objectives: deepen the understanding of our Founders' doctrine, know the branches and works of the Vincentian Family and discover better our role as Advisors. They divided the topics into three parts: 1) Faithful to the Gospel, the Church and St. Vincent; 2) the Being and Work of the Vincentian Family; 3) the Role of the Advisor to the groups of the Vincentian Family.

The deepening of these three themes was achieved through conferences, group work, summaries, sharing experiences and a weekly syntheses. The location of the meeting (Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity) and visits to Vincentian places in Paris, allowed participants to deepen their **fidelity to the Gospel, to the Church** and naturally **to our Founders**, for they too were animators of Confraternities of Charity and the two nascent Communities.

The International Heads of the AIC, SSVdP, JMV, AMM, and MISEVI participated in this Vincentian Month, giving conferences, responding to questions and being present in work groups divided into Associations. In this way they helped us know better the **being and work of the Vincentian Associations**. Their presence contributed significantly to a better current knowledge of these Associations, their projects and their formation plans. Their conversations gave us the possibility of specifically clarifying our task as Advisors for we were able to listen to their expectations of us. One of the important points of their work in common was to strengthen awareness and collaboration among councillors and laity within the Vincentian Family in such a way that, together, we can offer more efficacious answers to today's poverties. We have come a long way but there still is a long way to go.

The third week we directed our attention toward what is specific to us: **the role and tasks of the Vincentian Advisor**. The topics reflected upon led us to focus our work as Advisors in relation to formation, the spiritual life and the Vincentian lay apostolate. Work groups by Association allowed us to take on specific commitments.

Thanks to the work of a commission composed of some participants, we were able to have a **Final Synthesis** at the end of the meeting that summarized the three weeks. They presented the contents in an outline form with order and precision: realities, convictions, commitments and suggestions. Certainly, this material offers us an idea of all the richness contained in what was presented, both in the conferences and in the work groups.

The prayer in common at the beginning of each day and the four Eucharists celebrated with all the participants were important times that helped to live and work in a climate of God and of openness to the Spirit. The wonderful disposition of everyone created a very positive and joy-filled environment in the midst of hard work. In the final evaluation the participants indicated a very positive experience of the Vincentian Month.

We want to thank all our brothers and sisters who, with much love and dedication, gave the best of themselves in doing their bit in order to provide a quality meeting. We thank, in particular, the Translation Center of the Daughters of Charity of the Motherhouse for the enormous work undertaken before, during, and after the Meeting. We also thank the members of the Editorial Board of *Vincentiana*. Thanks to them, we will be able to offer to all of you the material that today we are placing in their hands. We offer it to you who participated and also to all who, for various reasons, were not able to be present, but with love and perseverance, accomplish this mission of support to the lay groups. Lastly, we offer it to all those who are convinced that *“It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, N° 207, p. 583).

Vincentian Month Organizing Commission