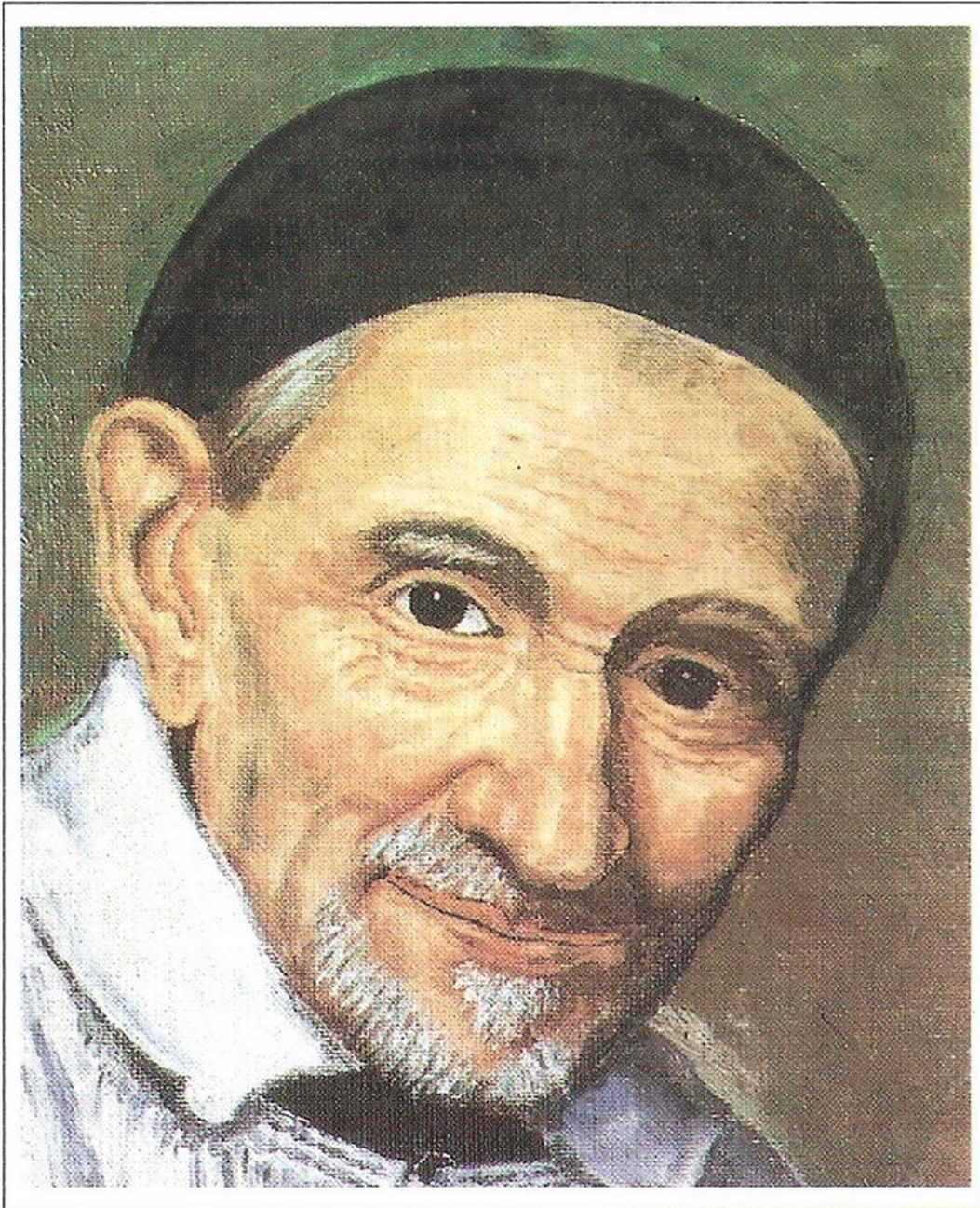


# VINCENTIANA

48<sup>th</sup> YEAR - N. 2

MARCH-APRIL 2004



*Experiences of Apostolic Work  
Among the Poor*

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

# GENERAL CURIA

Rome, April 20, 2004

*To the members of the General Assembly*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I write today to offer you some information about the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, whose theme is: "Our Vincentian identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — an evaluation and three challenges for the future." With this letter I am enclosing the Working Document of the Assembly, the Directory, the postulata, and some practical instructions.

I ask all the members of the Assembly to be here in Rome at least by July 4, in order to take part in the opening session on the morning of Monday, July 5, at 9 a.m.

I am very grateful to the members of the Preparatory Commission (Manuel Ginete, Corpus Delgado, Jorge Pedroza, John Sledziona, Simão Valenga) for preparing the Assembly so carefully and so well, and also to a small organizational commission here at the General Curia (Józef Kapuściak, Elmer Bauer, José María Nieto) for working out so many of the practical details.

At its last meeting, the Preparatory Commission made a number of recommendations to the Superior General and his council which, after discussion with the Commission itself, we then acted on. The Commission recommended:

1. that Fr. Manny Ginete be named as facilitator for the Assembly. This recommendation was accepted. I have asked him to assist at all the sessions of the Assembly as facilitator with the right to speak, but not vote.
2. that the Superior General's delegate to the Vincentian Family, Fr. Benjamín Romo, be invited to be present at the Assembly, because the Congregation's relationship with the various branches of the Vincentian Family has become increasingly important and because this was the theme of the last General Assembly. This recommend-

ation was accepted. I have invited Fr. Romo to assist at all the sessions of the Assembly with the right to speak, but not vote.

3. that the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Evelyne Franc, be invited to speak, preferably after the election of the new Superior General and council. This recommendation was accepted. Sr. Evelyne will speak to the Assembly on the morning of Saturday, July 24. Her topic is: "What do the Daughters of Charity expect of the Congregation of the Mission?" We have also invited the lay presidents of the principal branches of the Vincentian Family to take part in a round-table discussion on the afternoon of Friday, July 23, followed by questions and answers. Each participant in the round-table will speak for ten minutes on two questions: 1) What have been the most important developments within his/her Association over the last six years, as well as the most significant problems?; 2) What does he/she ask of the members of the Congregation of the Mission as he/she envisions cooperation among the members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family in the future?
4. that in preparation for the election of the new Superior General, there be a time of retreat, with a conference. This recommendation was accepted. I have invited Fr. Fernando Quintano to give this conference.
5. that various committees and persons be named before the Assembly in order to facilitate its work: for the liturgy, for organizing social events, for translation and communication, etc. This recommendation was accepted. A list of the persons named is attached. I am very grateful to these confreres for accepting so promptly and so generously. In addition, Frs. Julián Arana and Julio Suescun very graciously accepted my invitation to put together a book of prayer for the Assembly.
6. that computers and Internet connections be available to the members of the Assembly. This recommendation was accepted. We have arranged for computers and a high-speed line both at the Collegio Leoniano and at Via Ezio, so that the members of the Assembly might maintain contact with their provinces.

As announced in my letter of March 30, 1999 (cf. *Vincentiana* 43, N° 2, pp. 87-88), simultaneous translation will be provided during the General Assembly in English, French, and Spanish only.

In preparation for the Assembly, I ask you to read the enclosed working document very carefully. It synthesizes the thoughts of the

provinces on the theme of the Assembly and suggests several challenges for the future.

The Assembly will also, as you know, elect a new Superior General. I encourage you to prepare for this election peacefully and prayerfully. My experience over the years has shown me that there are many very good men in the Congregation who are capable of exercising this office well, with the help of a good council and a good supporting team. I trust deeply that the Spirit of the Lord will be with the Assembly in its process of discernment.

I look forward very much to seeing all of you in July.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

*firma autografa*

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
*Superior General*

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**Moderators**

CORPUS DELGADO  
THOMAS MCKENNA  
ERMINIO ANTONELLO

**Postulata**

ALBERTO VERNASCHI  
GIANCARLO PASSERINI  
GIUSEPPE TURATI

**Reception**

JÓZEF KAPUŚCIAK  
GIUSEPPE STRINATI  
SALVATORE FARÌ  
PROSPER MOLENGI

**Liturgy**

YVES BOUCHET  
SALVATORE FARÌ  
PROSPER MOLENGI

**Translators**

English to French: NOËL KIEKEN and ÉRIC RAVOUX  
French to English: EUGENE CURRAN and PASCHAL SCALLON  
English to Spanish: TEODORO BARQUÍN and FÉLIX ÁLVAREZ  
Spanish to English: JOSEPH CUMMINS and CHARLES PLOCK  
French to Spanish: FERNANDO DEL CASTILLO and JORGE LUIS MUÑIZ  
Spanish to French: ALAIN PÉREZ and PASCAL BREMAUD

**Social Committees**a) *Bus Tours*

GIANCARLO PASSERINI  
GIUSEPPE STRINATI

b) *Social Nights*

YVES BOUCHET  
FRANCISCO SOLÁS  
EUGENE CURRAN  
SALVATORE FARÌ

**Secretariat**

JOSÉ MARÍA NIETO  
Sr. ANN MARY DOUGHERTY  
Sr. TERESA SANNO  
ORLANDO ESCOBAR  
ADAM BUDZYNA

**Chronicler**

CELESTINO FERNÁNDEZ

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

**CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
CPAG '04**

***Work Document*  
40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
2004**

*Our Vincentian Identity today,  
having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years:  
evaluation and three challenges for the future*

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission are the result of a **long process of discernment** in response to the call of Vatican II to express in a new way our own charism and to revise the juridical norms of the communities. The Extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969 drew up a first draft of the Constitutions.<sup>1</sup> The Assembly of 1974, besides redrafting some sections of the Constitutions, formulated some Declarations in order to enlighten, stimulate and orient the effort of the whole Congregation and of each of its members.<sup>2</sup> The General Assembly of 1980, after a thorough and delicate job, rewrote the whole text of the Constitutions.<sup>3</sup> Once presented to and approved by the Holy See, they took effect on 25 January 1985.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis" (1969) in *Vincentiana* (1969), 85-126.

<sup>2</sup> "Declarationes" (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 286-302. "Constitutiones et Statuta. Textus Completus Conventus Generalis anni 1968-1969 emendatus a Conventu XXXV" (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 303-345.

<sup>3</sup> "Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis" (1980) in *Vincentiana* (1980), 193-268.

<sup>4</sup> "Promulgación de las Constituciones" (1984) in *Vincentiana* (1985), 1-11. To study the whole process the Congregation used up to the promulgation of the present Constitutions, cf. M. PÉREZ-FLORES, "Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980," in *Vincentiana* (1984), 751-784. "De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984," in *Vincentiana* (1985), 84-146. C. BRAGA, "The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. Historical Notes," in *Vincentiana* (2000), 289-307.

## I.

**OUR IDENTITY IN LIGHT OF THE CONSTITUTIONS  
AFTER 20 YEARS**

When he promulgated the new Constitutions, on 27 September 1984, the Superior General stated: "*Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated*"; and he expressed his fervent wish: "*The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the gospel to the poor.*"<sup>5</sup>

Twenty years have passed since the Constitutions were proposed to us as a light for our way. In domestic and provincial assemblies, in preparation for our 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2004), we have gone over and evaluated **our life and mission in light of the Constitutions**, trying to say concretely how each missionary, each community and Province and the Congregation as a whole has expressed in its life **the Vincentian identity** designed by the Constitutions.

Together we wish **to thank God** because the Constitutions, drawing on God's word as their source and centered in the attitudes of Christ, the Rule of the Mission, and listening carefully to the calls of the Church and the clamor of the men and women of our time, have brought up to date the insights of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian tradition and are giving impulse to our life in the following of Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor.

Both in the local and provincial assemblies as well as in the General Assembly, **we have committed ourselves to make the Constitutions a permanent reference**. For we have discovered that, in the midst of our daily activities, we frequently take for granted the guiding principles of our life and hardly glance at the Constitutions, with which we should constantly confront ourselves in order to live and creatively actualize our identity.

The responses of the Provinces have reiterated the **quality of our Constitutions** as they propose our identity. But they have also pointed out the urgency we have of existentially developing in daily life, in our encounter with the face of the poor, the identity we accept on a rational level.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Vincentiana* (1985), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Studying carefully the Synthesis of the responses of the Provincial Assemblies to the Consultation Document for CPAG '04, one can clearly observe the appreciation the confreres have for the Constitutions and the **achievements** attained under their inspiration; but, at the same time, the **difficulties** encountered on the way, difficulties that become so many **opportunities** to continue the deepening and grounding of the charism in our heart, our evangelizing ministry and our community life.

The question about our **identity** — who are we? — expresses itself in a new enthusiasm, in a vibrant fire, in a renewed hope, in the exodus from our own comforts towards the prophetic stance of generous self-giving, of missionary urgency.

Going back over the responses of the Provinces to the Consultation Document, preparatory to the General Assembly, we seem to perceive a cry which springs from the calmness of the **evaluation** of our 20 years of life since the promulgation of the Constitutions.

**Congregation of the Mission, be who you are!** Do not resign yourself to mediocrity. Transform yourself in fire. Walk passionately in the following of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor. Revive the charism, the gift which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you. Work and tirelessly extend the frontiers of the mission. Live as a witness full of conviction and transmit the vitality of your vocation!

From this **creative fidelity** we will be able to give an account of our identity and respond to new challenges in the coming years.

## II.

### THE CHALLENGES TO OUR IDENTITY

From the time the Constitutions were written until today, the **changes lived out** within our communities and Provinces, as well as in the ecclesial community and the entire world have been many and notable. The most recent General Assemblies of the Congregation have offered proposals for updating our vocation and mission.<sup>7</sup> Following the same pastoral orientation as the recent Assemblies, the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2004) offers to all the members of the Congregation its reflection on the impact produced on our Vincentian identity by the **principal changes** which are taking place in our society and in the Church; and on the **three principal challenges** to be faced in the coming years.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The General Assembly of 1986 offered "Lines of Action 1986-1992" to the whole Congregation in *Vincentiana* (1986), 549-605. The General Assembly of 1992, in its *Letter to the Confreres*, established different commitments with regard to "New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities", in *Vincentiana* (1992), 359-388. The General Assembly of 1998 promoted the collaboration of the different branches of the Vincentian Family in order to respond to the challenges of the mission: "With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium," in *Vincentiana* (1998), 384-397.

<sup>8</sup> In the Synthesis of the responses of the Provincial Assemblies to the Consultation Document of CPAG '04 a more detailed enumeration of the



## **A. The changes produced in recent years and their impact on our Vincentian identity**

### **1. *With regard to Values***

The majority of the provinces pointed out an erosion of traditional Christian values and a crisis of confidence in social, political, family, technological and ecclesiastic institutions. But at the same time we continue to hear, and this greatly encourages us, of cases of brave and committed individuals, moved by their faith, whose lives are outstanding for their capacity for personal sacrifice and perseverance.

These changes impact our Vincentian identity: they encourage us to define more precisely the initial and ongoing formation of the candidates and the members of the Congregation, by adopting a more critical stance towards the world's values, and by paying closer attention to the traditional practice of fraternal correction.

The implications for our Vincentian identity which spring from these changes are: the renewal of our identity by basing ourselves on the vow of stability, the apostolic character of our vows and of the five characteristic virtues, by helping and respecting one another in our community and prayer life, and by accepting the personal responsibility of living and giving testimony to our Vincentian charism.

### **2. *With regard to the apostolic activity of the C.M.***

In the area of our apostolic activity the majority of the provinces pointed to the disastrous effects of globalization: a growing distance between rich and poor, destruction of local cultures and the deterioration of the environment, unjust economic structures, exploitation of workers, corruption, consumerism, a growing number of refugees and migrants, and a wide variety of problems such as fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, war and terrorism, and the threat of fatal diseases. On the other hand, many groups in the Church and in society are dedicated to the cause of the poor and to the work of transforming society.

The impact of these changes on our Vincentian identity shows itself in: a growing awareness of the need to seek the help and collaboration of other groups in the Church and in society; a renewed

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changes and a wider range of the challenges suggested by the Provinces can be found. Here we have brought together those which strike us as most significant and urgent.

dedication to the ideals and to the fundamental aspects of our Vincentian identity.

The implications we discover for our Vincentian identity are: to share our Vincentian identity with the other branches of the Vincentian Family; to promote volunteer programs to facilitate the sharing of our Vincentian charism; to become better defenders of the poor and marginalized; to heed the call to continued conversion by integrating ourselves more deeply in the world and the reality of the poor.

### **3. *With regard to vocations and the number of members of the C.M.***

Many provinces point out in their replies their diminishing numbers and their advanced age. Other provinces emphasize an impressive growth in the number of vocations and a high number of young confreres.

These changes have an impact on our Vincentian identity. For the provinces experiencing a drop in numbers and advanced age: a renewed commitment to vocational promotion, as well as a greater emphasis on the Vincentian character of our apostolic ministries and our community life. For the provinces with growth in the number of vocations: an effort to carry out long range plans, as well as a concern for the maintenance and availability of economic resources.

The implications which spring from these changes are: a new commitment to the following of Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor; an invitation to young people to share our prayer, our community life and works of evangelization; a renewed emphasis on the importance of our community life as a testimony of our vocation, of our mission and of our multicultural reality.

## **B. The three principal challenges for the Congregation of the Mission in the coming years**

### **FIRST: TO REVITALIZE OUR VINCENTIAN VOCATION**

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries is urged in the coming years to:

- Take our Constitutions to heart, meditate on them and dialogue about them frequently in community.
- Live as authentic witnesses of our Vincentian charism.
- To make a special effort, as an expression of creative fidelity, to express our Vincentian charism in the new

culture of our time and in the cultures of the different peoples.

- Accept gladly possible candidates and lay collaborators into our common life, our prayer and our works of evangelization.
- Give ourselves an initial and ongoing formation after the example of Christ, Evangelizer of the poor.
- Promote the branches of the Vincentian Family and be willing to form their members in the charism of our Founder.
- Deepen the knowledge of our Vincentian identity through study, provincial and interprovincial meetings, participation in the CIF courses, and spiritual exercises and retreats.

**In order to do this:**

? We the missionaries of ..... (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

\*

\* .....

(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of ..... proposes to:

\*

\* .....

(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

**SECOND: REINVIGORATE OUR APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY**

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries are urged in the coming years to:

- Use the Constitutions as the criterion for accepting new works, reducing our commitments and giving new vigor to our present ministries.
- Commit lay collaborators of the Vincentian Family, and of similar groups, to dedicate themselves together with us to the direct service of the poor.
- Collaborate with other provinces of the Congregation in the affective and effective evangelization of the poor.
- Give emphasis to the missionary and prophetic character of our Congregation in each one of our ministries.

- Promote our availability as followers of Christ and mobility in our acceptance of new works.

**In order to do this:**

? We the missionaries of ..... (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

\*

\* .....

(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of ..... proposes to:

\*

\* .....

(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

**THIRD: RENEW OUR COMMUNITY LIFE**

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries is urged in the coming years to:

- Formulate, carry out and regularly evaluate our provincial and local plans.
- Use the new document *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* as a means for reinvigorating our local communities.
- Dedicate time to prepare common prayer and take care of the details of the common life of the local community.
- Be willing to give an account of our administration.
- Form and continue supporting superiors.

**In order to do this:**

? We the missionaries of ..... (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

\*

\* .....

(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of ..... proposes to:

\*

\* .....

(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

**Conclusion**

*“If we invoke the Mother of God, things can only go well,”*<sup>9</sup> St. Vincent used to affirm. To her, Jesus’ best disciple, we entrust our commitments on the road to identification with Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, to whom our Constitutions continually refer us.

*Rome, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 2003*

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<sup>9</sup> SV XIV, 126.

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

## Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

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<b>DATE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>OFFICE</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>
15-12-2003	DE LA RIVERA Carlos	Visitor	Chile
17-12-2003	MILAD Youssef	Regional Superior	Egypt
17-12-2003	VAN BROEKHOVEN Jan	Director DC	Netherlands
31-12-2003	CORNÉE Pierre	Visitor	Paris
03-12-2003	HERNÁNDEZ M. Andrés	Director DC	Santo Domingo
09-01-2004	NGOKA Michael	Vice-Visitor	Nigeria
10-01-2004	MARTÍNEZ B. Benito	Director DC	San Sebastián
21-01-2004	ÁLVAREZ MUNGUÍA Javier	Director General	Daughters of Charity
28-01-2004	ESTÉVEZ CONDE Antonio	Director DC	Venezuela
30-01-2004	FALCO Biagio	Visitor	Naples
30-01-2004	WITZEL Georg	Director DC	Cologne
31-01-2004	ROCHE Paul	Vice-Visitor	Sts. Cyril and Methodius
31-01-2004	SCHREIBER Alois	Director DC	Austria
02-02-2004	KALLAMKAL Mathew	Visitor	Northern India
16-03-2004	GUERRA Giuseppe	Local Treasurer	General Curia
30-03-2004	MOLINA SALMERÓN Antonio	Director DC	Madrid Santa Luisa
02-04-2004	DI CARLO Mario	Local Superior	General Curia
05-04-2004	REDONDO Saturnino	Director DC	Argentina
14-04-2004	GUERRA Giuseppe	Postulator General	General Curia
14-04-2004	MARKOS Gebremedhin	Visitor	Ethiopia
24-04-2004	ÁLVAREZ SAGREDO Félix	Director DC	North Africa

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**2003 ANNUAL STATISTICS - CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
MINISTRIES**

Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is **counted only once**, considered under his principal ministry, as of 31 December 2003.

MINISTRY	PRIESTS	PERMANENT DEACONS	BROTHERS
1. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful	96		8
2. Missionary parishes or districts	188	1	11
3. Parishes	866	1	19
4. Pilgrimage sanctuaries	44		4
5. Seminaries and clerical formation	167		2
6. Formation of our own exclusively	196		5
7. Missions Ad Gentes	176		9
8. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)	133		
9. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)	192		16
10. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)	28		3
11. Special studies	78		3
12. Chaplains: military, immigrants, hospital, associations	165		2
13. Chaplains: Vincentian Lay Groups	58		1
14. Direct Service of the Poor	31		12
15. Manual work	5		30
16. Administration	131		7
17. Retired, ill, convalescing	290		36
18. Other	83	2	9
19. Absence from the Congregation	162	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3089</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>180</b>

PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2003							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2003											
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS						
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB	
<b>General Curia</b>	4		8				<b>8</b>					<b>0</b>							<b>0</b>
<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>241</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>167</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>56</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>147</b>
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	6		28			2	30	1		36	1	38					12		12
Ethiopia	4	2	37		4	1	44			20	1	21			15				15
Madagascar	9	1	79		6	4	90			23	6	29	7	2			4		13
Mozambique	6	1	19		2	1	23			8	1	9	25	5			6	1	37
Nigeria	6		44		1	4	49			70		70	16	1			12		29
St. Justin de Jacobis	6		34				34			10		10			41				41
<b>NORTH AMERICA</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>406</b>			<b>9</b>		<b>9</b>			<b>1</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>13</b>
Eastern (USA)	26	1	162		11	8	182			3		3					7		7
Midwest (USA)	14		111		17	4	132			6		6					5		5
New England (USA)	7		29		2		31					0							0
Southern (USA)	6		23		1		24					0		1					1
West (USA)	8		33	1	3		37					0							0
<b>LATIN AMERICA</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>717</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>166</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>86</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>443</b>
Argentina	8		38			2	40			9		9					11		11
Curitiba (Brazil)	9	3	65		2		70			12		12	35				8		43
Fortaleza (Brazil)	3		35			2	37			7		7					6		6
Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	12	3	68		8	3	82			26	1	27	20	2			9	1	32



PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2003							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2003											
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS						
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB	
Central America	8	3	42		2				6	1	7	6		8				14	
Chile	8		25		2	2			6		6	5						5	
Colombia	23	2	140		13	8			44		44	160				10		170	
Costa Rica	4		16		2	1			2		2	4	1					5	
Cuba	5		11						1		1	2				1		3	
Ecuador	7		30			5			11		11	23				4		27	
Mexico	21	1	86		4	3			15	1	16			22				22	
Peru	12	1	52			1			8	1	9							0	
Puerto Rico	15		54		5	5			8		8	28	1	11		6		46	
Venezuela	12		55					1	11	1	13	10		45		4		59	
<b>ASIA</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>3+1Pat</b>	<b>388</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>156</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>114</b>		<b>118</b>		<b>233</b>	
China	4	1	44		1			5			5							0	
Northern India	11	1	69		3				51		51			57				57	
Southern India	11		63		2	10			42	1	43		1	50		39		90	
Indonesia	11		81		1	8			44		44					3		3	
Philippines	14	1	92		4	1			10	1	11					72		72	
Orient	8	1 Pat	39		2				2		2			7		4		11	
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1323</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>59</b>			<b>98</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>90</b>	
Austria	5		17		3						0							0	
Belgium	3		11								0							0	

Sts. Cyril and Methodius	6	1	23			2	<b>26</b>			8		<b>8</b>	6	1					<b>7</b>
Paris (France)	22		107		10	35	<b>152</b>			30	2	<b>32</b>	21				6		<b>27</b>
Toulouse (France)	13		61		7	1	<b>69</b>			3	1	<b>4</b>							<b>0</b>
Germany	3		13		2	1	<b>16</b>			1		<b>1</b>					1		<b>1</b>
Hungary	3		15			1	<b>16</b>			1		<b>1</b>	3						<b>3</b>
Ireland	14		79				<b>79</b>					<b>0</b>							<b>0</b>
Naples (Italy)	11	1	55		2		<b>58</b>					<b>0</b>	4						<b>4</b>
Rome (Italy)	10	1	54	1	3		<b>59</b>					<b>0</b>						1	<b>1</b>
Turin (Italy)	15		80	2	3		<b>85</b>			2		<b>2</b>							<b>0</b>
Netherlands	6		55		2		<b>57</b>					<b>0</b>							<b>0</b>
Poland	28	3	252		5	7	<b>267</b>			29		<b>29</b>							<b>0</b>
Portugal	11	1	52		2		<b>55</b>			2		<b>2</b>	24		3				<b>27</b>
Slovakia	7		32		3	4	<b>39</b>			12	1	<b>13</b>					4		<b>4</b>
Slovenia	9	2	47		3	1	<b>53</b>			1		<b>1</b>			2				<b>2</b>
Barcelona (Spain)	10		45		3	2	<b>50</b>			1		<b>1</b>	3						<b>3</b>
Madrid (Spain)	17		114		16	3	<b>133</b>					<b>0</b>					3		<b>3</b>
Salamanca (Spain)	20		90		11	1	<b>102</b>			2		<b>2</b>	1						<b>1</b>
Zaragoza (Spain)	20		121	1	3	1	<b>126</b>			6		<b>6</b>			5		2		<b>7</b>
<b>OCEANIA</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>54</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>			<b>4</b>		<b>4</b>					<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>
Australia	7		54		4	2	<b>60</b>			4		<b>4</b>					2		<b>2</b>
<b>T O T A L</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>30+1 Pat</b>	<b>3089</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>3441</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>928</b>

P\* = Priests; PD\* = Permanent Deacons; CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; \* Priests or permanent deacons coming from a diocese or another Institute; TP = Aspirants to the Priesthood; TB = Aspirants to the Brotherhood.

# FEATURE:

## *Experiences of Apostolic Work Among the Poor*

“If you want peace, reach out to the poor!” was the theme of the Message of the Holy Father for the 15<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace on January 1, 1993. This phrase helped inspire the present feature of *Vincentiana* in which are collected some “Experiences of the Apostolate among the Poor”: in *Austria*, with a branch of the gypsy population; in *Madagascar*, with the homeless poor; in *Spain*, with the immigrants; and in the *United Nations*, describing the actual “social agenda” of the CM before that important organism. In these, as in so many places and institutions, the confreres put into practice the exhortation of St. Vincent: “Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be with strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows” (SV XI, 45).

There is a direct correlation between the work *with* and *for* the poor and the obtaining of peace. The evangelizing action which we carry out in many parts of the world is our input to peace, to the building of the Reign of God, to the civilization of love: “Blessed are those who work for peace.” Peace is a “ministry,” a hard job which requires strategy, creativity and much patience!

“If you want peace, reach out to the poor!” means that we obtain peace *when* we are capable of abandoning the finite world of our egoism; *when*, knowing the reality of others, especially of the poor, we begin to relativize our own; *when*, finally, with the force of the Spirit, we make efforts in the search for peace, cooperating in the creation of conditions for a world which is more just, more human and more in conformity with the will of the Creator. Our meditation “is completed” thus with an interesting *Vincentian Reflection On Peace*, prepared by Fr. Maloney for *Vincentiana*, at the end of the present feature. Enjoy reading!

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

## The Heartfelt Anger of a Scorned People

by Wolfgang Pucher, C.M.

*Province of Austria*

It was a Sunday morning in winter when I arrived at the town of Pavlovce in southeastern Slovakia. At the edge of a hollow that serves as a dump is a tumble down house. It has two rooms. Eight people live there. A young mother with a babe in arms comes out to meet me. I follow her into a small room where there are two beds, two chairs and a little stove. On the stove is a steaming pot. The woman lets me lift the cover off — only boiling water. I ask the woman what they are going to eat for lunch. She shrugs her shoulders. “I don’t know yet. My husband is in town begging for food. Maybe he’ll bring something.”

In Slovakia live a half million Roma.<sup>1</sup> They belong to that despised minority that, since the shift in Eastern Europe, does not know how it is going to subsist. Under the Communists, they all had work, some minimal income, and a place to live. They were no better or worse off than the rest of the people in those countries. Today, however, they have neither work nor enough money to live with dignity and no perspectives for the future. Unemployment is almost 100%. Not long ago, the Slovakian government reduced to 35.7 euros per person the subsidy, which in any case was not enough to live on. Families receive 100 euros regardless of the number of children. This forces them to look for work. It is pure cynicism. They are relegated to starvation.

In Eastern Europe, for the first time since the French Revolution, hunger has sparked an insurrection. Sadly, the anger of the poorest of the poor in Slovakia led to aggression. They sacked supermarkets and took the food home. And only a police prohibition against their leaving the towns prevented a planned protest by all the Roma of the country. Now they are totally alone with their misery. Even the

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<sup>1</sup> One branch of the Gypsy population.

Minister of Social Affairs, Kanik, showed understanding for the anger of the Roma. The President also manifested his displeasure with the government's handling of the situation. Nevertheless, the decision was upheld.

The history of the Roma — today between eight and ten million (nobody knows the exact number) — begins around the year 1000 of our era. At that time they emigrated from India to Eastern Europe. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century there is evidence of the Roma throughout Europe. Their captivity begins in southeastern Europe around 1300. They were expelled from France and Germany. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Emperor Sigismund declared them vagrants. In England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century they are reduced to servitude and branded with a “V.” There, just as in Spain, the nomadic way of life was punished by the death penalty. In Bohemia and Moravia it seems all adult Roma were hanged. Both girls and boys had an ear cut off to show they were Roma. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Emperor Charles VI of Austria promulgated a decree ordering all Roma to be rooted out of Austria and Hungry.

Between 1933 and 1945 Hitler annihilated half a million Roma in the concentration camps. In the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, 4000 Roma were gassed to death on 2 August 1944: it was the Night of the Gypsies. When the war ended, the lot of the Roma was forgotten. Not one monument, not one compensation nor lobby<sup>2</sup> to aid this people. Even in the decade of the 70s of the last century they were the objects of deportation in Czechoslovakia. And they were subject to sterilization programs. In Poland the Roma who refused to settle down were expelled from the country. Since the collapse of communism racist violence against the Roma has increased. Attacks against them are commonplace. The guilty parties, when they are identified, remain unpunished.

Today the Roma live isolated and in miserable conditions in all of Slovakia. They are uncultured, dirty and uneducated. They wander through cities and towns with handcarts picking up what others throw away. A study by the UN program for development assesses the situation of the Roma as “a third-world island in the first world” — worlds between which the breach grows ever wider. Infant mortality among the Roma is triple that of the ordinary population. Their life expectancy is seven years less. In a good half of the Roma population hunger and malnutrition are clearly seen.

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<sup>2</sup> A legal entity whose purpose is to influence legislators.

### **Discrimination Creates Isolation and Isolation Creates Discrimination**

Nikolai Gheorghe, a sociologist and one of the intellectual leaders of the Roma, says: "For us the social subsidy is the greatest threat. We grew up with parents who struggled in menial jobs to feed their children. Our parents were manual laborers, merchants. But their children, what do they learn today when they only see their parents collecting the subsidy?" It is the trap of "dependence." "The ghetto culture is systematic: discrimination creates isolation and isolation creates discrimination." Once the pattern of behavior and mutual mistrust bond together they are difficult to escape. Even when they can pay, the Roma will not find anyone outside the ghetto to sell them land. And even in the cemeteries there is a small corner just for Roma.

It is in the educational field that the depression can be best observed. In Svinia, Roma children have their own classes — poorly equipped — and there is a school building where they have to bring their own silverware to eat in the lunchroom. According to a study by the United Nations Development Business, three-quarters of the children go to special schools. Only a third of them finish elementary school. And scarcely 6% go on for further schooling. In Slovakia it is rare for a Roma child to pass the psychometric aptitude test. And so all the prejudices become fulfilled prophecies. The Roma are illiterate because of lack of access to schools. They drop out of the job market because they can go for years without anyone giving them a job. They are delinquents and they rob the stores because the insidious social parasitism no longer maintains them.

In the collective consciousness of the Roma the horror of the Third Reich continues to live when the census of its population was used only to extinguish them. As a result many Roma refuse to state their ethnic affiliation in the population censuses. The Slovak Minister of the Interior has in mind the formation of a section of the police department exclusively for Romas.<sup>3</sup> This idea makes them very nervous; it reminds many of the racial persecution of National Socialism.

On only two occasions does the face of these people light up: when they recall the happy times of communism and when they dream of emigrating to the European Union. In the western countries many of them seek, either in clandestine jobs or by begging, an income that will ease their unfortunate situation. Often they cannot even cross the frontiers; they are detained there. Their passports are

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<sup>3</sup> Roma or Romas is the plural. The singular is Rom. In the British Isles they are called Romany.



A Roma begger in Graz (Austria): "I am hungry. Thank you."

stamped with a seal making it impossible for them to emigrate for several years; it is purely arbitrary with no legal basis.

In 1996 about a 100 Roma beggars from Slovakia showed up in Graz. They came in small cars unfit for traffic. They passed the day kneeling in front of the large department stores or on crowded corners stretching out a plate to passers by without saying a word. Many wore a sign that said *I am hungry*. Even in the winter as many as five of them passed the night in one of their cars or in the public lavatories. It was a hopeless situation. No one was moved by their plight. The majority of the population ignored them. A minuscule fraction linked to the National Socialists used the media to stir up people against them.

The Vincentian community at Eggenberg began by inviting the beggars to a meeting. There they would have the opportunity of identifying what it was in the city of Graz that oppressed them. The obvious contempt by many citizens, the mistreatment by the police, the lack of places to sleep — these were the gravest problems. We began to house the beggars in a pavilion of the establishment, the Vincent Nest.<sup>4</sup> By Easter of 1997 no one had to sleep outside. The first thing we did was to give each beggar a document which stated his identity. And it also said: *The Vincentian community is aware of my situation*. This helped the beggar to be treated like a person. Then we made known through different media the situation of the Roma in their countries of origin. There were positive responses, but there were hateful ones as well.

In 1999 the Vincentian community and the mayor of Graz agreed on an assistance project for the Roma. Forty beggars would do simple jobs in the different parishes. By way of compensation, the Council agreed to pay a minimum amount to “beggars who work.” Then came a media campaign with the slogan: *Graz for beggars’ wages*. As a result the city of Graz withdrew its support for the financial plan. The project has continued, but since that time it has been financed by donations.

Spurred on by several businessmen, the police took further actions which finally resulted in the expulsion of some beggars from Austrian territory. The reason given was: *Grave danger to public order*. On 13 December 2002, the Vincentian community lodged a complaint before the Supreme Tribunal of Austria and received a favorable sentence. Since that time the police know they cannot act as they wish against these poor people. The beggars feel protected by the Vincentian community and have the surety of being provided for during their stay in Graz. They receive food and lodging from us.

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent, of course, refers to Vincent de Paul; but it sounds close to “Winzig” which means “small.”



The majority of the beggars of Graz come from Hostice, a town in the district of Rimavska Sobota. About 800 people live there, half of them belonging to the Roma minority; the other half is a Hungarian minority. The Vincentian community has acquired a house in the area. Its sign reads: *Vinzi Dom* or *Vincent House*. Together with the Slovakian aid organization META, the house takes in girls who drop out of school and cannot find work. There they learn sewing, take a course in computers and are prepared, thanks to short programs, for employment in the tobacco harvest, etc.

A former beggar from the area who was helped by the Vincentians in Graz was elected mayor of the town. Together with him and with the guidance of *Vincent House*, the Vincentian community tries to give life to the town. Some reporters from Austria visited the town and wrote about the poverty of its inhabitants. Those people know they are no longer forgotten or lost. They see how others help with their struggle. A reporter from the Austrian magazine *Profil* wrote on the occasion of his first visit there in 1999: *Hunger on the edge of well-being*. In his judgment life had ceased to exist in the town.

Today there is once again life in Hostice. It can hardly be called impressive. But with the inhabitants being backed by the Vincentian community of Eggenberg and with ever stronger ties between them and Graz, there is hope their life is not going to be lost quite yet.

(JOSEPH CUMMINS, C.M., translator)

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

## The Little Girl in Rags and Pope John Paul

The Start of an Adventure on the “Great Island”;  
the Poor Get Back on Their Feet

by Pedro Opeka, C.M.

*Province of Madagascar*

I am delighted to accede to your request to write something on Akamasoa which, in Madagascar, struggles against poverty in this part of the world.

After 15 years of missionary activity in Vagaindrano, in the southeast of Madagascar, facing the Indian Ocean, I was, at the end of 1988, put in charge of the young Vincentian scholastics at Antananarivo. There I discovered the unheard of poverty in which thousands of families and children lived in the capital of the “Great Island.” I saw these families in the street without a thing to their name. Certain families had been driven back from the city centre, transported like cattle in lorries and abandoned on the hills of Ambohimahitsy and Andralanitra, in a totally deprived state with nobody bringing them even the slightest aid that they might at least survive there! So, their misery was well hidden so that it might be totally ignored.

I am the son of emigrant parents. My parents fled the totalitarian regime of Slovenia in order to emigrate to Argentina. The memories of our family life were brutally brought back to mind. We had lived a very hard life; but one in which hope for a better future was always present. Certainly, the conditions of life and work had been very difficult. So, could such a hope be possible for the poor of Antananarivo? I was constantly asking myself what I could do to give such hope to the families in order that they themselves might find a way out of their poverty.

From 29 April to 2 May 1989, Pope John Paul II visited Madagascar. One day, I was in the midst of thousands of young people who had come to see the Holy Father. During the course of this ceremony, a little girl in rags, who was carrying her little brother on her back, went up to the podium. No one knew how she had

managed to get near the Pope, evading the police guard. The Pope responded by taking her in his arms and giving her a big hug. It was as if the Pope were embracing all the misery of the world. This little girl had certainly found the comforting tenderness for which she was hoping. The gesture bowled me over. It was a renewed call from Jesus. This was an irresistible challenge. Both my heart and my reason spoke to me: "Now, you have to do something to improve the suffering of human poverty, the misery of this little girl and of so many others!"

The life of St. Vincent, our founder, inspired me once again. After years of maturing, St. Vincent himself found his true treasure in the life of Jesus Christ, who divested himself of everything in order to become our brother, taking on himself our frail and sinful human condition in order to give us the dignity of the children of God. Jesus, the "One Sent," came to live on our earth to announce to the poor the Good News of their deliverance, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind. This example of Jesus, who took on this hope with a radical fidelity even unto death, inspired St. Vincent's life. Three hundred fifty years later, the example of St. Vincent is still hugely relevant and is a guide for so many people of good will in the world. St. Vincent was a practical man, a man with his feet on the ground. He was constantly going about visiting the poor, to bring them material help and to bring them the comfort of a hope that is lived in Jesus. As a son of St. Vincent, my priestly commitment is thus reaffirmed in committing my life to the poor of Antananarivo, while I was called there as educator and formator.

On 29 May 1989, I visited some families. I had to crawl in order to get into the little shelter made of boxes and bits of rusty metal which served them as "lodging." The unsanitary condition of these shelters was incredible and I saw children living in dirt that is impossible to imagine without seeing it. In the course of the following days, I went to visit other families living on the hill of Ambohimahitsy in the district of Ambohimangakely. It was always the same sight of overwhelming filth, sickness and unrelenting hunger. I knew families, with sometimes as many as seven children, torn apart and broken up: the father having abandoned the mother and children; the mother having to prostitute herself; the children stealing what little they could from the rubbish in the public dumps and both adults and adolescents sinking into alcohol and drugs. The violence, which dominated everything, was terrifying. At the beginning of our meetings, the families were fearful and distrustful. I took time to listen to them. Little by little, we built up trust among us. I promised to do all I could in order that they might be able to get themselves out of this inhuman and revolting way of life in order, by their own work, to live a normal life.

What could be done to bring some initial urgent help to these people: care for the sick and food aid? How could one do away with this mountain of misery, which is totally unacceptable as a condition for human beings? How could one give back a life in society to these people, overwhelmed by despair and surviving under such violent conditions? I had nothing in my pocket to help them and aid them in their distress.

I went begging among the religious communities of Antananarivo who gave me a little money and gifts in kind. I quickly understood that, alone, I could do nothing. Happily, I knew some Malagasy youths, who were students at the university. I went to see them and suggested that they reach out to the poorest. They accepted. They responded to God's call: they had the desire to come to the aid of their compatriots, who were the most deprived and excluded from society in their country. But they did not know what to do. Their response was both great comfort and great encouragement for me. I have always read the gospel and I know that poverty is not fatal. Together, here, we would undertake to fight it. Thus it was that in January 1990, the Akamasoa Association (the name means "good friends") was created. This non-governmental organisation (NGO), with its humanitarian aims, was necessary in order to facilitate our relationships with government authorities, various organisations of Malagasy civil society, the foreign embassies and other worldwide humanitarian organisations.

Our first action was to organise a welcome in Antolojanahary for the first families coming from the streets and the public dump of the capital. It was the first village that we created, 60 kilometres northwest of Antananarivo, on the road to Mahajanga, and where there are currently 70 families living by their work on the land. We then created four other villages in the suburbs of the capital and we are working in two other regions of the province of Fianarantsoa, 400 kilometres south of Antananarivo, as well as at Vaingaindrano, 800 kilometres from the capital. In the five villages in Antananarivo, there are 15,560 people (2,926 families), including 8,409 children who are educated from primary school through secondary school examinations. Poverty in Antananarivo is still enormous and, in 2003, we brought immediate and urgent aid (food, health-care and tools) to more than 20,000 people. We built 1,544 brick dwellings and we still have to build a further 426 in order to replace temporary wooden buildings. The association pays 3,419 people who work in our centres for occupational training. One hundred eighty-nine teachers conduct the school. Thirty-three people (doctors, nurses, midwives, and nurse's aids) furnish our health services. We also have 29 social workers. Finally, seven people manage the overall activities of Akamasoa.



Above, Bemasoandro (Madagascar), with a primary school.

From the very beginning, we tirelessly followed the same objectives: the physical, psychological and moral rehabilitation of people whose life on the margins had dehumanised them; access to work in order to be able to gain a decent wage; to have a “home of one’s own” worthy of human beings in order that the family might flourish; the education of the children (the majority of their parents have had no schooling); civic instruction in order to build up a more humane society and Christian instruction in order to value the gift of life given by God.

I cannot say that this work is easy. The truth is that it is hard because it is filled with daily difficulties. After 14 years, I have learned a lot. The collaborators who surround me and who dedicate themselves to this work with courage and faith have also gained greater experience. We learned that the most impoverished are also broken physically, psychologically and morally and that they no longer know how to live in a human society that is based on respect for oneself and others. It takes limitless patience in order to help a person who has suffered so much to live again, especially when he has reached the point of losing confidence and hope that he can ever “live like others.” It takes a lot of time for these people to be able to stand on their own two feet and begin to walk again. It requires personal contact in order to convince them that they have to take the first steps themselves, through work and discipline. At times, one has to fight with them in order to calm spirits that are stirred up by alcohol. There are many slips: no one can be forgotten or neglected; so, one has to renew the dialogue. One cannot change the behaviour of another; each person must do it for and by him/herself. Sometimes disillusionment threatens us; but one must not give in to it. Firstly, because we are filled with joy and encouragement to see that, little by little, so many thousands of people have found new life, for themselves and their families. It is also a great happiness to see so many children and young people who have confidence in themselves, and workers who participate actively in the social life of Akamasoa in choirs, sports activities, local meetings and prayer groups. I praise God for all these graces which he has bestowed on the entire Akamasoa team, in order that it might accompany the poor who have come to us to rebuild their lives.

From the very beginning, I was conscious that this work was a challenge which was beyond my own strength. This battle against poverty could only be undertaken with a team; a team which also includes the poor themselves. We can say that poverty is in the process of being overcome in the Akamasoa centres, even though there remains a great deal still to do. Our work is a drop of water in the ocean of poverty that devastates millions and millions of families and children in the world. Our experience allows us to bear witness to the immensity of the task. It allows us to assert that poverty



A family in its new house in Akamasoa (Madagascar) with P. Opeka.



The wooden houses are disappearing little by little, but this depends, you can be sure, on people's generosity.

cannot be overcome once and for all and definitively, because human selfishness is a reality in all times and in all societies. That is why poverty is always a threat and future generations will always have to battle against it. I reiterate: I object to the argument that poverty is inevitable, because that argument is merely a mask for not taking responsibility. Battling poverty is the task of each adult, on behalf of the children. Accepting that selfishness can dominate is to tolerate poverty, and, therefore, working for development is in vain. But our work in Akamasoa has convinced us that, if we institute personal and communal rules to ensure solidarity and equity, in order to put some boundaries on human self-centredness, then this development work can bear real fruit. These rules must deal with social relationships but also with matters of economy, education and culture, for the causes of poverty are to be found in failures in all of these areas. If these rules are not established at the heart of each country and among nations, then it simply becomes a matter of rule by the strongest, which leads to the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming more and more deprived of all that a human person needs in order to live life with dignity. That, unfortunately, is the reality that we see throughout the world. States and International Organisations must commit themselves to this work of solidarity and equity, instead of intervening only at the last moment, simply in order to assuage their consciences. More than isolated aid is needed to combat poverty. The poor must be ensured the possibility of being able to work and to have their children instructed. It is a never-ending work. It is a work that cannot simply be done by technocratic means to get "quick-fix" solutions. Besides material development aid, which must allow the poor person to work in order to earn a living, this work is also humanitarian in that it demands that one give of one's own humanity.

The work of Akamasoa would not have been possible without prayer and union with Jesus Christ. Holy Scripture teaches us that "the poor of heart" put all their trust in God; they hand their lives over to him. The "poor of heart" are aware of their imperfections and their limits. So, they undertake to listen to the Word. Evangelical poverty is a quality toward which we must strive since it is the Source of Love and of Goodness, which opens us to the gifts of God and disposes us to receive the graces from on high. It is by this Christian education that my missionary vocation has allowed me to guide and sustain the perseverance of all, in order to support the trials. The gospel nourishes our commitment to stand with the poor and to live with them, in order to understand their difficulties and to love them. Our actions are not convincing, if we do not know how to be with those who suffer and who await the life-giving word. It is thus that the miracle at the pool of Bethesda repeats itself daily. The paralytic was alone and resigned to his fate, since no one came to



plunge him into the healing waters. When Jesus asks him: "Do you want to be well?" he asks the poor of our world of today: "Do you have the will to heal in order to live?" It is because this man answered the call of Jesus that he rose up, took up his mat and set off, becoming the protagonist of his own life.

Dear confreres and friends, I invite you to be with us by your prayers. In the communion of the hope given by Jesus, your prayers will give us strength to invite the poor to stand up again in order to live in the dignity of the children of God.

(EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

# Pastoral Service of “Open Hands”: Chaplaincy for Immigrants

Church of the Miraculous Medal of Pamplona (Navarra - Spain)

by Julián Arana, C.M.

*Province of Zaragoza*

and Visitación Sola, D.C.

*Province of Pamplona*

The history of humanity is a history of immigration. During the last few years, in this globalized world, migration has become a phenomenon of great magnitude that challenges the international community, the local society and, in a special way, those who call themselves Christian (Episcopal Conference of Ecuador, 31 October 2003, *Our immigrant brothers and sisters in Spain*).

Many people have abandoned their homeland, their family and their cultural environment. They have become the victims of a political and/or economic crisis that is rooted in selfishness and corruption. Pope John Paul II, in his message for World Migration Day in 2000 stated: *In many regions of the world today people live in tragic situations of instability and uncertainty. It does not come as a surprise that in such contexts the poor and the destitute make plans to escape, to seek a new land that can offer them bread, dignity and peace. This is the migration of the desperate: men and women, often young, who have no alternative than to leave their own country to venture into the unknown. Every day thousands of people take even critical risks in their attempts to escape from a life with no future. Unfortunately, the reality they find in host nations is frequently a source of further disappointment.*

## **1. The Reality to which this “Pastoral Service” responds**

Spain finds itself at the crossroads of being a nation where a significant number of its citizens live abroad and an increasing number of people from other lands arrive at its shores to take up residence here. In the last decades, Spain has become a land of

immigrants, thus transforming the time honored tendency of being only a land of emigration.

Just as the Church of Spain was concerned for its emigrants, so now the Church is equally concerned during this period of immigration. From the beginning, the Church has stood beside these new immigrants, defended their rights and welcomed them into its institutions. *As has been affirmed on many occasions, a variety of perspectives must be considered when approaching the phenomenon of immigration: political, social-economic, and cultural. Above all, we must consider the ethical and moral perspective that has as its supreme and normative point of reference the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. From this perspective we must examine the dignity of all human persons and the respect that is due to them and to the primary and fundamental social institution of the family. For the Church and for Christians, there is no other way to plant the question, no other way to resolve the problem of immigration. In fact, this is the demand of the Gospel we preach, the Gospel in which we profess our belief, the Gospel that we attempt to live in the midst of this world to which we have been sent, the Gospel of love of our Lord Jesus Christ (A.M. ROUCO, *La Prioridad del Hombre*).*

In the Church of Navarra, this concern for immigrants was also present, though dormant. As more parishes were giving greater attention to the new immigrants, the idea arose of organizing a pastoral approach for immigrants: *As this problem has become more serious, we have seen that it would be good to have a point of reference that would make it easier for all those who wish to have contact with the life of the Church (Msgr. FERNANDO SEBASTIÁN, Archbishop of Pamplona and Tudela).*

After several meetings and in order to celebrate the Jubilee Year, Fr. Corpus J. Delgado, C.M., Superior of the Vincentian Community, and the Archbishop of Pamplona and Tudela created the "Pastoral Service of Open Hands." The Archbishop and the Provincial of the Zaragoza Province of the Congregation of the Mission signed an agreement on 1 June 2000.

This "Pastoral Service" became part of the diocesan structure dealing with immigrants and was constituted as a "Chaplaincy for Immigrants" that would minister to those persons proceeding primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean. This "Pastoral Service" would care for the immigrants in the best way possible for as long as they lived in Pamplona and the surrounding area.

The objective of this "Pastoral Service of Open Hands" is to promote a greater pastoral care for immigrants in our local churches.

The expression "open hands," which is used to describe this pastoral service, was inspired by the gesture of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, a gesture that clearly reveals the demands of the

Church's evangelizing mission on behalf of the Christian community and, in a particular way, on behalf of our immigrant sisters and brothers: *In the Church, a sacrament of unity, no one is a foreigner. Therefore, the Church's action on behalf of immigrants is not a supplementary action, but a right that is rooted in the very mission of the Church* (Episcopal Commission on Migration, 1999; cf., JOHN PAUL II, *Message for World Migration Day, 1995*). *As Church, we want to be a place of reference and a bridge so that as new immigrants begin to settle in different areas, they can also establish a relationship with the parish and with the community where they decide to live. In the meantime, we believe we can offer them a great service* (Fr. CORPUS DELGADO, C.M.).

On the pastoral level, "Open Hands" has the following objectives:

- To care for the immigrants in a human and pastoral way, in the name of the ecclesial community of Navarra;
- To open the life of the diocesan Church to these immigrants who are mostly Catholic;
- To assure the pastoral attention that they require is extended to them by the Catholic Church;
- To work for their integration into the local parishes where they reside;
- To promote the dissemination of information into the local parish through the establishment of networks of communication about the existing initiatives, especially the diocesan and parish *Caritas* [Catholic Charities] programs and also to coordinate our work with them;
- To provide for the basic, urgent needs, not yet covered, of immigrant individuals and families.

The "Pastoral Service of Open Hands" sees its evangelizing action in three areas:

**a) *Proclamation of the Word: catechesis and faith education***

- Catechesis of teenagers, young people and adults;
- Orientation and deepening their faith on all levels: pre-baptism, Christian initiation, pre-marriage, family, etc.;
- To assist their full integration into the local parish community, the "Pastoral Service of Open Hands" proposes that its catechetical and educational teams serve as a bridge that moves them toward a normal insertion into the life of the parish and diocese.

**b) *Celebration of the faith***

- To promote a more intense participation of the immigrants in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration in the Church of the Miraculous Medal. This celebration is open to the whole community. In the beginning, we had thought of designating a certain time for this celebration, open to the whole community, but assuring that our immigrant sisters and brothers would have a significant role as ministers of hospitality, commentators, lectors, singers, etc. Up to now, all these attempts have been unfruitful;
- To provide others celebrations for the immigrant population: baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, matrimony, funeral services, etc. For this, the chaplain is vested with the faculties and power of jurisdiction in accord with Church law and diocesan pastoral norms.



A meeting of the pastoral service of "Open Hands" with the immigrants (Navarra, Spain).

**c) Christian commitment: charitable-social action**

The majority of the immigrant population, particularly those from Latin America and the Caribbean, have come to our land *because of the precarious social and/or political situation of their country of origin* (Commission on Migration, 1999). In light of this reality, the charitable-social action of the “Pastoral Service of Open Hands” requires a certain delicacy. This action is made concrete in:

- Welcoming personally and caring for each individual person and family;
- Offering them information that provides them with access to the programs of *Caritas* and other social services;
- Coordinating with the Diocesan and Parish *Caritas* to provide for the basic needs not yet covered of the immigrants (housing, work, education, etc.);
- Responding to their leisure and recreational needs, and organizing after-school activities and activities for adults. All these initiatives should promote socialization and community building. At the present time, the “Pastoral Service” and its facilities are the place of reference for meetings, encounters and sports.

On the level of resources, the “Pastoral Service of Open Hands” has at its disposition the following:

**Human Resources**

- A chaplain named by the Archbishop of Pamplona in accord with Canon 565. The Visitor of the Zaragoza Province of the Congregation of the Mission will propose the name of the chaplain in accord with Canon 557, 2°;
- If only one priest is named chaplain (Rector) then the community charged with the pastoral care of the Church of the Miraculous Medal will be co-responsible for the “Pastoral Service of Open Hands.” “They will undertake this pastoral service with great zeal, and in accord with their charism, and always in communion with the general pastoral norms of the diocese and within the framework of fraternal communion with the priests of the diocese”;
- A social worker who is a Daughter of Charity;
- Vincentian volunteers, composed of Daughters of Charity and the different Vincentian lay groups;
- Other volunteers.

### **Material Resources**

- The Vincentian Province of Zaragoza, in coordination with the chaplain, offers the "Pastoral Service of Open Hands" use of the infrastructure at its disposition: chapel for worship services open to the public, offices, meeting rooms, rooms for the catechetical program, sports facilities, dining room, etc., and will cover the costs for lighting, water, telephone, etc.;
- The Archbishop will pay the salary and health benefits of the chaplain and the social worker;
- Other costs will be covered by donations and the free-will offerings of the parishioners.

### **2. Our Work**

From September 2000, the "Pastoral Service of Open Hands" has functioned with Fr. Julián Arana, C.M., as chaplain, and Sr. Visitación Sola, D.C., as the social worker. Other volunteers include: Sr. María Luisa Fernández, D.C., Fr. Alexis Viera, C.M., Amaya Madinabeitia, Esther Fernández and Jesús Pérez. All are part of the team of "Open Hands" and together have developed the various activities: welcoming, initial outreach, mentoring, workshops, formation, catechesis, celebrations, etc. The "Pastoral Service" is open every afternoon, Monday to Saturday.

At the end of each year, we list the highlights of the year with their positive and negative elements. This enables us to review our activities and come to a better understanding of the reality in which we minister.

One of the most important and fulfilling aspects of our ministry is welcoming the new immigrants. We have attempted to create a physical, human and spiritual space that is welcoming to the whole person. We want the "Pastoral Service" to be a place of reference where these immigrants are able to meet, communicate and share together; a place where they can enjoy their leisure and recreational time; and a place where they can share their faith, their concerns and their joys. This is a slow process but, little by little, people are coming here not only "to ask" for things but, as they say, to rest and dialogue with one another.

From the beginning of this "Pastoral Service" more than 1,500 persons have passed through our offices, with 2,487 requests: 73% of these requests involved work, 12% asked for information and the remainder were for economic assistance. Others asked to use the Internet to communicate with their families, to view television,



to perform other tasks, etc. and to utilize the sports facilities. The Diocesan Offices of *Caritas*, where Sr. Visitación works every morning, have been able to respond to many of the requests for work.

Behind each number and statistic, behind all this data, there is a real face, a heart that beats, a person with flesh and bones, and a person with a history of suffering. Behind every file there is a world of hope, a lifetime of sacrifices..., and much fear.

From this welcoming that is extended to our sister and brother immigrants, we began to discover their richness, their values, and their counter-values. Contact between cultures supposes a mutual enrichment because we both give and receive.

Our greatest concern is the education in the faith and the celebration of the faith. Each year we organize catechetical groups for teenagers, young people and adults who, because of personal reasons and time constraints, do not always “fit” into the ordinary pastoral approach of the local parishes. They are teenagers and adults who have not been baptized, who have not received Communion or Confirmation.... Indeed it would be difficult for them to enter the normal catechetical program in the different parish settings.

We have proposed that our catechetical program be a process of ongoing formation in the faith and not just a process to prepare people to receive sacraments. Thus our program is a type of catechumenate where those preparing for the different sacraments are given the same content and, whenever possible, celebrate their faith together. When the catechist judges that an individual is ready for the sacraments, then a more intense preparation is begun and there is a dialogue about the meaning and the implications of the different sacraments. Thus every year we celebrate baptisms with teenagers and adults at the Easter Vigil, and first communions on the feast of Corpus Christi. After these celebrations, the majority of the people continue the catechetical process and invite other friends, family members and acquaintances to participate. At the end of 2004, we believe that some persons, who participated in the catechetical program, will be able to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

We admit that long working hours, change of residence, forgetfulness and other factors contribute to a mixed response from the immigrant population. Yet with all of this, some diligent and committed persons continue their formation and the youth group has grown to include 20 members at the present time.

### 3. Challenges for the present and future

The service that the Church provides to the immigrant population supposes welcoming, recognition and acceptance of their values, humanitarian assistance, social integration, proclamation of the Gospel, and pastoral accompaniment. Therefore, this "Pastoral Service," from the perspective of our Vincentian charism, will endeavor to put into practice all these points, insisting on:

- Extending a respectful welcome to the immigrants who come to us with fears and hopes of an uncertain future for themselves. A welcome that is concretized in listening to them, sharing information with them and supporting them, and that does not end in material assistance, but in a process of accompaniment that enables the new immigrants to realize their plans in their new social environment.
- Working, by coordinating our efforts, for their integration into Spanish society, respecting their culture and values and thus contributing to an intercultural enrichment. In the same way, we will help them become active in their local parish so that they are able to live and celebrate their faith as members of the community and assume ministerial roles within this community.
- Guaranteeing their religious formation through weekly catechesis for teenagers and young people and the catechumenate for adults. In this way it is hoped that they will learn, will form themselves and thus be able to explain their faith.
- Offering open spaces where people can recreate, play sports, celebrate their *fiestas*, and express their cultural richness; spaces where people can meet and exchange experiences; spaces where people can dialogue, and share their joys, hopes, and pains; *a welcoming space that recognizes the God-given dignity of the immigrant workers..., for in the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere... the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters* (JOHN PAUL II, *Message for World Migration Day, 1995*).
- Coordinating our work with the Diocesan Offices of *Caritas* and other social services, by participating in the programs that *Caritas* has organized for immigrants (Monday to Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) and with *Pamplona Abierta*. We also make people aware of different programs that are available to immigrants in their neighborhoods.

In this paper we have attempted to reflect on some of the aspects and realities that the “Pastoral Service of Open Hands” encounters on a daily basis. Throughout the year we have learned that our pastoral ministry and the evangelizing mission of the Church depend on the fundamental gesture of extending a welcome to the immigrant population. As St. Vincent reminds us, we ought to be *affable, cordial and serene towards those who draw near to us so that we might be a consolation to them* (SV XII, 189).

We have also learned the importance of “listening before offering help,” for it is from listening that we come to understand the “real” needs of the people and can then develop lines of action and projects that respond to these needs. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *The first service that one should offer others in community is to listen to them. Just as God’s love begins with listening to the Word, so to if we want to love our sisters and brothers, then we must first of all listen to them. God loves us in such a way that he not only gives us his Word, but also gives us his ears. Thus, we do the work of God when we take the time to learn to listen to our sisters and brothers.*

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal continue to help us minister with open hands and hearts so that the action of the Spirit might continue to be present in our work.

(CHARLES PLOCK, C.M., translator)

*Vincentiana*, novembre-décembre 2005

# Notes on the Social Agenda of the CM at the UN 2004-2005

by Joseph Foley, C.M.

*CM NGO Representative at the UN  
Province of USA-East*

## Introduction

When news commentators speak the words “United Nations,” the words are often identified with the Security Council or the General Assembly. This is especially true in the past three or four years. In reality, the United Nations is a complex global organization made up of multiple agencies that has brought about remarkable changes for persons around the world. The United Nations has a record that speaks for itself:

- **Peace** – at the present time, the United Nations is involved in 14 peacekeeping missions around the world; it has negotiated more than 175 peace settlements, and averted 82 conflicts through diplomacy.
- **Democracy-building** – the UN has enabled development of 80 new, independent countries; it has enabled the establishment of a body of international law; and the UN’s international court has been instituted to settle disputes such as border clashes and economic quarrels.
- **Development** – the UN Development Program (UNDP) disperses \$ 6.5 billion annually in 130 poor countries; UNICEF promotes children’s rights, health, labor conditions, education; the World Health Organization (WHO) has wiped out smallpox and almost eradicated polio and is a major organization targeting HIV/AIDS and SARS. The World Food Program (WFP) feeds more than 83 million people a year.
- **Human Rights** – The UN has created, promulgated, and monitored the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and it has implemented and monitored more than 80 Human Rights agreements on political, cultural, economic, social issues (e.g., women, children, prisoners, indigenous people); through the International Labor Organization

(ILO), the UN has established labor standards; and through the International Criminal Court it can prosecute “crimes against humanity.”

The record is equally impressive when one goes on to consider the environmental accomplishments of the UN; its efforts to secure women’s rights and eliminate all forms of violence against women; the awareness raised and the agreements achieved by the UN Global Conferences of the 1990s.

Playing one’s role in the United Nations (as a member of civil society and as a representative of a non-governmental organization) need not blind one to the glaring weaknesses of the organization. While a great strength of the UN is that it is the only international institution in which the most powerful nations are held accountable to the least powerful ones, a perennial problem of the UN is that it is too weak, not that it is too strong. The great danger lies in the self-interest of its member states, which allow only what suits their national agenda. As supporters of the UN, NGOs advocate alternatives to domination and self-interest as the basis of world order.

As a religious Community working in 79 countries around the world, the Congregation of the Mission has its own impressive record of promoting better standards of living for people, especially those who live in conditions of poverty. From the earliest days of our Institute, our members, too, ministered to victims of war in various European countries. And, our record shows that we have a long history of protecting and defending human dignity and the integral human development of those we serve. It is only logical, then, that Vincentians partner, and at times challenge, another global institution committed to: saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, promoting fundamental human rights, ending poverty and establishing the conditions under which justice can be maintained. Each of these is fully consistent with what we believe to be God’s will for this world.

In 2004-2005, the NGO Office of the Congregation has selected the following areas as its primary focus:

### **1. The Issue of War and Peace**

From a humanitarian point of view, once the guns are silent, the troop strength reduced and the promises are forgotten, the brutal consequences of war remain. Whether war is conducted in the spotlight of world attention or in some place away from center stage, it is, finally, the people who are left to grieve and to mourn. They have to begin nearly impossible tasks: overcoming poverty after towns and villages have been plundered and after schools, roads,

businesses, places of worship and hospitals have been bombed and fields and orchards land mined.

One has only to think of the media images of the war in Afghanistan, or the Sudan, or the conflict between Israel and Palestine, or Iraq or Angola.

- **Afghanistan:** Even before the events of 11 September 2001, Afghanistan suffered the effects of more than two decades of conflict under an oppressive regime. The international community responded with food and medicine, home schooling, and funding for small development programs, the reconstruction of homes, roads, irrigation and water systems. In the post-Taliban era, the NGO peace community has continued its humanitarian assistance; it also advocates on behalf of the country's poor and helps Afghan families obtain the resources they need to rebuild their communities and their lives.
- **Iraq:** Ever since the Gulf War, living conditions in Iraq deteriorated drastically. Under the current occupation, most citizens continue to lack the most basic needs: safety, food, water, sanitation and healthcare. Today, unemployment, electricity cuts, medicine shortages and water quality are still the most pressing problems facing the people of Iraq. The NGO peace community continues to look for ways to bring needed assistance to those who suffer the most, while advocating for a timely end to this war.

By such activities and, sometimes, in the face of surprisingly blunt opposition, the NGO working groups with which we labor try to be a beacon of hope to those who have seen their families, their communities and livelihoods destroyed by the violence of war.

## 2. Children and HIV/AIDS

Addressing the opening session of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002, Secretary General, Kofi A. Annan told the participants: "This is not just a Special Session on children. It is a gathering about the future of humanity.... We must do more than talk about the future.... We must begin to create it, now." Earlier (May 2000), as part of a build-up to the Special Session, UNICEF launched the *Global Movement for Children*. This campaign included ten imperatives: 1) leave no child out; 2) put children first; 3) care for every child; 4) fight HIV/AIDS; 5) stop harming and exploiting children; 6) listen to children; 7) educate every child; 8) protect children from war; 9) protect the earth for children; and 10) fight poverty: invest in children.

*Children and HIV/AIDS - What everyone needs to know:* Since the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS has taken the lives of more than 22 million people. Today, 42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. In the most severely affected countries, life expectancy has fallen by as much as 23 years. The impact of this pandemic is most severely reflected in children.

- HIV/AIDS is rapidly becoming a disease of youth. More than half of all new infections occur in young people (15-24 years). Nearly 12 million young people are currently infected with HIV/AIDS and 6,000 are newly infected each day.
- Decades of progress in child survival are being reversed. To date, five sub-Saharan countries have experienced increases in child mortality due to AIDS. In 2002, over 600,000 children under 15 died of AIDS, while 800,000 were newly infected.
- AIDS has already orphaned more than 13 million children. At the current infection rates, that number will be 25 million by 2010.

For its part, UNICEF has adopted a set of medium range strategic priorities to address the issue of HIV/AIDS. The Congregation supports this effort by its participation in the *NGO Working Group on Children and HIV/AIDS*. The Working Group, which was formed this year, labors within UNICEF's strategic priorities: 1) to prevent HIV infection among young people (aged 10-24); 2) to prevent parent-to-child transmission of HIV; 3) to provide care for children living with HIV and AIDS; 4) to insure the protection, care and support for orphans and for children in families made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

The Children and HIV/AIDS Working Group has created a Plan of Action. The Plan calls for a survey of local experts, academics and HIV/AIDS practitioners in the various regions of the world. It will serve as a tool to establish three or four top advocacy priorities. The Working Group believes that after all the talking and writing is done, the needs of children with HIV/AIDS fall through the cracks. We would like to think that it is possible to reverse this and to attract more attention and money to the issue of children and AIDS.

### **3. Social Development**

It is an uncontested fact that the ultimate goal of social development is the creation of a society in which each and every person, regardless of circumstances, can live a healthy and active life for as long as possible. And, it is the responsibility of governments to

do what is possible to create a social system in which younger and older generations support each other, with the aim of realizing a society in which people can live with peace of mind. In many countries, this requires making changes in such things as health care and pension systems.

From the point of view of the United Nations, a first step in this process is the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The MDG, adopted as a common global agenda by the world's heads of state in the year 2000, commit countries to:

1. halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015;
2. achieve universal primary education;
3. empower women and promote equality among women and men;
4. reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds;
5. reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters;
6. reduce the spread of diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and malaria;
7. ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. create global partnerships for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief... all this by 2015.

The particular focus of the *2004 Commission for Social Development (CSW)* is the "Effectiveness of the Public Sector." By selecting this theme the Commission was inviting reflection, debate and resolutions around the issues of the state's responsibility (directly or indirectly) to provide for the essential needs of its residents. Public Sector effectiveness is measured by how well the state discharges its responsibilities under the major international Human Rights' instruments, the Copenhagen Commitments and the Millennium Declaration; or put simply, by how well the state

- creates the economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will allow people to achieve social development;
- commits to the eradication of absolute poverty;
- strives for equality and equity among women, the elderly, people with disabilities, children and men;
- provides access to quality education, primary healthcare (e.g., access to such things as anti-retroviral drugs), adequate nutrition, safe water and sanitation.

While recognizing the incremental nature of any substantial change, that part of the NGO community that is committed to poverty eradication and social development offered expertise and



constructive recommendations in several important areas: the rights of migrants, the treatment of people with disabilities, strategies for strengthening family, public sector effectiveness and good governance and privatization.

At the same time the NGO community offered some significant challenges, saying for example, that despite the commitments made by governments in Copenhagen (1995) and again at the Millennium Summit (2000), it should be considered morally dishonest for the world's richest countries to give rhetorical support to the achievement of social development while refusing to implement the means by which financial resources could be mobilized to achieve social development. It is equally morally dishonest to refuse to change global trade rules that discriminate against poor countries and impoverish communities.

I offer these three areas as practical examples — practical in the sense that the vast majority of our membership has experience and expertise in these areas; and the work at the UN would be immeasurably enriched by sharing that experience or expertise, or by completing the HIV/AIDS survey.

#### 4. Value Added

Recently I listened to some remarks on the spiritual dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals. The speaker, Alfredo Sfeir-Younis, a long-time employee of the UN and currently a Senior Advisor in the Managing Director's Office of the World Bank, talked about how puzzled he was by how many significant decisions are made in what appears to be a total moral and ethical vacuum. He observed that, in his experience, many who do speak out of their human values and spirituality do not seem convinced that issues such as war and peace, human insecurity, the violation of human rights, the destruction of the environment and discrimination in many forms can be resolved by using a spiritual paradigm.

So what is one left with? "Today, the horizon that is linked to the ethos of our lives seems to be based very much on the elements of our *material existence* and, therefore, are very bounded and limited. The sky is not the limit any longer; the limit is much closer to where we are standing at this moment." And so, says Sfeir-Younis, "we continue to be dominated by materialistic and individualistic values. We repeat the same mistakes time and time again, until they look like they are not mistakes any longer. We accept that life can be lived at higher and higher levels of toxicity and, then, behave like the drunk driver that always insists that he/she can drive. We adapt ourselves to pain, to suffering, to the sub-optimal, to the incomplete and unhappy reality we live in."

“We reject root causes and treat symptoms instead. While we know that pollution causes many headaches, instead of getting rid of pollution we buy more expensive and stronger pills. And pharmaceuticals thrive as a result of this phenomenon. The same applies to security, now a trillion dollar business. The question is: to whose advantage is it to have a world at war, to have as many sick people as possible, and to create a lot of insecurity at every level of our lives? The simple answer is: those whose business and, therefore, whose profits depend on war, ill health and insecurity.”

“Today, we approach the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDG) in a defective manner and so we hear a great deal about the reasons why these MDG will not be attained. We hear lots of blame and political play rather than positive ways to attain them.”

“Going to the other extreme, have you ever thought how the world would look if these MDG were attained? Do you have a feeling for what this may mean for millions of people?”

“I would like to make some categorical statements at this moment of my presentation:

- **The first** is that the material solutions we are seeking for the attainment of the MDG are only a minimal portion of what needs to be done. In addition, most material solutions will be transitory palliatives and will not create the foundations for sustainable solutions. Think for a moment that if the first MDG were attained, we might take nearly a billion people out of poverty. However, another billion people will become poor in the same period of time.
- **The second** is that we must create a decision-making system, a governance structure, and a process founded on human and spiritual values. It will be the strength of these spiritual values, and the self-realization of these values, that will change the direction we have wrongly taken on the road towards fulfilling the aims of the Millennium Declaration. And, it is this group of NGOs more than any other in the UN that must be fully convinced that this is the case. I am talking about the values of universality, inclusion, identity, love, caring, sharing, fraternity, compassion, and many more. These are the values that will breakdown existing power structures, fossil forms of governance, etc.
- **The third** is that implementation of these MDG must not be conceived as a mechanical process. It is a process of complex human interaction, anchored in institutional arrangements, cultural aspects, manmade assets, financial

considerations, human and social values, and spiritual dimensions of our human reality.

- **The fourth** is that these MDG, as new expressions of human betterment, will demand new and higher levels of human consciousness. Otherwise, societies will end up doing more of the same. But, more of the same will yield more of the same. It is essential that we focus on the role that individual and social awareness and consciousness play in the attainment of the MDG. It is important to unleash our infinite human potential and put it at the service of these MDG and more!
- **The fifth** is that there are two ways in which we may actually make progress in human betterment. One is through action of the type we see everyday. Work more, earn more, spend more, work more, and so on. We may follow this material routine with the view to attaining some material progress. Yes, it is possible to advance like this. However, there is another way: to use the power of our wisdom and free will. And, through that power generate the type of energy that is needed to mobilize each and every citizen in the world. Without this energy the MDG will continue to be the residual of 'other things' and the outcomes of 'other processes.' Processes with plenty of rules but without wisdom, will simply not do.
- **The sixth** is that we (yes, you and I), will have to make some fundamental and irreversible decision, and I wonder whether we have the valor and the courage to make it. In particular, to embrace, adopt, and live fully the spiritual paradigm in its entirety, and stop being on the sidelines. The other option is living bits and pieces of this way of life, these principles, and those fundamental dimensions of our non-material life."

A Community such as ours might well be challenged by these considerations. Given our particular charism and history, there is a great deal that we have to contribute to this kind of conversation.

### Conclusion

In this article, I have presented a very brief sketch of the accomplishments of the UN; I have named three areas of Vincentian NGO involvement this year; and I have indicated an area in which religious in general, and Vincentians in particular, have a unique contribution to make on issues such as poverty eradication and development since we embody the charism of Vincent and the social justice tradition of the Catholic Church.

## A Vincentian Reflection on Peace

by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

*Superior General*

Many eloquent voices are crying out for peace these days. The list is impressive even if I just count the items that cross my desk. On October 31, 2003, the Community of Sant'Egidio wrote inviting me to pray and march for peace on New Year's Day. The November-December 2003 issue of *Religiosi in Italia* featured an article entitled, "Peace: Prophecy of the Eternal."<sup>1</sup> On New Year's Day itself Pope John Paul II synthesized many of his previous statements in a document called, "An Ever-Timely Commitment: Teaching Peace," addressed to leaders of the nations, jurists, teachers of the young, and all those tempted to turn to violence.<sup>2</sup> On January 20, his talk to the diplomatic corps focused on "Four Convictions on the Building of Peace."<sup>3</sup>

Such numerous reflections on peace are surely a good sign, but they are also a bad sign. Continued widespread violence has evoked these cries. As a famous revolutionary in my own country once said: "Gentlemen may cry: 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace!"<sup>4</sup>

I have been asked to write a Vincentian reflection on peace. The topic is very broad, ranging from the quest for interior peace to the promotion of non-violent relationships among the nations. Here in *Vincentiana* I have already written on several occasions about gentleness as a characteristic Vincentian virtue and a foundational attitude for peacemaking.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the Jubilee Year 2000,

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<sup>1</sup> MARCO GUZZI, *Religiosi in Italia* 339 (N° 6; Novembre-Dicembre 2003) 241-250.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *An Every Timely Commitment: Teaching World Peace*, Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2004, Vatican: 8 December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *Origins* February 5, 2004 (Vol. 33, N° 34) 581-586.

<sup>4</sup> PATRICK HENRY, "The War Inevitable," a speech given in Richmond, Virginia, on March 23, 1775.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today," in *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul* (New City Press: New York, 1992) 37-69. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Vincentiana* XXIX (1985) 226-254. Cf., also, "A Further Look at 'Gentleness,'" in *Seasons in Spirituality* (New City Press: Hyde Park, New York, 1998) 81-100. This article also appeared in *Vincentiana* XXXIX (1995) 285-304.

I also sent a letter to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, reflecting on reconciliation and on preaching and teaching justice.<sup>6</sup> After the events of September 11, 2001, I addressed an Advent letter to all the members of the Vincentian Family,<sup>7</sup> with peace as its theme.

Having already written about several aspects of this topic, and because of its very broad scope, in this article I will restrict my focus to peace in the sense in which Pope Paul VI once so movingly described it: “No more war! War never again!”<sup>8</sup>

### I. St. Vincent and Peace

St. Vincent often speaks about peace and peacemaking, but usually in the context of community life or the giving of missions. In speaking about community he states: “The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace. How can you attract people if you are not united with one another in Him?”<sup>9</sup> In speaking about the missions, he encouraged the members of the Congregation of the Mission to work at healing broken relationships. One of the important goals of missions was reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> Missionaries were to attempt to settle disputes and divisions. In fact, they frequently reported to St. Vincent about their success in doing so.

But Vincent also addressed the question of war. In a repetition of prayer on July 24, 1655, he lamented that war was widespread: in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Ireland, Scotland, England. “War everywhere, misery everywhere,” he cried out. “So many people suffer!” he said in frustration. It was in this context that St. Vincent made his famous statement that “It is the poor who preserve the true religion, a living faith.”<sup>11</sup>

Besides his words, Vincent also responded to the devastating war in Lorraine with a massive relief effort. He asked the Ladies of Charity to take charge of the fund-raising. They managed to get large donations from the King, the Queen, and the Duchess d’Aiguillon, but the contributions always fell short of the needs. He sent 12 of his best priests and clerics at Toul to help in the relief efforts and sent brothers who knew about surgery and medicine. In fact, he drew up

<sup>6</sup> Cf., *Vincentiana* XLIII (1999) 407-414.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., *Vincentiana* XLV (2001) 479-482.

<sup>8</sup> Paul VI, Discourse to the United Nations on the occasion of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, New York, October 4, 1965; cf., *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 881.

<sup>9</sup> ABELLY, II, Chapter I, 154.

<sup>10</sup> CR XI, 8.

<sup>11</sup> SV XI, 200.

a rule establishing strict standards of conduct and administrative procedures among them. The missionaries distributed relief in seven strategic points: Toul, Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Pont-à-Mousson, St. Mihiel, and Bar-le-Duc. Each center received a monthly allotment. Fr. Jean Dehorgny was named as regional visitor to supervise the relief work in 1640.

José María Román describes the help offered as follows:

*Basic aid consisted of food, particularly bread and soup, medicine and clothing. The same method of distribution was followed in every place. Each week the missionaries would go round their districts and with the help of the parish priest they would draw up a list of poor people. Then they would give the priest, or some charitable lady, the flour needed for the week's baking, and after the first distribution of bread they would gather the poor people together for a pious exhortation, catechise the children, and help those who were most seriously ill to prepare well for death.<sup>12</sup>*

Brother Mathieu Regnard became Vincent's emissary to Lorraine. He made 54 journeys back and forth, each time carrying with him between 20 and 30 thousand *livres*. He crossed battle lines, worked his way through bands of marauders and, almost as if in a novel, always managed to escape. He later described 18 incidents in which he nearly lost his life (and the money!). On one of his trips in September 1639, besides coming back himself, he brought along 46 girls and 54 boys to the capital.

In the 1650s war ravaged Picardy, Champagne and the Ile de France. This time Brother Jean Parr was Vincent's trusted envoy for Picardy-Champagne. There the Daughters of Charity were tireless in relief work and served as nurses in military hospitals. St. Vincent encouraged them eloquently:

*The queen is asking for you to be sent to Calais to look after poor wounded soldiers. How humble this should make you feel; to think that God wants to make use of you in such a marvellous way! Oh Saviour, men go to war to kill each other, and you go to war to repair the damage that is done there! What a blessing from God! Men kill the body, and very often they kill the soul if people die in a state of mortal sin; you go to bring them back to life, or at least to preserve life by the care you give to those who survive, and your efforts to show them,*

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<sup>12</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, C.M., *St Vincent De Paul: A Biography*, translated by Sr. Joyce Howard, D.C. (Melisende: London, 1999) 515.

*by your good example and your exhortations, that they should be resigned to God's will.*<sup>13</sup>

With the siege of Paris, the pain of war came to the capital. The sisters distributed food each day to 2,100 people in the St. Denis area and to 5,000 poor people in St. Paul's Parish. At St. Lazare, soup was distributed twice a day to 800 people. The number of those fed daily soon rose to 15,000. "We hear that you've spared nothing to save the lives of all the sick-poor in those places," he rejoiced in a letter to Brother Nicolas Sené.<sup>14</sup> "If you need powder for purging, ask Monsieur Portail [...] If you have to bargain to get provisions everywhere, do so [...] Write to Madame de Herse asking for a little money to help those poor people harvest their grapes [...] And spare nothing to save the life of the souls and bodies of those poor people."

But it is often forgotten that in addition to his vigorous war-relief efforts, Vincent was also engaged in behind-the-scenes peacemaking. On two occasions he intervened personally, going right to the top.

At some time between 1639 and 1642, during the wars in Lorraine, he went to Cardinal Richelieu, knelt before him, described the horrors of war, and pleaded for peace: "Let us have peace. Have pity on us. Give France peace." Richelieu refused, responding diplomatically that peace did not depend on him alone.<sup>15</sup>

Collet relates an even more striking episode, which he takes from an account written by Brother Ducournau.<sup>16</sup> In 1649, during the civil war, St. Vincent left Paris quietly, crossed battle lines and forded a flooded river (at almost 70 years of age) 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 again 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.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 580.

<sup>14</sup> SV IV, 530-531.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. COSTE, *The Life and Labours of St. Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard (London, 1935) II, 369-370. Cf. also, Abelly, I, XXXV, 169.

<sup>16</sup> P. COLLET, *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul* (Nancy, 1748) I, 468. Cf. SV III, 402. Cf. also, COSTE, II, 447.

## II. Some Horizon Shifts Since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Both the reality of war and societal attitudes toward it have changed significantly since St. Vincent's time. Below, I mention only three of the most significant changes.

1. *While limited conflicts continue to exist, the existence of weapons of mass destruction now makes total war, with the possible annihilation of whole populations, a looming threat.*

While we often speak of peace, widespread violence exists even as I write. The list of places seems endless: Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Algeria, the Basque Provinces, Burundi, Casamance, Chechnya, Colombia, Comores, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Ivory Coast, Kashmir, Kurdistan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Myanmar, Nepal, Northern Ireland, Northern Uganda, Palestine, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Western Sahara.

In addition, terrorist attacks are on the increase, leaving large numbers dead and striking fear in the hearts of many. On March 11, as I was doing research for this article, hundreds died in Madrid as bombs exploded on the trains that carried them to work or school. Similar bombings have occurred in Casablanca, Istanbul, Moscow, Paris, Bagdad, Jakarta, Tokyo, and other large cities.

The needs generated by prolonged violence in so many places are dramatic: *a)* hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, handicapped, hungry, and displaced persons and families; *b)* destruction of homes, factories, workshops, stores, churches, hospitals, schools, and infrastructures; *c)* economic crises, devaluation of national currency, inflation in the cost of living; *d)* collapse of governmental institutions and the absence of public services. War paralyzes nations and their citizens, especially the poor, and often deprives them of even the meager means that they possess for their sustenance.

On top of the "limited" wars listed above, since World War II and the advent of nuclear weapons the threat of all-out war has loomed large. In recent decades, increased sophistication in weapon design has paved the way for "surgical strikes," but the enormous power of nuclear arsenals creates the possibility of massive destruction of populations.

The sale of arms remains one of the major factors in the world economy. In a strikingly forceful statement, the conciliar fathers at Vatican II condemned the arms race: "Therefore, we declare once again: the arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race



and the harm that it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured.”<sup>17</sup> But with the widespread diffusion of arms and the frequency of their use, young people often attest to uncertainty about their future because of the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

2. *In modern times there has been a very significant revival of pacifism.*

Gandhi, with his largely peaceful revolution in India, has had an enormous influence in this regard. Likewise, Martin Luther King, in the United States, obtained very significant advances in civil rights by non-violent resistance. James Douglass’ book, *The Non-Violent Cross*,<sup>18</sup> which gained immense circulation, popularized the biblical and philosophical roots of pacifist movements.

In the Catholic tradition, *Gaudium et Spes*<sup>19</sup> took a carefully nuanced, yet positive position in regard to pacifism: “In the same spirit we cannot but express our admiration for all who forgo the use of violence to vindicate their rights and resort to those other means of defense which are available to weaker parties, provided it can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others and of the community.” At the same time Paul VI made stirring appeals for the non-violent solution of conflicts, addressing this theme eloquently at the United Nations headquarters in New York on October 4, 1965, and later coining the phrase, “If you want peace, work for justice.”<sup>20</sup> In his book, *Faith and Violence*, Thomas Merton offered a clear presentation of the theory and practice of Christian peace-making.<sup>21</sup> In 1983 the bishops of the United States, in a carefully prepared document, made a very significant contribution to the theory and the practice of working toward the creation of peace.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> JAMES W. DOUGLASS, *The Non-Violent Cross* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

<sup>20</sup> Paul VI, Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace, January 1, 1972.

<sup>21</sup> THOMAS MERTON, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

<sup>22</sup> “The Challenge of Peace,” *Origins* 13 (no. 1; May 19, 1983) 1-32.

3. *In recent times there has been increased consciousness of the need for peacemaking not only on an individual level, but also on a structural level.*

To Paul VI's appeal for a peace that rests on justice as its foundation,<sup>23</sup> John Paul II adds: "Development is the new name for peace."<sup>24</sup>

The groundwork for the Church's emphasis on the need for structural change is already evident in *Pacem in Terris*<sup>25</sup> and in *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>26</sup> Paul VI took the theme up eloquently in *Populorum Progressio*,<sup>27</sup> and, in an address to the members of *Cor Unum* given on January 13, 1972, called Christians to commit themselves to enter into "the very heart of social and political action and thus get at the roots of evil and change hearts, as well as the structures of modern society."<sup>28</sup>

Today we are conscious that sin deeply affects social structures. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle structural obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. It is only when such structural obstacles are analyzed, understood, and removed that society can establish abiding, peaceful relationships.

There is also a heightened sense of the global community at present. Local conflicts make the international scene quite volatile at times, with the lurking danger that these conflicts will escalate into an "all-out war."

Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II has appealed again and again for peace, emphasizing the need for solidarity among the nations, a just world order, integral human development, respect for human rights, and the guarantee of freedom. The list of themes for his New Year's Day messages is impressive:

1979: *To Reach Peace, Teach Peace*

1980: *Truth, the Power of Peace*

1981: *To Serve Peace, Respect Freedom*

1982: *Peace: A Gift of God Entrusted to Us!*

1983: *Dialogue for Peace, A Challenge for Our Time*

<sup>23</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 896.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 10; cf. also, *Populorum Progressio*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, 89, 91.

<sup>26</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972) 189.

- 1984: *From a New Heart, Peace is Born*  
 1985: *Peace and Youth Go Forward Together*  
 1986: *Peace is a Value with No Frontiers North-South, East-West: Only One Peace*  
 1987: *Development and Solidarity: Two Keys to Peace*  
 1988: *Religious Freedom, Condition for Peace*  
 1989: *To Build Peace, Respect Minorities*  
 1990: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*  
 1991: *If You Want Peace, Respect the Conscience of Every Person*  
 1992: *Believers United in Building Peace*  
 1993: *If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor*  
 1994: *The Family Creates the Peace of the Human Family*  
 1995: *Women: Teachers of Peace*  
 1996: *Let Us Give Children a Future of Peace*  
 1997: *Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace*  
 1998: *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All*  
 1999: *Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace*  
 2000: *"Peace on Earth to Those Whom God Loves!"*  
 2001: *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace*  
 2002: *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Peace*  
 2003: *"Pacem in Terris": A Permanent Commitment*

### III. Some Vincentian Reflections on Peace Today

1. *"Passionate gentleness," a virtue in which, "justice and peace shall kiss" (Psalm 85:11).*

Today Jesus' proclamation of a kingdom of peace and the witness of his own gentleness play a very prominent part in the contemporary Church's preaching of the good news. The Church's teaching about peace is intimately bound up with integral human development and the promotion of justice. Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus*,<sup>29</sup> speaks eloquently about this link: "I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated the cry: 'Never again war!' No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even

<sup>29</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, 52; cf. also, 14, 54.

the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war. [...] For this reason, another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development.”

Aquinas reminds us that the passion most immediately associated with justice is anger.<sup>30</sup> Anger recoils in the face of injustice in order to spring into action and wipe it out. It moves us to lunge toward justice, to hunger and thirst for it. Anger wells up out of love and respect for the human person, whose rights we perceive as being violated. It strains to right wrong, to reestablish an order in which persons can grow and flourish. It will always be aroused, therefore, when we perceive that unjust structures are depriving the poor of the political, social, economic, or personal freedom that their human dignity demands.

Gentleness finds the ways of expressing anger, not in violence, but in “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world.”<sup>31</sup> “Passionate” gentleness<sup>32</sup> knows how to direct anger to root out injustice, to channel it so that “justice rolls like a river.”<sup>33</sup> W.E.B. DuBois sums up this gentle passion in a lovely prayer:

*Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us — the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty — all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully, grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish. Amen.*

## 2. *Mediation as ministry.*

To borrow a phrase from Karl Rahner, there are many “forgotten truths” in our Christian heritage; something that is very important in one era can slip to the back of Christian consciousness in another

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologica I-II.*, 46.2, 4, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971) 924.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. WALTER BURGHARDT, “A Faith That Does Justice,” Warren Series Lectures, in *Catholic Studies* (# 18; November 17, 1991) 9.

<sup>33</sup> Am 5:24.

historical epoch. The same is true within the Vincentian Family. It is easy to forget that, for St. Vincent, mediation was one of the most important ministries of missionaries.<sup>34</sup> It is a delicate ministry. Mediators seek to create a triangular relationship in which communication is reestablished between two conflicting parties, with the aid of the mediator's presence. Of course, for successful reconciliation, both parties must trust the mediator.

The mediator must be careful to

- be an active listener
- be impartial, attentive, and not overly influenced by one party or the other
- respect the rhythm of both parties, accompanying them patiently
- create an atmosphere of confidence, continually encouraging the two parties to find a solution
- pay attention not only to words but also to feelings and non-verbal language
- know how to find the common values and points of interest of both parties
- be creative in formulating and reformulating possible solutions.

Reconciliation, both on a small and large scale, is one of the basic goals of ministry. I am reminded of the role that the Community of Sant'Egidio played in mediating the peace in Mozambique. After 15 years of civil war, "human wisdom" would surely have doubted the ability of a "powerless" Italian Community to accomplish what other much more "powerful" agencies had failed to do. Yet the negotiations were successfully completed in 1992 and peace continues to reign in that country. Could not other groups have similar courage in offering their services as ministers of reconciliation?

Conversation and dialogue will, in the lives of the gentle, be the primary means for settling conflicts, accompanied by suffering love. These are the tools that Jesus himself, who is "our peace, and breaks down the wall of separation,"<sup>35</sup> used. If the community of his disciples develops a genuine passion for dialogue, justice, and peace, then it is a clear sign that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. CR XI, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Eph 2:14.

### 3. *Teaching peace as a ministry.*

In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII noted that we sow the seeds of God's peace when we minister to the four hungers of the human spirit: truth, justice, love, and freedom. Education programs are a primary means for doing so.<sup>36</sup> Pope Paul VI wrote: "Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit."<sup>37</sup>

Right from the time of St. Vincent, the ministry of education was an important one for both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. All the missions given in Vincent's lifetime involved daily catechetical instruction. In addition, Vincent and his companions soon became involved in seminary work, preparing the diocesan clergy for more effective service, especially to the poor. Today the Congregation of the Mission continues to have the responsibility for a number of seminaries, as well as four universities. The Constitutions of the Congregation also state that the formation of the laity, with a view toward leading them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor, is one of the ways in which the purpose of the Congregation is achieved.<sup>38</sup> The Statutes of the Congregation recognize the importance of educating young people, as well as adults, and suggest various places where this can be carried out appropriately, with an accent on social justice, particularly among the poor.<sup>39</sup>

Starting at least in 1641, the Daughters of Charity began to focus on the *petites écoles*. St. Louise sent the sisters to teach young girls to read and write, catechizing them at the same time. She herself engaged in this work. Today, the schools of the Daughters of Charity have more than half a million students. Even beyond schools, Daughters of Charity offer formation to large numbers of young people in our youth groups throughout the world.

The websites of all the major branches of the Vincentian Family provide abundant teaching materials on the Social Teaching of the Church, integral human development, the quest for justice, and peace education.<sup>40</sup> Particularly noteworthy is Vinpaz (Vincentians for

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Women: Teachers of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 28; December 22, 1994) 465-469; JORGE MEJIA, "Dimensions of the Bishop's Essential Ministry of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 39; March 16, 1995) 641-648; DOLORES LECKEY, "Peacemaking and Creativity: Three Dynamics," *Origins* 24 (# 45; April 27, 1995) 777-780. Leckey focuses on three dynamics that make for peace: listening, beauty, and laughter.

<sup>37</sup> PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> C 1, 3°.

<sup>39</sup> S 11.

<sup>40</sup> Vincentian Family: [www.famvin.org](http://www.famvin.org)  
 Congregation of the Mission: [www.famvin.org/cm](http://www.famvin.org/cm)

Peace), which can be found on the site of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

In programs of education for peace, Dolores Leckey identifies three dynamics in teaching peacemaking.

The first of these is listening. In a noisy world, with so many media and so many conflicts, one becomes more and more conscious of its importance. As one observes tables in restaurants and in meeting rooms where everyone's cell phone is constantly ringing, one wonders if anyone is really listening! Listening is ultimately an act of trust in which we seek to understand others, all of whom are different from us. But real listeners, I am sad to say, are rare. Can we teach children to listen better?

Secondly, there is a power in beauty. We sense this as we listen to music and gaze upon works of art or as we join in well-prepared liturgical celebrations. One of the horrors of war is that it destroys beauty. The words of war are poisonous rather than poetic. The screeches of bombs are terrifying rather than liberating. Can we teach children to love beauty and to create rather than destroy it?

A third element is laughter. Hilaire Belloc once wrote: "There is nothing worth the wear of winning, but the laughter and love of friends."<sup>41</sup> Those who learn to laugh genuinely with one another are already building mutual peace.

In his poem, *The Fiddler of Dooney*, William Butler Yeats writes<sup>42</sup>:

*For the good are always the merry,  
Save by an evil chance,  
And the merry love the fiddle,  
And the merry love to dance.*

#### 4. *Learning the ways of non-violent dialogue.*

Without dialogue, genuine peace cannot exist. When conflicting parties enter into dialogue, several prerequisites are essential:

- Each must seek to discover the truth of the other: Why has the conflict arisen? What were the remote and proximate

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AIC: [www.famwin.org/aic](http://www.famwin.org/aic)

Daughters of Charity: [www.filles-de-la-charite.org](http://www.filles-de-la-charite.org)

St. Vincent de Paul Society: [www.ozanet.org](http://www.ozanet.org)

International Association of the Miraculous Medal: [www.amminter.org](http://www.amminter.org)

JMV International: [www.secretariadomjv.org](http://www.secretariadomjv.org)

MISEVI: [www.misevi.org](http://www.misevi.org)

<sup>41</sup> HILAIRE BELLOC, *Complete Verse*, with a preface by W.P.N.P. Roughhead (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1970) "Dedicatory Ode," 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Yeats's Poems*, edited and annotated by A. Norman Jeffares (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991) 109.

causes? What injustices are being redressed? What are the legitimate demands on both sides?

- Each side must recognize its own responsibility in the conflict.
- Each must speak of the problems as objectively and calmly as possible, recognizing the destructive acts which make people suffer, especially the poor.
- Each side must offer concrete proposals. One cannot come to the peace table empty-handed. The proposals made must be realistic and must proceed step-by-step.

Can we as a Vincentian Family learn to dialogue well? Can we teach others the art?

*It was a clear, cold, winter night. Perched at the end of a pine- tree branch, a dove watched with wonder as snowflakes silently fell. She jumped when a voice from behind interrupted her quiet reverie.*

*"How many snowflakes can a branch bear before it breaks and falls to the ground?" the owl asked.*

*"I have no idea," responded the dove, recovering from her shock.*

*"2,326,482,671," said the owl.*

*"What? How do you know that?" asked the dove.*

*"I counted them myself," replied the owl. "It was on a night just like this that it happened. The flakes were falling quickly. 'One, two...,' I counted. When I reached 2,326,482,670, a final snowflake alighted on the branch. 'CRACK!' I heard, and the branch plummeted to the ground."*

*The dove reflected silently for a moment and then mused, "I sometimes wonder: if one more voice were raised for peace, would it finally come?"*