

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, May 25, 2004

To the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you!

Over the last ten years we have been thinking, praying, planning and acting together increasingly as a Family. This February 20-22, at a meeting in Paris of the heads of some of the principal branches of the Family, we reviewed many of the events that have taken place in the decade since our annual meetings first began. All of us are delighted to see how much has happened in such a short period of time and join in thanking God for his many gifts to us in the Vincentian Family.

Each year we write to you at this time to encourage you to begin preparing for our Vincentian Family Day of Prayer held around September 27. This Day of Prayer, which has been evaluated very positively in the many countries where our Family exists throughout the world, has also, in recent years, been the occasion for introducing a common theme or a campaign of action within the Vincentian Family.

As you begin to prepare for 2004's celebration, we offer you the following information, which we hope will be of help:

1. We have decided to continue for another year the campaign entitled "The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger." This campaign has produced extraordinary results. We know of more than 160 projects which have been organized worldwide and recognize that there are also many others about which we have not received information. In this past year a number of projects have been initiated which aim at combatting the causes of poverty. In implementing such projects, branches of our Family in poorer countries have received significant financial aid from branches in better-off countries.

The commission responsible for organizing the "Fight Against Hunger" will soon be writing a letter to all the Vincentian Family

National Coordinating Councils summarizing what we know of the results of the campaign so far and encouraging the National Coordinators to promote action projects in which all the branches of the Family in the country, region or locality can be involved and also encouraging further projects aimed at eradicating the causes of poverty.

Since it is clear to us that collaboration in projects against hunger has been more effective in those countries where a Vincentian Family National Coordinating Council exists, we want to encourage all the countries to form such a council.

2. We also decided to extend the Campaign Against Malaria in which, for the first time in our history, the branches of the Vincentian Family are joining in a "political action" campaign to express the views of our Family with a clear, united voice, to those who have the power and the economic resources needed to effect a change in regard to malaria. At the same time, in some countries our Family is also undertaking concrete projects to reduce malaria locally.

This campaign has begun slowly, but has huge potential for saving lives. Globally there are more than 300 million acute cases of malaria each year, resulting in more than a million deaths. About 90% of these occur in Africa, mostly in young children. In fact, malaria is Africa's leading cause of death for those under five years of age.

The commission responsible for organizing the Campaign Against Malaria will soon be writing to the Vincentian Family National Coordinating Councils with concrete suggestions on how to formulate a document that might be presented, after adaptation and reformulation according to local circumstances, to government agencies or to other institutions which have the resources for combatting malaria.

3. At our meeting, we agreed on a common theme for the coming year (September 27, 2004 - September 27, 2005):

**The Year of Youth:
Sharing the Vincentian Charism with All Generations:**

**Prayer
Formation
Service of the Poor**

We want to encourage all the branches during the coming year to seek new, young members to share in the charism of our Vincentian Family. To assist you in presenting this common theme to the Family on September 27, several pages of materials have been attached. These can, of course, be adapted and supplemented in different countries and cultures.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of our annual Vincentian Family meetings and as we look forward to “The Year of Youth” within our Family, we urge all the members of our various branches to reach out to young people and share with them simply and openly the charism of St. Vincent. It is an immensely attractive one: relevant, concrete, effective. Within the branches of our Family, it manifests itself in different ways, each branch having its own particular characteristics. At the same time, much unites us. All of us focus on Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. All of us look to St. Vincent as a principal source of inspiration. All of us seek to live and serve with simplicity, humility, and practical charity. All of us recognize that the works we do are ultimately God’s works. So we labor and pray both individually and communally, trusting in God’s daily providence in everyday life.

We conclude this annual letter with the words of St. Vincent: “Let us go then, my brothers and sisters, and work with a new love in the service of the poor, looking even for the poorest and the most abandoned, recognizing before God that they are our Lords and Masters...” (SV XI, 393). We hope that, in the year ahead, all of us will repeat these words genuinely as an invitation to young people.

Your brothers and sisters in St. Vincent,

Anne Sturm
President,
AIC
(founded in 1617)

Yvon Laroche, rsv
Superior General,
Religious of St. Vincent de Paul
(founded in 1845)

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General,
Congregation of the Mission
(founded in 1625)

Gladys Abi-Saïd
President,
Vincentian Marian Youth
(founded in 1847)

Sr. Évelyne Franc, D.C.
Superior General,
Daughters of Charity
(founded in 1633)

Charles Shelby, C.M.
International Coordinator,
Miraculous Medal Association
(founded in 1909)

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha
President,
St. Vincent de Paul Society
(founded in 1833)

Eva Villar
President,
MISEVI
(founded in 1999)

VINCENTIAN FAMILY THEME FOR THE YEAR

September 27, 2004 - September 27, 2005

Theme: We have decided on the following common *theme* for this coming year (September 27, 2004 - September 27, 2005):

**The Year of Youth:
Sharing the Vincentian Charism with All Generations:**

**Prayer
Formation
Service of the Poor**

Objective: In the concrete, this means that every branch of the Family will focus on this objective: "Inviting more young people to join us in the service of the poor."

Motivation: By way of motivation, it may be helpful to know that some of the branches have been remarkably successful in recent years in recruiting new younger members (cf. the attached "Guidelines" for some examples).

Some possibilities: During the year, each branch is asked to devise its own means for contacting young people. Some possibilities, for example, might be:

1. In each country, each branch (AIC, CM, DC, SSVP, RSV, JMV, AMM, MISEVI) might launch a "Youth Recruitment Campaign," with the goal of enlisting more young members in the service of the poor. Each branch would design the means for carrying out this campaign (visiting universities, speaking in parishes, etc.). JMV and MISEVI could also be asked to focus during the coming year, in a renewed way, on recruiting new members. The AMM could organize a special drive during the year to acquire young members.
2. In each country a "Convocation of Vincentian Youth" from all the branches of our Family could be organized, asking each house or work of the country or province to send five to ten young people, at least half of them new. The houses of the CMs and the DCs, the local Conferences of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the local AIC groups could be asked to identify five to ten young people and send them to the Convocation. If JMV or MISEVI exists in that same country, its members could help in organizing the Convocation and as many of them as possible could take part.

At the Convocation one could present:

- concrete models for serving the poor (St. Vincent himself, Rosalie Rendu, Frederick Ozanam...);
 - the “Vincentian way” of serving the poor
 - a prayerful focus on seeing Christ in the face of the poor person,
 - concrete, practical service,
 - in coordination and friendship with others.
3. In each country, on the day of prayer (around September 27) of the Vincentian Family, the local associations (AIC, CM, DC, SSVP, RSV, JMV, AMM, MISEVI) might be encouraged to invite three or four “new” young people to participate at the Eucharistic celebration or whatever other meeting was organized. This might be a good opportunity for young people to experience our prayer and, in some small way, our ongoing formation.
 4. In each country, each branch could invite young people to meet the poor, offering them concrete opportunities for joining us in serving them in our various programs. Formation could be offered to the young people before they go out to serve. Afterwards an evaluation session, with further formation, could be organized.
 5. In each country, and even on an international level, an interactive Vincentian Family website for young people could be created, inviting them to share their experiences in the service of the poor, to ask questions, or to communicate whatever thoughts they might wish to offer other young people. This same site might advertise programs to which young people are invited or projects in which they might collaborate. For example:
 - Project Vincent - July 8-10, 2004: an opportunity for young people to gather together in the Vincentian spirit to learn about and be energized in their faith. For information, contact: <http://www.projectvincent.org>.
 - Youth camp in Ukraine - summer 2005: we are looking for four animators. For information, contact AIC-Ukraine.
 - ...

A recruitment program, a convocation, participation in our Family Day of Prayer, a call to service, and an interactive website are only five means for inviting more young people into our Family. Surely many others could be devised.

GUIDELINES VINCENTIAN FAMILY DAY OF PRAYER

September 27, 2004

I. **Suggested Theme: The Year of Youth: Sharing the Vincentian Charism with All Generations: Prayer - Formation - Service of the Poor**

We hope that some of the following information will be helpful as you prepare this day.

1. **Youth: Do we know the facts?**

Half the world's population is below 26.4 years of age. The median age in various regions, as broken down by the United Nations' Population Database, is as follows:

Africa:	18.3
Asia:	26.1
Europe:	37.7
Latin American and the Caribbean:	24.2
North America:	35.4
Oceania:	30.7

Some of the branches of our Vincentian Family have been remarkably effective in recent years in attracting young people. A few examples:

- a) In the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in England and Wales, since 1999, over 5000 new young people have engaged in voluntary service as members of the Youth SVP group.
- b) In 1998 there were JMV National Councils in six countries. In 2004, there are National Councils in 46 countries. There are 70,000 JMV members registered in the Association.
- c) In Brazil the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has more than 15,000 members under 30 years of age.
- d) In the United States 56% of all adults (more than 110 million persons) engage in some form of volunteer work. At our Vincentian universities the percentage is even higher. Eighty-six percent of those who volunteer state that they do so because they feel compassion for those in need.
- e) In Asia, the vocation programs for the Daughters of Charity have been very active and fruitful over the past six years; many young women have entered the Company in Vietnam, the Philippines, India, and Indonesia.

- f) In the Philippines, AIC has organized projects for the “Luisa’s,” young people to whom spiritual and technical formation is offered in view of service of the poor.

2. Calling young people to share in the Vincentian charism: a three-pronged approach

- a) **Prayer.** Many young people yearn to know how to pray. Our own Vincentian spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in dynamic tension with one another. St. Vincent had the wonderful gift of being an incredibly active man while, at the same time, all those who lived around him regarded him as a contemplative.

It is important that young people feel at home in praying with us. In his document *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (33) Pope John Paul II says this: “Our Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly ‘falls in love.’ Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God’s plan.”

So our prayer together should lead to action together. Divorced from action, prayer can turn escapist. It can lose itself in fantasy and create illusions of holiness. But on the other hand, service divorced from prayer can become shallow. It can have a driven quality about it. It can become an addiction.

It is good to offer young people the experience of different kinds of prayer: liturgical prayer, meditative prayer, imaginative prayer, centering prayer, *lectio divina*. In the Vincentian tradition, prayerful reflection on the word of God leads us to the poor. Mary’s song of praise, the Magnificat, exemplifies this type of prayer. She recognizes, in faith, that God can turn the world upside-down: casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty.

We encourage all our communities and groups to be open to offering young people the possibility to participate with us in our prayer.

- b) **Formation.** We will provide an enormous service to the Church, and to the poor, if we offer young people a vibrant, Christian, Vincentian formation. We who live in the Vincentian tradition

have a wonderful gift to offer the young. We should transmit it to them joyfully and generously.

The challenge is not just to create youth groups, but to form them well. We must help them respond to a question that Pope John Paul II posed at the end of a recent synod: "You, young people, you are 'sentinels of the morning.' [...] How is the Lord of history asking you to build a civilization of love? You have a keen sense of what honesty and sincerity require. You do not want to be caught up into divisive ethnic struggles nor poisoned by the gangrene of corruption. How can we be disciples of Jesus together and put into practice Christ's teaching on the Mount of the Beatitudes?"

It is important to offer young people long-range, ongoing formation. This can take place in a brief weekly or monthly meeting that is linked with their prayer and/or apostolic service. It can also take place through some type of regular reading material (a newsletter, a bulletin, etc.) which is given to them and discussed with them. An occasional intensive moment of formation is also important, like a workshop or a retreat. Many formation materials are available on our websites.

- c) **Service of the poor.** Initiate young people into simple forms of service of the poor, even at an early age. A number of the branches of our Family have been quite successful in doing this: distributing clothing and food at centers for the homeless, helping younger pupils with schoolwork after school, offering friendship to lonely people by visiting them, assisting those with learning and physical difficulties at rehabilitation centers, reading to the homebound or the sight-impaired. Invite young people to serve the poor with us. This is another way of sharing our charism.

II. Organizational Guidelines

Possible Scripture Readings

- Jeremiah 1:4-10
 - 1 Samuel 16:1, 4-13a
 - 1 Timothy 4:12-16
 - Matthew 5:1-12
1. The heads of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, AIC, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, JMV, MISEVI, the Miraculous Medal Association, and the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul in each city or area should meet as soon as possible in order to begin to plan the prayer celebration. After

receiving this letter, would you please contact one another by phone or other suitable means as soon as possible. To facilitate this matter, we ask the superior of the Congregation of the Mission in each area to initiate these contacts. If there are no members of the Congregation of the Mission in the area, then we ask the superior of the Daughters of Charity to be the initiator. If there is a Vincentian Family Coordinating Council in the country, it will be easier to organize this celebration.

2. Please invite the other branches of the Vincentian Family in your area to join in this celebration (e.g., other groups of laity, sisters, brothers, or priests living in the Vincentian spirit). This year, as we celebrate "The Year of Youth," it is especially important that the young feel at home at our celebrations. Our gathering can be an opportune moment for them to know men and women who share St. Vincent's vision. It is important to give a special place to young people in this celebration.
3. We encourage you too to provide for the participation of the poor, who evangelize us by their presence.
4. The day of prayer could include a common celebration of the Eucharist or some other communal service, according to the circumstances in each area. If a Mass is not possible, one might envision a celebration of the word, with readings, hymns, prayers, sharing of thoughts, etc. In other contexts, one could envision a "Holy Hour," with the usual liturgical actions (processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, readings, etc.).
5. During the celebration, the prayer of the Vincentian Family, distributed two years ago, could be said together. All could be encouraged to use this prayer frequently in their group meetings and, even daily, personally.
6. One could also organize, depending on the circumstances, a moment for ongoing formation and/or for relaxed social contact.
7. The celebration should be organized on or around September 27, in accord with what date would best promote the participation of the various members of our family. It is important that the celebration be truly *communal*, with the active participation of members of the various branches. A wise distribution of roles will guarantee that all associations take part in the organization process.
8. The readings listed above or any of the readings suggested for the Mass of St. Vincent may be used (cf. Lectionary of the Congregation of the Mission), along with, if you judge it helpful, other appropriate selections from St. Vincent's writings. Much will depend on the kind of celebration that is organized in each area. A prayer of the faithful should be prepared with intentions

contributed by members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family.

9. In order to raise consciousness about our annual day of prayer, about “The Year of Youth,” about our campaign against hunger, and about our “political action” campaign against malaria, we suggest the following:
 - a) the use of various media to publicize them: articles in the press, announcements on the radio, television, etc.
 - b) the use of our international, national, and local web pages to publicize them.
10. We hope that, around September 27, our Family in each country might evaluate the projects that have been organized for the Campaign Against Hunger and the Campaign Against Malaria and make new commitments.