

Vincentiana, July-October 2004

# Fly!

– Looking back and looking forward in 2004 –

*Report of the Superior General to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
on the State of the C.M.*

Rome, 6.VII.2004

Let me begin this “State of the Congregation” address with a symbol. Do you know the arctic tern? It is a tiny bird which weighs less than a pound, but is the greatest migratory animal that the world has ever seen. Every year it flies roughly the circumference of the globe. During its lifetime it covers the distance from the earth to the moon and back. It spends the northern hemisphere’s summer days in the Arctic where the sun never sets. Then in early September it begins an 11,000 mile journey to Antarctic where it enjoys the summer of the south. In March it heads north again, flying 11,000 miles once more. A baby tern, whose leg was banded when he was two months old in Labrador at the north of Canada, took off that day, crossed the Atlantic to the shores of northern Europe, and then headed south past the British Isles, France, Spain and Portugal. After crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, it continued on, at 160 kilometers a day, soaring past the edge of all western Africa’s countries and was found, just four months after leaving northern Canada, standing on a beach in South Africa.

As we examine the life of the Congregation of the Mission over the last six years and reflect on what has been done and remains to be done in implementing the Final Document of the Assembly of 1998, I suggest this extraordinary migratory bird to you as a symbol of the mobile missionary vocation of the Congregation. Today, I will divide my presentation into five parts. After each part I will pause and ask you to meditate a few moments and jot down some brief responses to the questions you will find in the leaflet that you have before you. Afterwards, I will distribute to you a longer, more detailed version of the State of the Congregation.

## **I. Flying together as a Vincentian Family**

This was the theme of the 1998 Assembly. The Assembly strongly urged us to work in unison with the other members of the Vincentian Family (III, 1). I am very happy to say that over the last six years in most countries the Congregation of the Mission has collaborated very actively with the other branches of our Family. Our lay branches rejoice in this. Many of these branches have also grown significantly over these years.

In light of a recommendation made in the Final Document of the 1998 Assembly (III, 1b), I created, on November 30, 1998, a new office at the General Curia, that of "Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family." With the consent of the General Council, I named Fr. Benjamín Romo to fill that office. I am very grateful to him for his tireless labors. Benjamín and the presidents of the principal lay branches of our Family will talk more about the various branches later in the Assembly, so I will restrict my remarks today to the three groups of which the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission is also the Director General.

### **1. JMV**

Six months after the last General Assembly, on February 2, 1999, the Holy See approved the first International Statutes of JMV. At that time JMV was formally established in only six countries. But with the help of confreres and the Daughters of Charity it rapidly spread to all the continents. We held the first General Assembly of JMV right here in this hall on August 8-12, 2000, with delegates coming from 44 countries. They elected an International President, Gladys Abi-Said, and four lay members of an International Council. In September 1999, with the help of the Visitors and Visitatrixes of Spain we set up an International Secretariat for JMV in Madrid. It is now staffed by a Vincentian, a Daughter of Charity and lay volunteers from Ecuador, Venezuela, Haiti and the Philippines who have offered three years of their lives to serve there. They keep in contact by e-mail with the National Councils in all the countries and maintain a very active, well-designed website at [www.secretariadojmv.org](http://www.secretariadojmv.org)

Now, we have begun to prepare for the Second General Assembly of JMV which will take place in Paris in August 2005. At present, JMV has more than 70,000 members. National Statutes have been approved in 46 countries.

### **2. MISEVI**

On April 7, 1999, the Holy See approved the International Statutes for MISEVI. This youngest member of our Vincentian Family has as its goal the sending of lay men and women, who

emerge from other branches of our Vincentian Family, to the missions *ad gentes*. MISEVI helps provide for their formation, their apostolic placement, their community setting, their economic sustenance, their human and spiritual support systems, and their eventual reentry into their homeland. Permanent lay missionary communities now exist in Honduras, Bolivia and Mozambique. On January 2-6, 2001, MISEVI held its First General Assembly at Los Molinos near Madrid. It elected a Lay President, Eva Villar, and three other members of an International Coordinating Team. MISEVI's coordinating team maintains personal contact with each of the lay missionaries working in the various countries and has a very creative website at [www.misevi.org](http://www.misevi.org)

In August 2003, MISEVI International also held a meeting in Mexico for all those interested in setting up national MISEVI groups. Seventy-eight participants came from 26 countries. Several countries are now formulating national statutes.

### 3. AMM

The new International Statutes for the Association of the Miraculous Medal were approved on February 19, 1998. Though the statutes do not actually provide for a General Assembly or an international governing structure, I decided to hold the first international meeting of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, which took place on October 22-26, 2001. Sixty-eight Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and lay members of our Family, coming from 28 countries, took part. In the Final Document approved by the members of the meeting, one of the proposals to the Director General was precisely to create an international structure. Soon afterwards, I named an International Coordinating Council for the Association. Its members are Fr. Charles Shelby (International Coordinator), Sr. Marie-Yonide Midy (from Haiti, living in Paris), Fr. Janusz Zwolinski (from Poland, living in the Congo), and Señorita Martha Tapia (from Mexico).

The Association, which in 1998 existed in only six countries, now has approved National Statutes in 13 countries. Six other countries have statutes in the process of approval. The International Coordinating Council has now live contacts with coordinators of the Association in more than 50 countries.

The Association has an active website at [www.amminter.org](http://www.amminter.org) and publishes, online, a monthly catechesis for its members, as well as a quarterly news bulletin.

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The Assembly of 1998 made a strong appeal to the members of the Vincentian Family to respond together to the cries of the poor, by planning “specific projects at local, provincial, interprovincial, and international levels” to respond to the needs of the poor (III, 2b) and also by addressing “the causes of poverty in our different situations” (III, 2c). Let me present to you briefly some significant collaborative activities of our Family over the last six years:

1. On September 27, 2001, the various branches of the Vincentian Family committed themselves to collaborating in a program called “The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger.” The 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 the past year a number of projects have been initiated which aim at combatting the causes of poverty.

2. On September 27, 2003, for the first time in our history, the branches of the Vincentian Family joined in a “Political Action” campaign, called the “Campaign Against Malaria” 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. This campaign has begun slowly, but has huge potential for saving lives. Malaria remains Africa’s leading cause of death for those under five years of age.

3. At our most recent meeting of the heads of the Vincentian Family, on February 20-22, we agreed on a common theme for the coming year, beginning September 27, 2004. The theme is:

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

Prayer  
Formation  
Service of the Poor

We are encouraging all the branches during the coming year to seek new, young members to share in the charism of our Vincentian Family. To assist in presenting this common theme to the Family on September 27, several pages of materials have already been sent to all the Visitors.

4. In order to work at combatting the causes of poverty, as demanded by the 1998 Assembly (III, 2c), we sought and obtained recognition by the United Nations as an NGO, on February 1, 1999. Fr. Joseph Foley, our representative to the United Nations, submits detailed reports to the General Council four times a year, has a very well-designed website ([www.cm-ngo.net](http://www.cm-ngo.net)), teaches regularly at CIF, and has recently been contributing quarterly to *Nuntia*.

5. In the same context, the 1998 Assembly also committed the Congregation of the Mission (III, 2d) to “support the movement for the cancellation or reduction of the international debts of poor countries to mark the Jubilee Year,” citing *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51. On January 1, 2000, I sent a lengthy letter to the members of the Congregation accompanied by a study on the international debt.

6. The General Assembly of 1998 committed us to establishing a worldwide communication network (III, 5b), in cooperation with the wider Vincentian Family, and to use it not only for fostering our own formation and for disseminating information within the Vincentian Family, but also in the service of the poor. I am very grateful to Fr. John Freund, Fr. Julio Suescun, and Fr. Claude Lautissier for the enormous work which they have put into our website, which opened officially right after our last General Assembly and which is very popular among the members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family. Our site has given birth to other independent websites among the various branches of our Family. I have met with our website coordinators on several occasions, asking them to focus on the use of the page, making it a page that is attractive and that changes frequently, even every day, so that members of our Family will want to check it often for information about the Family and about the needs of the poor. Since its inception, the site has received well over two million hits. Recently, the Spanish-speaking site has risen to first place in frequency of use. Congratulations to the three members of our website committee!

Fr. Claude Lautissier and Fr. Julio Suescun have also produced CDs with the writings of St. Vincent in French and in other languages, as well as other valuable source materials for those doing research in Vincentian studies.

7. On September 27, 2002, the heads of the Vincentian Family collaborated in composing and publishing a Vincentian Family Prayer, which is now widely used. We know that one and a half million copies have been printed and that the prayer has been translated into at least 20 languages.

A shadow. It is not always easy to work *with* the various branches of our Vincentian Family. Sometimes the fault is ours. At times I receive complaints that confreres want to dominate rather than collaborate, want to direct rather than accompany, want to decide rather than contribute their opinion. At times the fault lies with other branches of the Family. Much depends on their leadership and on whether they are accustomed to collaborating. Some are wonderful collaborators, others less so.

What does the symbol of the tern have to say to us about our collaboration in the Vincentian Family? Terns take part actively in an extended family. When in the Arctic and Antarctic, they live in colonies with as many as 15,000 couples. Observers attest that they spend much time with their neighbors and especially with their young, patiently forming them. They love their family and protect it fiercely. When an intruder threatens a member, the whole flock assembles to mob it, screeching harsh, high-pitched cries. Terns nest near one another and travel together, often hovering in unison over schools of fish, so that they can eat together even as they continue their mobile life as a family.

## **II. Flying, while nourishing ourselves and our new members with rich formation**

Here I highlight only a few of the most significant developments in regard to formation over the past six years on the global level.

### **1. Formation of Formators**

One of the most concrete, forceful challenges presented to us by the General Assembly of 1998 concerned the formation of formators (III 3B). The Assembly mandated the Superior General and his council to study the possibility of creating in one or more places an international center for the formation of formators. After much discussion in the General Council, we decided to ask the five Visitors' Conferences to establish regional programs for the formation of our formators. I wrote to them in April and June of 1999 requesting that each Conference organize a program where our own formators could come together once a year or once every two years for several weeks of study, for sharing experiences and concerns as formators, and for an experience of community living and prayer together. The response has been quite good. Europe, for various reasons, has the most difficulty in organizing such meetings.

The means of initially forming formators are varied. Most provinces, using the many programs that are available, have well-trained formators. On the shadow side, some provinces are reluctant to free confreres for the time that is necessary to become well formed. I want to encourage all the provinces to do so, especially our younger, growing provinces. The sacrifice that you make in liberating a confrere now so that he becomes a well-formed formator will bear fruit in well-formed students in the future.

## 2. CIF

CIF has now existed for ten years. I am very grateful to Fr. John Rybolt for his creative leadership in designing and guiding the program and now to Frs. Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán for carrying it forward. CIF offers two programs: a longer session for confreres in the 35-50 age bracket and shorter, one-month sessions for confreres who are over 50. During these years 368 confreres have taken part in the longer CIF session and 115 in the shorter one. Their evaluations have been very positive. Fr. O'Donnell and Fr. Catalán will be here on July 19 to make a brief presentation about CIF. Fr. Rybolt, as you know, is already here as a member of the Assembly.

## 3. *Ratio Missionum*

The General Assembly of 1998 also asked the Superior General to establish a commission to develop a *Ratio Missionum* (III 4b). Soon afterwards, with the consent of the members of the General Council, I named a commission to begin preparing the *Ratio*. It met three times between the fall of 1999 and the fall of 2000. It also consulted all the members of the Congregation of the Mission about the contents of a *Ratio*. When the commission finished its work, I asked Fr. John Prager to serve as a final editor and unify the style of the document which was then approved and published in *Vincentiana* in January-February 2002. Many provinces and missions have used this document in ongoing formation programs.

## 4. The Visitors' Meeting and the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*

On June 4-16, 2001, the 52 Visitors of the Congregation met with the Superior General and his council in Dublin. The theme of this meeting was the "Animation of the Local Communities." *The Practical Guide for the Local Superior* was one of the outcomes of this meeting.

At the General Assembly of 1998, a postulate requesting the publication of a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* was narrowly defeated, but, at the meeting of the Visitors, the publication of a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* was considered once again. In light of the Congregation's positive experience in the use of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, the vast majority of the Visitors recommended a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*. After several drafts and much consultation, the final version was approved by the Superior General and his council on May 8, 2003.

The second week of the Visitors' Meeting focused on interprovincial collaboration and also provided two days for the meetings of the five Visitors' Conferences.

#### 5. Meetings of New Visitors and the Revision of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*

We have now had four meetings of new Visitors, using the *Practical Guide for the Visitor* as the basic outline for these meetings. Many Visitors have attested that the sessions have been very helpful and that the *Practical Guide* is a handy instrument for guiding them through the sometimes complicated matters that cross their desk. Recently, we decided that it needed updating and, after consulting many of you, have now completed a revision which is much more extensive than we had envisioned. The book is presently in the hands of the printer and will soon be published in three languages.

#### 6. SIEV

SIEV, or the International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies, continues to assist in many ways in the ongoing formation of the confreres. It provided invaluable help in organizing the meeting concerning Islam (1999), the Vincentian Month for the Director of the Daughters of Charity (2001), the Month for the *Asesores* of the Vincentian Family (2002), and the meeting of younger confreres interested in Vincentian studies (April 2004). It has also undertaken many other projects; for example, promoting studies in regard to John Gabriel Perboyre which appeared in the November-December issue of *Vincentiana* in 2002, and the making available of the 1995-2003 issues of *Vincentiana* on a CD-ROM. Other projects are in progress, such as asking a group of confreres and other persons who are "experts" in Vincentian spirituality to write a series of articles on themes connected with the social doctrine of the Church and on the concrete initiatives carried out in this regard in our Vincentian Family; and asking the collaboration of some confreres from different countries or parts of the world to compile the Vincentian bibliography of the works published in their language every year.

#### 7. Vincentian Month for the Directors of the Daughters of Charity

On July 2-27, 2001, in Paris, almost all of the 74 Directors of the Daughters of Charity participated in a Vincentian Month. During each week a basic theme was treated: the Company of the Daughters of Charity, the function of the Provincial Director, the service of the Director in the area of formation and, finally, the preparation for the next General Assembly of the Company. I joined the confreres for a retreat day at the Berceau. The month concluded with a dialogue session with the Mother General and her council, suggestions for the revision of the *Directory for the Directors* and the evaluation of the month. *Vincentiana* has published the conferences that were given during this gathering.

#### 8. Vincentian Month for the *Asesores* of the Vincentian Family

On July 7-27, 2002, about 120 advisors of the lay groups of the Vincentian Family met at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. During the second week of this meeting the international heads of several of the branches of the Vincentian Family presented conferences describing their work and responded to questions and concerns. The meeting was evaluated very positively for its friendly, reflective and open atmosphere. *Vincentiana* has published the conferences that were given during this gathering. A much-used document entitled, *The Role and Function of Advisors in the JMV*, has also been printed in ten languages.

#### 9. International Meeting Concerning Islam

On July 26 - August 6, 1999, we sponsored a meeting in Lebanon whose theme was "Our Apostolate in the Muslim World." One hundred and four confreres, Daughters of Charity and lay persons from 25 countries took part. The evaluations were enthusiastic. The various conferences given at the meeting have been published in *Vincentiana*.

#### 10. SIEV Meeting for Young Confrere-Scholars

Recently, 13 young confreres from an equal number of provinces assisted at the *First International Meeting of Young Confreres Interested in Vincentian Studies*, held on April 26-30 right here in this house. The objective of this meeting was to share about the experiences of each province in the area of Vincentian studies. Each of the 13 participants and the five members of SIEV who assisted presented his own experience in Vincentian studies and that of his province. It was noted that, on different levels, much work in Vincentian studies is being done.

#### 11. Meeting of the Provincial Treasurers

On November 4-9, 2002, the Provincial Treasurers of the Congregation met in Rome. Among the topics treated were: the spirituality of the treasurer, investments, accounting, bookkeeping, health care issues, patrimony, finance committees, the relationship of the Provincial Treasurer and the Visitor, the relationship of the Provincial Treasurer and the local treasurers, the Vincentian Solidarity Office, and the articles of our Constitutions and Statutes that pertain to the administration of temporal goods. Since then, many Provincial Treasurers have invited the Treasurer General to visit their province to offer ongoing formation to local treasurers and to make recommendations about the economic set-up of the province.

## 12. Language study

The Assembly of 1998 committed the Congregation to “promote, especially for our students, the learning of other languages” (III, 3A 4). On March 30, 1999, with the unanimous consent of the General Council, I issued a general ordinance mandating that all our students, during the time of formation, will study a second language (English, French, or Spanish) with the goal of being able to understand and speak it.

## 13. *Directory for the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity*

With the Holy See’s approval of the new Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity on March 25, I appointed a mixed committee of Vincentians and Daughters of Charity for the revision of the *Directory for the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity*. This committee held its first meeting on May 23-25, 2004. When eventually, after several drafts and after broad consultation, a new *Directory for the Provincial Directors* is approved by the new Superior General, we envision annual formation sessions for the 10-15 new Directors who are appointed every year.

## 14. Study on Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation

In the March-April 1999 (XLIII, N° 2, pp. 111-125) issue of *Vincentiana* the General Council published a study entitled “On Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation of the Mission,” a work which, I am convinced, holds many possibilities for the future. On the shadow side, it has rarely been used.

## 15. Vincentian Scholarship Programs

The Eastern Province of the United States, since the year 2000, has been offering a “Vincentian Scholarship Program” in conjunction with St. John’s University and Niagara University. This program offers the possibility of academic specialization to confreres, especially to those from developing countries.

The Midwest Province of the United States and De Paul University in Chicago have also instituted an International Vincentian Scholarship Program in which confreres from developing countries study for graduate degrees at De Paul University and live at Kenmore Vincentian Residence.

Many confreres from provinces throughout the world have taken advantage not only of these scholarship programs which are geared toward graduate degrees, but also of language programs offered at these same universities during summers.

Let me add here that St. Vincent School of Theology, in cooperation with Adamson University in the Philippines, has just begun to offer a Master of Arts in Theology with a Major in Vincentian Studies.

#### 16. Book of Prayer

At Easter 2003, with the help of many confreres, particularly Fr. Aidan Rooney, I sent to all the Visitors a sample book of prayer asking you to appoint a commission which would adapt it to your own particular culture and requesting that you send me a copy of your province's adapted book by January 1, 2004. The responses were slow in arriving, so I had to send out a brief reminder earlier this year. Since that time, many have arrived. They are available for your perusal outside this hall today.

What does the arctic tern have to say to us about formation?

For us who make vows of chastity and stability, it may be encouraging to know that the tern is monogamous during the 34 years of its average life. It makes a permanent commitment only after an elaborate ritual called the fish dance, in which the male hovers, helicopter-like, over his future wife's head, teasingly offering her a fish, which eventually she accepts. They are then committed to each other forever. Amazingly, even though they sometimes make their journey back north from the Antarctic separately, they always reunite in precisely the same place near the North Pole, where they annually breed their young, laying two or three eggs. Their young are born 24 days later, receive abundant nourishment and an intensive apprenticeship for about two months, and then take off intrepidly for the journey south. Terns feed their young, as well as themselves, in flight, diving into the water, snaring tiny fish and popping them into the mouths of their chicks, while their relentless migration continues. They teach their young the migratory route and the young learn it so well that they can make the trip back north unaccompanied and arrive precisely at their birthplace, always feeling at home where their roots lie.

### III. Flying even to the ends of the earth, mobile in mission

The General Assembly of 1998 urged us to continue to promote already established missions *ad gentes* and to continue to found new ones (III, 4a). Here are just a few highlights regarding our missions over the last six years:

*International Missions*

1. On January 1, 2001, the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius was created, with Fr. Paul Roche as its first Vice-Visitor. This new vice-province brought together the confreres serving in our missions in Belarus, Ukraine and Siberia. I had the privilege of joining them for their first meeting on September 16-20, 2002. Twenty-one priests, two deacons, one brother and seven students participated, as well as the Visitors of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. It was a wonderful gathering, with much hope for the future. On that occasion, I also dedicated a new provincial house. Since that time a residence for our seminarians has been built.
2. Our new mission in Papua New Guinea was surely, as St. Vincent liked to say, "something I never thought of." In response to the appeal of the bishops of Papua New Guinea, a lone volunteer went there in 2001. Another followed in 2002 and another in 2003. So, we now have a fully constituted community in Bomana at the interdiocesan seminary. In the meantime, the enrollment at the seminary that we staff nearby in the Solomon Islands has doubled. The bishops of the Solomons, in fact, would like to make it not only a philosophate, but also a theologate. Up to the present, I have hesitated to commit the Congregation of the Mission to the expansion in personnel that this would require.
3. On July 20, 2001, the Province of Southern India generously offered to take over responsibility for the international mission in Tanzania. There are now seven confreres there with six students in formation for the Congregation of the Mission.
4. On February 13-16, 2003, I traveled to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania with Fr. Paul Roche. There we met with Cardinal Bačkis for a discussion about our house and church, which were confiscated by the Communist government 50 years ago. The church is now back in the hands of the archdiocese. Our large house there, formerly a seminary, is at present a hospital housing 200 patients. Shortly after my return to Rome, the Cardinal wrote, inviting us back to our church in Vilnius. The Jesuits in Lithuania are helping us work out the practicalities of reestablishing the Congregation there.
5. At our international mission in El Alto, Bolivia, we opened a house of formation in February 1999 and there are now five candidates for the Congregation. On the shadow side, we still need more personnel for this mission, which is a very difficult one because of the high altitude and because of a number of cultural factors.
6. On May 2, 2003, with the unanimous consent of the members of the General Council, I accepted the invitation of the Holy See to take over responsibility for the Pontifical Ethiopian College, which lies inside Vatican City. The Rector, Abba Berhanemeskel Keflemariam, and the Vice-Rector, Abba Hagos Hayish, are here today as the

delegates of their provinces to this Assembly. I am very grateful to them and to their provinces for their generous contribution to the service of the clergy of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

7. On November 7, 2003, Fr. Humberto Sinka went to Angola to accompany the Daughters of Charity there. On the shadow side, though I would love to have other missionaries join him, so far volunteers for Angola have been sparse. We already have several candidates for the Congregation coming from the mission there. The Vice-Province of Mozambique has generously offered to help in their formation.

#### *New Missions Sponsored by Provinces*

1. On December 7, 1998, Fr. Juan Ávila set out with four Daughters of Charity for Rwanda and Burundi, where the Province of Colombia has generously decided to establish a new mission. Today ten confreres are assigned to the mission there. In addition to their work among the poor, the confreres help in the formation of the diocesan clergy. One serves as Director of the Daughters of Charity for the Province of Central Africa. Recently we opened a house of formation and have 16 candidates for the Congregation of the Mission.

2. The Vice-Province of Nigeria has courageously offered to establish a new mission in Liberia. This mission will begin in September 2005. Two or three confreres will be going there. They will not only work in the service of the poor, but will also assist in the formation of the diocesan clergy.

3. Though it did not create a new mission in this period, the Midwest Province of the United States very significantly changed the nature of its mission in Kenya with the inauguration of a new Vincentian seminary there on January 25, 2000. The seminary now houses 28 Vincentian students, several of whom will soon be ordained to the priesthood. A novitiate is at present being built on the adjacent property. The Daughters of Charity have joined the confreres in Kenya, working at two very poor sites and have recently opened their own house of formation there. The confreres have just taken over a poor, missionary parish which will be staffed by newly ordained Kenyan Vincentians.

#### *Models for Mission*

I would like to thank our Postulator General, Fr. Roberto D'Amico, for his very active service since the last General Assembly in holding up before us models for mission. In October 2000, we celebrated the canonization of Francis Regis Clet; in October 2002, the beatification of Marcantonio Durando; and in November 2003, the beatification of Rosalie Rendu.

What does the tern have to say to us about mission? The symbolism is evident. The tern is the greatest migrant the world has ever seen. It travels eight months a year, nourishing itself and its family on the way, modeling for its young how to fish and fly, and stopping twice a year, in the north and the south, to renew its strength, to form its newly born, to relax and enjoy itself in community, and then setting out once again. Interestingly, all close observers note that just before setting out, even the noisiest colony of terns becomes awesomely silent (this phenomenon is called the "dread"), almost as if in prayer, and then streaks off into the air. The tern is strikingly mobile. Remarkably, it is fertile for almost its whole life. And it is a patient, persevering formator of the young.

#### **IV. Sharing our resources in order to fly well**

The 1998 Assembly called for an increased sharing of resources within the worldwide Congregation of the Mission (III, 3B, 2b). Today, most of all, I want to thank the Visitors and many individual confreres for their enormous generosity in making their economic resources available to the poorer provinces and missions of the Congregation. Let me mention very briefly some of the ways in which this is happening.

##### **1. Province to Province**

This type of sharing has always taken place within the Congregation, but today it takes place on a very large scale. Since the finances of the Congregation are not centralized, I cannot tell you the exact amount of aid that flows from province to province. But since the Treasurer General sees the financial reports of the provinces and often assists in the transfer of money from one place to another, we get the general picture and know that the amount of such aid is very large. So, my deepest thanks to those of you who give so generously.

##### **2. IMF: 2000, IMF: 2004 and other funds**

In 1996, with the aid of a very generous benefactor and with the long-range commitment of several of our provinces, we began to create the International Mission Fund: 2000. The fund matured in the year 2000. At that time all the original donors agreed to continue contributing to a new fund called IMF: 2004, which will mature at the end of this year. These and other already existing funds generate revenues for an annual distribution to our poorer provinces and missions, which takes place around June of each year. More than 36 provinces and missions have received help from the June distribution, having previously submitted requests for assistance and

describing the projects in which the monies requested will be used. For the past five years, an average of 1.4 million dollars has been distributed each year.

### 3. Patrimonial Funds

As you know, St. Vincent was always concerned about establishing his houses and works on a firm economic foundation, so that their future would be viable. With this same principle in mind, several years ago I began to appeal to some of our better-off provinces for help in setting up patrimonial funds for some of our poorest provinces. Over the last five years, the provinces, and also a very generous benefactor, have contributed a huge amount of money to these patrimonial funds, which are gradually building up and will continue to build up for several years to come. Written agreements have been worked out stipulating how the revenues flowing from these funds can be used in the future and providing for the gradual transfer of the responsibility for such funds to the receiving province. Patrimonial funds have now been set up for 12 poorer provinces.

### 4. Vincentian Solidarity Office

After receiving a positive reaction to this idea at the meeting of all the Visitors in Dublin, I decided, on June 15, 2002, with the unanimous consent of the members of the General Council, to establish the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) and appointed Brother Peter A. Campbell, C.M., to be its first administrator. The goal of the VSO is:

To assist the poorer provinces, vice-provinces and missions of the Congregation of the Mission with writing successful grant proposals to funding organizations for their works and needs.

The VSO is an optional service that these provinces, vice-provinces and missions can use. They remain quite free to continue to send proposals directly to funding organizations or to donors.

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You may be asking yourself: could the arctic tern really have something to say to us about money? I suggest to you that it has much to say about sharing resources. Arctic terns, unlike many other terns, have webbed feet and a very sharp, needle-like beak. This enables them to be great fishermen. They also have wonderful eyesight. They hover in the air observantly and then plunge into the water to spear their prey. But they share their food willingly, feeding their children with shrimp, insects and small fish. When on land,

husband and wife share the labor. They build the nest together. They take turns caring for the eggs and feeding the hatchlings. Basically, terns live together, work together, and share their goods.

## **V. Flying toward the future**

Looking to the future, what are the principal challenges that I see lying before the Congregation of the Mission. Let me mention four very briefly. I encourage you to formulate others during this Assembly.

1. In regard to our service within the Vincentian Family, I repeat today a strong conviction that has developed within me over the last six years. *The* challenge in our Family is formation. Formation, formation, formation — our Family has an army of members — millions! Hundreds of thousands of them are young, enthusiastic, idealistic. *The* challenge for us as members of the Congregation of the Mission is to help them receive a deep, integral, Christian, Vincentian formation so that they will fly out into the world and fly out toward the poor, filled with St. Vincent's spirit.

2. In regard to formation within the Congregation of the Mission itself, I urge you to offer our own young members, who are many, a formation program that is demanding, because our lifestyle is demanding, and at the same time exciting, because our charism is strikingly relevant. Teach them a way of loving that is on the one hand disciplined, and on the other hand liberating. And offer similar ongoing formation programs to those of us who are older.

3. In regard to the Congregation's mission within the Church, I urge the worldwide Congregation to be increasingly mobile. I urge you who are its leaders to hold up before the members of your provinces the image of the many great missionaries who have gone before us even to the ends of the earth, as well as the example of the many who continue to do so today in the more than 80 countries where we serve. Teach the young to be available, to go, to go anywhere *within* the province, and to go *beyond* the boundaries of the province, "even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

4. In regard to the sharing of our resources, the Congregation has made enormous steps in this regard. I congratulate the Visitors and so many individual confreres for your generosity. But we can still go further. I encourage the better-off provinces to live more simply. I encourage the poorer provinces too to continue to maintain a very simply lifestyle. I ask the better-off provinces to examine their own resources each year in light of the enormous needs of the third world. When one sits in Rome, one often sees that monies used to meet a need that seems great in one country could be used to meet a need that is much greater in another country.

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Many have asked the question, why does the arctic tern move continually from place to place, like a migrant missionary, so to speak? The answer which scientists have formulated is this: the tern loves the light. It sees more daylight than any other living creature. It flees the darkness constantly, racing toward the light and eventually basking in it. The light is solace for the tern as it summers in the north and the south. The sun is the tern's guide as it journeys across the ocean and the stars are its guide as it streaks through the rare experience of night in equatorial regions. Light generates for the tern the energy it needs and draws the tern on as it flies year after year from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back again.

So it is for missionaries. Like the tern, spirit-filled missionaries are mobile, willing to go even to the ends of the earth. Missionaries set out together, working in teams as a family, nourishing each other, helping one another in their ongoing growth and formation, sharing food and conversation at a common table, sharing economic resources, openly sharing their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and disappointments, their plans, their dreams. And it is the light that draws the missionary. It is the desire to live in the light, to follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor, that impels us to go on and on, to reach out more and more, and ultimately it is the light of Christ that frees us. St. Vincent loved the image of the bird that breaks free from its bonds and flies, so he cried out to the members of the Congregation of the Mission on August 22, 1659:

*Those who become detached from the desire for worldly goods, from the longing for pleasure, and from their own will become children of God. They enjoy perfect freedom. For it is only in the love of God that real freedom is found. They are people who are free, who know no law, who fly, who go left and right, who fly still more. No one can hold them back. They are never slaves of the devil nor of their own passions. O, how happy is the freedom of the children of God! (SV XII, 301).*

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