

Services of the Procurator General to Confreres and the Provinces

by Rolando DelaGoza, C.M.

Procurator General

7.VII.2004

Introduction

When your Procurator General came to Rome more than six years ago, he had to take over the jobs of Procurator General and of Archivist from two confreres, Fr. Modesto López of Spain and Fr. Thomas Davitt of Ireland, respectively. The first year was lonely, hard, and challenging because he had to adjust to a new environment, learn three languages at the age of 58, and decode the mysteries of computers and information technology. Thanks to God's grace and the very supportive and helpful Superior General and the other members of the Curia, he survived those difficult years and was able to serve the provinces, confreres and the Vincentian Family in dozens of small ways.

How does a Procurator General serve the provinces?

1. When the provinces write the Superior General for an invitation for obtaining a visa to come to Rome, the Procurator General is called to serve. Once the Superior General has written the letter, it is given to the Procurator General who takes the bus to the Vatican, waits in line with a dozen other Procurators General and sisters for a stamp of a seal from the Congregation for Religious, jogs to the Secretariat of State for another falling in line and stamping. Then he returns home, after doing other business, gives the letter to the secretariat which sends the letter to the province by fax or mail. Some of you may have experienced this when you got your visa to come to the General Assembly. During the past six months, 72 invitations, more or less, for the purpose of getting a visa were approved by the Vatican for our provinces.
2. If a province asks for a dispensation for a confrere, the Procurator General has to process the documents and submit them to the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. After you have collected all the documents in

the provinces and sent them to the Superior General, the Procurator General takes possession of the documents materially and intellectually. He checks the completeness of the documents, the veracity of the materials, checks the outward presentation, summarizes the hundred pages of documents into two pages and writes his recommendation and decides whether to submit or not the case to the Vatican. During the process he sometimes sheds tears of sorrow upon reading about confreres who have gone astray, some of them he knew personally, others by name. He reflects on the challenges facing you, the formators and the Visitors during the years of formation and community life. If there are missing documents or the proofs are not good enough, more supplementary documents will be asked of the provinces. After receiving the supplementary documents, he studies them and, if they are in order, submits them to the Vatican. During the past six years, 24 dispensations were granted to confreres from different provinces.

3. Whenever the General Curia needs a passport, a tessera (a kind of identification card), letters to be sent through the diplomatic mail, special stamps for documents, the Procurator General is asked to go to the Secretariat of State of the Vatican. Some of you may have been in the government offices of your own country but you can be assured that the office of the Secretary of State of the Vatican is something special. It is located a stone's throw from the Papal Apartments and enjoys the same facilities as the latter. The Procurator General goes past a half-dozen Swiss Guards, enters a wood-paneled elevator and then is led into a huge carpeted room and is told to wait. After a few minutes he is taken into another, still larger room with beautiful paintings, frescoed ceilings, huge tables and upholstered chairs. Being from a third-world country located in the Pacific Ocean, he looks admiringly, with sense of wonder, feasting on the exquisitely painted flowers, angels, birds and so on, when a red-sashed monsignor comes and talks a little and requests a written communication. One has to be ready to give a communication in Italian, just in case, but French, English and Spanish are acceptable. After a few minutes of questions and answers, one is given the impression that time is up and that one has to come back after one week in order to find out the answer. After one week, the Procurator passes by a half-dozen Swiss Guards who smartly give the salute, walks through the long and beautiful corridors, meets another monsignor and is given the answer to one's petition which is generally an affirmative answer. Once in a while, it is satisfying to meet some monsignor who may recognize St. Vincent de Paul and would comment on how great a saint he is.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to note that, no matter what some people think of the Vatican bureaucracy, the Secretariat of State is a modern and relatively efficient office. In addition to the beautiful surroundings and smart people, there are lots of computers and service-oriented personnel who work in that office. During the past six years, we have requested several dozen documents from the Secretariat of State.

4. When a province wants to sell or buy a property, it asks the approval of the Superior General, who, if there is need for Vatican approval, asks the Procurator General to submit the documents to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (or the Congregation for Religious, for short). After examining the documents and checking if everything is in order, the Procurator General, writes a letter to the Cardinal Prefect, goes to the Office of Religious, fills out a form and submits the documents. He is told to come back a week later to receive the answer. As there is always a long line of priests, brothers and sisters waiting, one learns to go very early in the morning to be the first in line. Inside the waiting room, one can talk with other Procurator Generals, read a book or just pass the time waiting. The enjoyable part is when one finishes one's request and is able to send the permit to sell/buy a property on time to be used by the provinces for their projects. In the past six years, 29 permits to sell/buy properties or treasures (worth millions of euros) were granted, some requested by the Daughters of Charity.
5. The procuring of tickets for papal audiences is the most popular and most appreciated form of service to confreres and provinces. Fellow Vincentians, sisters, relatives and friends are all welcome to make the request as long as it is done on time; i.e., a few weeks before the actual audience. It is a relatively easy and enjoyable process because the Procurator General simply writes a letter to the Prefect of the Pontificalis Domus and talks with an Irish Brother in charge of processing the tickets. Many first timers in Rome, confreres as well as friends and relatives, express their gratitude for having attended the audience with the Holy Father which is always an impressive occasion, not to say an inspiring moment in one's life. During the past six years, the Procurator General has obtained hundreds of tickets for papal audiences.
6. A very practical financial service is the obtaining of the diminution or complete extinction of the Holy Masses to be celebrated in some provinces. Some of our provinces have contracts or legacies of dozens of Masses that go back over a hundred or so years which have become onerous. Inflation and

the changing times have eaten up or destroyed the sources of the Masses and therefore there is a need of adjustment, either by asking the Congregation for the Clergy to completely extinguish or diminish the number of Masses to be celebrated. The Procurator General is requested by the Superior General to process the papers once the case is deemed reasonable. Although this applies more to the older provinces, it is good to keep in mind that we have to keep the obligations undertaken by our older confreres. In six years, we have successfully negotiated for five extinctions of contracts of Masses.

7. As we know, St. Vincent had a great devotion to the Holy Father and the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity kept this good tradition. Every year we receive several dozen orders for papal blessings from around the world, not only for our confreres or sisters but also for their relatives and friends. The papal blessing is a parchment with the picture of the Holy Father, the text of the blessing for a wedding, special occasion, 50th anniversary or ordination, etc., signed by a bishop in charge. Depending on how much one wants to spend, one can get a large or small, beautiful parchment. The parchment is a thing of beauty decorated by nice calligraphy, bordered by several drawings of the main basilicas, colored by decorative drawings, and engraved with the wording of the blessing granted to the person celebrating the occasion. Although the wording can be in any major language, Spanish and English are predominant. It is enjoyable to take a peek at the artist skillfully practicing the ancient calligraphy in the days of computers and computer design. Over six years, we have processed over a hundred of these papal blessings which give so much joy to our confreres, sisters, Vincentian Family members and friends.
8. When one of you or another confrere is considered for the episcopal dignity, the Procurator General is one of those consulted. I think some of you have seen these confidential "sub secreto" documents and it is better not to speak about them. Suffice it to say that this is one of the few contacts we have with the Congregation for Bishops, the Congregation that processes the nomination of bishops throughout the world. At present we have 29 Bishops, including a Cardinal, spread around the world.
9. On some rare occasions, the Visitor and his council may want to honor a person with a special "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" citation. It is one of the services of the Procurator General to process the papers and submit them to the Vatican. It is good to note that there is a need for the Congregation to be more aggressive in recommending some awards and honors to deserving friends of the Community.

10. As there are hundreds of Vincentians and many more Daughters of Charity working in schools, it is but natural that the Procurator General has to deal with the Congregation for Education. It is not very hard to reach because it is two floors above the Congregation for Religious which is the place of most of our businesses. Some confreres obtain their degrees in Rome but have to go home before they can process all their papers. The Procurator General can be requested to process the papers which means obtaining many seals and stamps on the documents showing that a particular confrere has indeed finished his studies at the Gregorian University or the Aquinas University. In the past six years, he processed three documents from the Congregation for Education.
11. At times, provinces or confreres need or want to purchase books or special magazines from the Vatican Bookstore. If they do not have a student studying in Rome, they may request that someone at the Curia look for those books and magazines in Rome. For one reason or another, the request will fall on the Procurator General, who knows the whereabouts of most of the libraries and Vatican publications. The publication offices of the Vatican are within the guarded area, so it takes time for an ordinary priest to ask permission to just enter the gates, while the Procurator General just waves his "Carta d'Identita" and the Swiss Guards give him a salute and an invitation to please enter the gates. A typical publication office has a nice waiting room, full of many Vatican publications like the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, *Seminarium*, etc. One has to ring a bell, and after a few minutes a sister or a layperson comes out of the many small rooms around the area and asks what one wants. If it is a subscription to a magazine, she takes out a large subscription pad and writes all the information required. It is good to send the old subscription receipt and the address attached to your copy of the magazine in order to ensure speed and accuracy of processing. At other times, some confreres or their relatives and friends would like photographs of their presence at an audience or canonization; the Procurator General can just order these on his way to the Vatican Pharmacy. During the past few years, several dozen subscriptions and copies of photos were requested by confreres or provinces.
12. It was during the past six years that the Visitors were invited to undergo a training program in Rome which most of you attended. Although the office of the Procurator General is the smallest he is given 15 minutes to make known what the Procurator General does in cooperation with the other larger offices in the General Curia. It is during this time that he has an occasion to talk, inform and sometimes guide the Visitors

through the intricacies of the Vatican bureaucracy. He meets with the Priests at the Ethiopian College and at the Filipino College in Rome and enjoys the chance of recalling his days as Spiritual Director, professor of a Major Seminary and Visitor. Recently he was invited to give a conference on the priesthood as a preparation for Easter Celebrations. Being from the third world himself, he is eager and active in helping out in reviewing the theses of the confreres at the Leonine College and attending the dissertation defenses at the Gregorian, Aquinas, Salesian Universities, etc.

13. As the General Curia is the communications center of the Congregation of the Mission, the Procurator General is also involved in various communications jobs: he is the Congregation's representative at MultiMedia International (a mass media organization), a member of the *Vincentiana* board of editors, a translator and writer for both the *Vincentiana* and *Nuntia* publications. Moreover, he navigates the wide world of the Internet several times a day for news and information that could prove useful for the Curia and the provinces. We all need "just-on-time" communications not only for our own information but also for the information and inspiration of the confreres in the provinces.
14. The joys of the Procurator General in the service of the Visitors and the confreres are too many to enumerate one by one but let me mention a few. Maybe when you heard that he has to ride the bus and fall in line thrice a week, you may be a little sorry but he actually enjoys riding the bus because he can feel the pulse of the city and maybe of the world. Inside the Roman bus are men, women and children of all races: white, dark, yellow and brown, peaceful and in harmony with one another. He can see many of them talking in foreign tongues describing their many problems — problems of loneliness because of separation from their loved ones, problems of their daily living, food for their children, rent to pay, cruel employers, adjustments in a foreign country, etc. They are the modern poor — not much more different from the captives whom St. Vincent helped in North Africa. They are not captives of pirates but of their financial needs. As the Procurator General is from a developing country he feels a closeness and sympathy that go beyond the confines of a bus ride. It is also a joy to be of service to the Visitors all around the world. When the Procurator General receives a communication from one of you, the Visitors and confreres of the far-flung provinces, he enjoys reviewing the little things he knows about the culture, beauty and geography of your country. A letter may come from a country with the tallest pyramid, from a country with the deepest ocean, from a country with the best wine, from a

country with 15,000 islands, from a country with a thousand years of civilization. He has received so many “thank you” from so many of you even though he is only doing his little job to help you, the servants of the poor.

Conclusion

As you can see the Procurator General is a service link between the Universal Church and the Congregation of the Mission. Thanks to the kind and enthusiastic support of Fr. Maloney and his council, during the past six years, 1,000 + letters were written, including 74 to the Cardinals of the various Congregations of the Holy See, 24 dispensations of confreres from various provinces were obtained, 72 recommendations for visas were procured, 100 + papal blessings were obtained, so many rescripts were facilitated for the benefit of the provinces and the confreres. As we move on into the 21st century, with the threat of globalization and the wars of civilizations, this little office is trying its best to help in the renewal, revitalization, and reinvigoration of the Congregation by facilitating the little things that make a difference in our formation, community life, and service to the poor. Together, we may recall the words of St. Vincent that perseverance, consistency and constancy are important; he said “The grace of perseverance is the most important of all: it crowns all graces.” On another occasion, he noted that a job or an enterprise should be brought to good conclusion either through oneself or through others: “When one realizes that an enterprise could procure the glory of God and that it is in conformity with his will, one should save neither pains nor expenses to bring it to completion either through oneself or through others” (*Maximes Spirituelles de Saint Vincent de Paul*, 4 décembre). Thank you very much and may God bless us all.