

**Circular**

Rome, 15 March 2005  
Feast of St. Louise de Marillac

*To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

From 21-24 February, the General Council met in an extraordinary session to reflect on different aspects of the General Assembly which was held in July 2004. At that meeting we talked about the *Final Document*, the Ordinances, the Decrees, the Postulates, and the thorough evaluation of the General Assembly.

We began the meeting in the context of prayer with the *lectio divina* of Luke 5:1-11, in which is contained the phrase that the Pope himself directed to us in his letter to our General Assembly: *Duc in altum*.

The main purpose of this extraordinary meeting was to study the different aspects of the General Assembly in order to listen to the voice of the Congregation that was expressed in and through its delegates and, as a council, to try to be obedient to what we heard. We considered this extraordinary meeting as a way of helping us to set the direction that we want to take as a council in these next six years, being faithful to the promptings of the Spirit that came forward in the different aspects of the General Assembly.

**I. Ordinances**

**1. The Ordinance of 1999 with regard to languages**, in which we ask all our students, during their time of formation, to study a second language, either English, French or Spanish, with the goal of being able to understand and speak it. The purpose of this ordinance is twofold. The ability to speak other languages is a wonderful missionary asset. It helps to enhance our capability to be pastorally effective. At the same time, it is a great help in terms of our own gatherings as a Congregation.

A second aspect that we discussed with regard to languages was with regard to promoting the right to intervene and be heard in our General Assembly for the non-official-language speakers. Our official languages at the General Assembly will continue to be English, Spanish and French with simultaneous and written translation in these languages. Nonetheless, we decided to

formalize the relay-translation system. **Decision: At our next General Assembly, we will add Italian as one of the spoken languages of the Assembly and have available at all times a confrere who would translate from Italian to one of the official languages.** For those confreres who wish to speak and are unable to do so in English, Spanish, French, or Italian, we will also use the relay-translation system, determining beforehand who are the confreres who need this assistance and in what languages.

2. **The Ordinance of 2001 with regard to the Finance Committee to be established in each province of the Congregation.** This is an ordinance which can help us be faithful to our vow of poverty, to use the patrimony of the poor in the best possible way in our evangelization and service of the poor.

#### **Decisions of the Superior General and council:**

- I will be asking each of the provinces for a report on the standing of the Finance Committee in its particular province.
- The Treasurer General also will be encouraging the ongoing development of these Finance Committees in different regional gatherings.
- The Assistants, when they make canonical visits of the provinces, will also animate each of the provinces to further develop the sense of this ordinance.
- It is a topic that will be touched on during the New Visitors' Meetings,
- as well as the meeting of all the Visitors, along with other business having to do with finances.

## **II. The Final Document**

We need to see the Constitutions as a force to push us into the future. Among other topics, we spoke about what we consider to be our values as a Congregation to help us to live our identity. These would be our four vows and the five characteristic virtues. We also spoke about the makeup of the Congregation itself being a challenge, both multiculturally and internationally.

Aside from the document itself, one of the richer parts of our dialogue is the role that the Conferences of Visitors/Provinces are beginning to take on, as was evident in our General Assembly.

### III. The five Decrees of the Congregation of the Mission \*

This is Decree Five, approved by the General Assembly of 2004: The Superior General with his council will devise, in consultation with the Visitors, a method of consultation in preparation for the election of the Superior General at the next General Assembly. The purpose of this method will be to provide to the members of the next General Assembly a list of those suggested for the office of Superior General, as well as information about these persons and their availability. The members of the General Assembly will always remain free to vote for other confreres.

Most of our energy was spent on this Decree. We talked about a number of ways of obtaining information about the different candidates for Superior General. We worked out a timeline for consulting the Visitors in terms of a new process.

### IV. The Postulates

#### 1. Postulates which were approved by the General Assembly and require action by the Superior General and his council.

**Postulate 32** — content: election process for Superior General. **Decision: The content of this postulate is summarized in Decree Number Five.**

**Postulate 33** — content: a commission to modify the Statutes of the CM. **Decision: the commission will be named in a *tempo forte*** in the near future.

#### 2. Postulates which were submitted to the attention of the Superior General and his council.

**Postulate 5** — content: pronouncements of the Congregation of the Mission with regard to worldwide situations. **Decision: in general we are in agreement to state our position with prudence from the perspective of the poor.** Out of the discussion came a need for an analysis of the reality, either at our various *tempo forte* council meetings or even as part of the process of the next General Assembly.

**Postulate 9** — content: status of laymen who live in our community houses (oblates). **Decision: will be studied by the commission on Statutes.**

**Postulates 21 and 24** — content: our principal Vincentian sites. **Decision: 1) to write to the Provinces of Rome and Poland in**

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\* The complete texts can be found in *Vincentiana* (July-October 2004), pages 350-351.

order to obtain clarification; 2) to write to the Visitors of the Provinces of France to obtain more information about the situation of the principal Vincentian sites there.

**Postulate 28** — content: the establishment of an office in the Curia for Africa. Our concern is how to enhance the sense of participation on the part of the confreres from COVIAM in the general government of the Congregation. **Decision: During the meeting of COVIAM in April, Fr. José Antonio Ubillús and the Superior General will ask that this issue be discussed.**

3. **Postulates that the Assembly submitted to the Superior General and his council with regard to the next General Assembly.**

**Postulates 7, 10, 16, and 17** — content: the vow of stability. **Decision: will be presented to the commission that will be studying the Statutes in preparation for the General Assembly of 2010.**

4. **Postulates which were not approved by the General Assembly, but most likely will be taken into account in the context of Postulate 33.**

**Postulates 2, 4 and 37** — content: relationship of the Congregation of the Mission with the Vincentian Family. **Decision: the commission on the Statutes will focus on Statute 7 in order to enhance our sense of collaboration with the Vincentian Family.**

5. **Postulates that the General Assembly submitted to the consideration of the Conferences of Visitors.**

**Postulates 1, 14, 18, 19, 20, and 30** — content: various. **Decision: address a letter to the Presidents of the Conferences asking that they take these postulates into consideration as was recommended by the General Assembly.**

6. **Postulates that the General Assembly decided not to take into consideration.**

**Postulate 6** — content: instruction on the five virtues of the Congregation of the Mission. **Decision: one of the next issues of *Vincentiana* will be dedicated to this topic.**

**Postulate 34** — content: the Assistants General. **Decision: the commission on the Statutes will take a special look at Statute 57.**

## V. The Evaluation

We discussed the major points of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the Assembly.

### **Most appreciated:**

1. the work of the secretary and deputy secretary. **Decision: include role of deputy secretary in the *Directory*.**
2. the work of the secretariat itself, making special recognition of the great contribution that was made on the part of the Secretary General, Sr. Ann Mary, Sr. Teresa, Brother Adam and Fr. Orlando in conjunction with the facilitator of the Assembly, the Central Commission and the Secretary and Sub-secretary of the Assembly.
3. the Commission on the Postulates. **Decision: will take it into consideration as a model for the future.**
4. the work of the chronicler. He was not only creative, but he was also faithful to the happenings in the Assembly. Special thanks to Fr. Celestino.
5. the report of the General Treasurer. Clarity and precision, detailed work.
6. Among other positive aspects, without any additional comment: Fr. Maloney's talk on the role of the Superior General, Fr. Corpus Delgado's on the *Directory*, Sr. Evelyne's talk, the report of the Secretary General, the work of the Redaction Commission (although we talked at some length about how that might be reorganized to have an official language from which the others would be translated).

## VI. Other Topics

1. **What kind of General Assembly we want in 2010.** Discussion: whether it is important that the Assembly write a document or not, more sharing of experiences that would help us learn from each other in the living out of our lives as Vincentians.
2. The need to rework **the *Directory***, especially to have a run through or a more detailed orientation on the *Directory* at the start of the Assembly.
3. The process of choosing **moderators** for the Assembly.
4. How to choose a **Central Commission** that would be representative of the whole Congregation.
5. The role of the **facilitator**. A highly discussed topic during the Assembly and also in the evaluation. Discussion: For the running of the Assembly itself, the order of hierarchy is: the President, the Central Commission and Moderators. The facilitator would

simply be present to coordinate among the President, the Central Commission, the Secretary, and the secretariat.

- 6. Languages and cultures.** In the next General Assembly, we hope to enhance occasions for mixing at the beginning of the Assembly, so that we are able to get to know one another. It is important that at the General Assembly, which is the supreme authority of the Congregation, we think and live as one. Our main concern, as a General Assembly, is the worldwide Congregation.

Our discussion on the evaluation was rich and enlightening and provided good ideas for the planning of the next General Assembly. The evaluation was presented by Fr. Manuel Ginete, who acted as our facilitator during the General Assembly. We thank him for the fine job that he did on the final evaluation with its concluding observations, which helped to stimulate our dialogue as a General Council, as we reflected back on what occurred in July.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
*Superior General*