

Congregation of the Mission (CM)



The Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission

St. Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission in 1625 for the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy. The Congregation has stated its purpose at the present time in the following way:

“The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:

- 1° make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (*Common Rules* I, 3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (*CR XII*, 13);
- 2° work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned;
- 3° help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor” (*Constitutions*, art. 1).

The General Assembly of 1980 when it was stating this purpose, in view of the signs of the times and the realities of our day, did not repeat what St. Vincent said in the *Common Rules*: “To preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas” but rather chose the words: “Work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned”; in place of St. Vincent’s: “To help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry,” it chose: “Help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor.”

The Spirit of the Congregation

“The spirit of the Congregation comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence” (*Const.*, art. 6). “The Congregation, furthermore, tries to express its spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely, simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. Speaking of these five virtues, St. Vincent said: “The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them’ (*CR II*, 14)” (*Const.*, art. 7).

Characteristics and Works of the Congregation

“These are the characteristics to be kept in mind in this work of evangelization which the Congregation proposes to carry out:

- 1° clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5);
- 2° attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world’s goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;
- 3° some sharing in the condition of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;
- 4° genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation;
- 5° readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation;
- 6° striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind’ (Rm 12:2)” (*Const.*, art. 12).

Juridical Status

The Congregation of the Mission is a Society of Apostolic Life comprising priests and lay brothers. Our juridical status is defined by our Constitutions, within the framework of canons 731-746 of the Code of Canon Law. We take vows but we are not religious, following St. Vincent's intention who always wanted us to have the flexibility and mobility of an apostolic society which lives and works in close contact with the world.

Some Statistics

In 2005 the Congregation had 3419 incorporated members: 31 bishops, 3096 priests, 168 lay brothers and 52 philosophy and theology students (who have already taken their vows).

Where do We Work?

We work in 85 countries, and we are organised into 5 Vice-Provinces: Costa Rica, Mozambique, Nigeria, St. Justin De Jacobis (Eritrea) and Sts. Cyril and Methodius (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine), and 46 Provinces: Madagascar, Ethiopia, Congo (with Belgium as a region), – Argentina (Paraguay and Uruguay), Brazil (Curitiba, Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro), Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama), Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States (New England, Eastern, Southern, Western and Midwest), Venezuela, – China, India (North and South), Indonesia, Orient (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Syria), Philippines, – Austria, France (Paris and Toulouse), Germany, Holland, Hungary, Ireland (England and Scotland), Italy (Naples, Rome and Turin), Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Salamanca and Saragossa), – Australia (Fiji).

Our Tasks, According to the Constitutions and Statutes

We evangelise the poor by means of popular missions (*Const.*, art. 14), nowadays especially in parishes (cf. *Stat.* 10); we have also many missions “ad Gentes” (*Const.*, art. 16).

The General Curia is responsible for the International Missions established in El Alto, Bolivia, in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Each year the Superior General addresses a letter to the entire Congregation to give news of the missions and to encourage new missionaries “ad Gentes” for Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, China, Mozambique, Cuba and other countries and regions of the word.

For popular missions or missions ad Gentes we can often count on the collaboration of the Daughters of Charity and many lay volunteers animated by St. Vincent's spirit. Several vocations for the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission come from among these volunteers.

We still have seminaries for the formation of the clergy (*Const.*, art. 15). This work does not at present have its former prominence. The Superior General, though, still receives many requests from bishops in missionary countries, or countries where there is a shortage of indigenous clergy. Many confreres are assigned to the spiritual help of the Daughters of Charity, as Provincial Directors, preachers of retreats, confessors or chaplains. "Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together" (*Const.*, art. 17).

"Lay associations founded by St. Vincent and those which are inspired by his spirit should be of special concern to our members, since they have the right to our presence and to our support. Although all members should be willing to undertake this work, it is necessary for some to be more skilled in it. It is important that this animation have a spiritual, ecclesial, social, and civic dimension" (*Stat.* 7). We work in various countries with the International Association of Charities, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Vincentian Lay Missionaries and other groups of the Vincentian Family.

In some countries schools are a very necessary part of the apostolate, with many confreres involved in them from primary level as in India up to university level as in the Philippines and the United States (cf. *Stat.* 11).

Some Notable Apostolates

There are confreres who work with those who live in the great rubbish dumps of cities (as in Payatas, Philippines and in Antananarivo Madagascar). There are confreres who commit themselves to work with communities for healing, for drug addicts, for AIDS victims (in certain European countries with the Daughters of Charity and lay volunteers), with indigenous groups (in many Latin American countries), with the deaf (in Ireland), with gypsies, with prisoners, with street children, with the homeless, etc. There are specialised pastoral ministries such as that in Brazil (Curitiba) where confreres work with truck drivers, always on the move. There are confreres who set up basic Church communities and undertake the formation

of lay assistants who will ensure spiritual help in places where there are no priests. Other confreres work at forming “multipliers of our Vincentian activity” by the animation of lay groups, in teaching in universities for ecclesiastical studies, or at other educational levels. There are confreres who take part in group meetings to reflect on the consecrated life, education, atheism, means of social communication, family ministry, psychological help, etc., and devote part of their time to giving courses in institutions belonging to dioceses, to Provinces of the Congregation, or to other Congregations.

Conferences of Visitors

In countries where there are two or more Provinces (Brazil, Spain, United States, France, Italy), the Visitors and their councils meet regularly to coordinate the apostolates which can be undertaken and carried out together, and to ensure common works such as houses of formation for their candidates (Internal Seminaries or novitiates, houses for philosophy or theology).

Other Provinces are grouped in continental conferences, such as those of Latin America (CLAPVI), Europe (CEVIM), Africa and Madagascar (COVIAM), Asia-Pacific (APVC) and the United States (NCV). The Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI) has regular meetings and runs courses for the confreres in various works (those in formation, missionaries, parish priests, those involved in lay movements). All these courses and meetings are also open nowadays to the Daughters of Charity and Vincentian laity. There are also groups of provinces which operate a joint coordination for Vincentian formation with the Daughters of Charity, as in Spain or Italy, etc. There are provinces where the seminarists meet regularly for Vincentian formation, as the Europeans or Brazilians do.

There are programmes which deserve special mention, such as the Salamanca Vincentian Study Weeks in Spain, or the *Fiches* (booklets) of the Toulouse Vincentian Animation Group in France. Various countries have published books on St. Vincent and his charism, on Vincentian topics and persons linked with St. Vincent. A History of the Congregation is being written at the moment.

Some Useful Addresses

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