

Rome, 30 July 2006
St. Justin De Jacobis

To 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!

With great joy I write to you today as we celebrate the feast of St. Justin De Jacobis, missionary *par excellence* in Ethiopia and Eritrea. I pray that, through his intercession, God may give us the grace to continue to deepen our missionary spirit in the world where we are called to evangelize especially the most abandoned.

At this time I would like to announce **the recipients of the Mission Award for 2006**. They are from the Provinces of Ethiopia, North India, Slovakia, Rio de Janeiro and Zaragoza. Below, I give a brief description of these projects, indicating how they show missionary creativity in the evangelization of the poor. Each project recipient will receive US \$ 20,000. Because of the size and nature of the projects submitted, the General Council has once again decided that all the award money will be given to the recipients in 2006, instead of awarding the money over a two-year period, as was described in the application form received by all the Visitors.

1. PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA

This project fits the objectives of the Mission Award because it will help in the development of lay Catholic leadership in Ethiopia.

Just a few years ago in Ambo we built the St. Justin De Jacobis Chapel with the dream of more fully utilizing our facilities there as a retreat/spirituality center. In the spirit of St. Justin De Jacobis, who helped bring the Catholic faith to Ethiopia, it is fitting that this center, named in his honor, continues to promote the growth of evangelization throughout this region.

We will offer programs for the development of catechists so that they can come here for an intensive training period or for refresher courses in the teachings of the Church. We will also use this center to reach out to youth, by offering weekend programs to develop good strong leadership among them. This center will also be a place for youth to come to discern how God is calling them to serve the Church in lay or religious life. This center will be a place of prayer for the various Catholic parishes throughout the region.

The goal of the project: To provide a spiritual center to enrich, develop and train Catholic Ethiopians to help in the development of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia.

In addition to the objectives already mentioned above, the center will promote the work and collaboration of the Vincentian Family by hosting two workshops each year on the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul for the members of the large family of St. Vincent.

2. PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA

History of the project: Vincentians from Spain came to India for evangelisation in the year 1922. What followed was a true unfolding of God's blessings on human efforts. In 1975, we made a bold move towards the evangelisation of the Soura people, a primitive tribe of about a million people. They are now on a path to education, development and progress. By 1980, our expansion drive crossed the frontiers of Orissa to other states of India making our presence felt mostly among the rural poor.

Background for launching this creative popular mission program: The groups with whom the Vincentians work are mainly Dalits (socially and economically backward people). Evangelisation has brought a lot of changes in them. In the year 2000 the members of the North Indian Province deliberated together and identified two important areas to which we now need to pay closer attention. These are: 1) faith formation of the Catholic community, and 2) formation and training of lay leaders to become effective agents for evangelisation. For this purpose we formed a centre known as Navjeevan Retreat Centre, Allada, Gajapati District, Orissa. The core group of this centre consists of a Director, an Assistant Director, one Daughter of Charity and six lay leaders.

The main thrust of the centre is to train catechists or lay leaders who will work for evangelisation. It also has a group of preachers to assist the priests in missions. The mission preaching includes popular missions and charismatic retreats accompanied by attractive music and use of audiovisual aids. These have brought about a lot of positive changes in the people. Besides popular mission preaching and charismatic retreats, we have formed a prayer group in the retreat centre. People from various parishes come to the centre for these prayer meetings. Facilities for counselling are also provided. The retreat centre conducts the following programmes every year:

- 1) Three hundred couples are trained in four intervals. The training lasts for five days.
- 2) Special programmes are organised for the youth and children twice a year.

- 3) A Bible convention, in which 7000 or more people take part, is conducted. The convention last for four days.
- 4) Four training programmes for catechists are held. Each programme lasts for one week and has a participation of some 80 catechists.
- 5) We also arrange retreat programs for various groups every month. These include retreats for married couples, youth, Church leaders, and catechists.

The goal of the project: The purpose of the project is to train and involve lay leaders in the evangelisation process. It also visualises the faith formation of the Catholic community. There are training programmes for some 120 catechists for one month each year. These catechists are selected from villages and are the leaders of the local Church. They are the best instruments in dealing directly with people in the villages. We conduct 25 retreat programmes in various parishes of Orissa in a year.

3. PROVINCE OF SLOVAKIA

The confreres of our province work in the Czech Republic, where the religious situation is very tragic. There are fewer and fewer Christians; for example, in 1950 there were 93% believers; in 1991, 43.9%; and in 2001 only 32.2% were believers and this number continues to fall.

The bishops of the country have asked for urgent help. The confreres have prepared a **project of New Evangelization** as a response to the necessities of the country. The project seeks to involve members of the Vincentian Family and other willing laity. The confreres want to create a missionary formation center and prepare laypersons who can function as animators during the popular missions in the parishes, but also continue the ongoing catechetics for adults, who, in many cases, do not have fundamental knowledge of the Christian truths.

How to respond to the criteria of the Mission Award: Through formation of the Vincentian Family laity, Vincentian sisters and other laity, so that they become active collaborators in the New Evangelization during the preaching of popular missions adapted to the local situation and in continuing the evangelization in the parishes after the popular missions.

Methodology: Formation of the laity through the ongoing preaching of catechesis for adults as a response to a call that Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the bishops of the Czech Republic during their *ad limina* visit to Rome last October.

Purpose of the project: The creation of a center for evangelical formation and the formation of members of the Vincentian Family so that they might participate in the New Evangelization in the Czech Republic, especially through ongoing catechesis for adults.

Specific objectives of the project:

- 1) Preparation of the space for the formation center.
- 2) Organization of missionary formation meetings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays twice a month for at least a year.
- 3) Organization of regular meetings for animators who are already working in the parishes where there have been popular missions.
- 4) Organization of meetings of future animators of the parishes where the popular missions are being prepared.
- 5) Organization of regular meetings with pastors of the parishes where ongoing catechesis is already done.

4. PROVINCE OF RIO DE JANEIRO

The holy popular missions of the Vincentian Family are a new concept of evangelization today. These are initiatives that the community has taken in order to strengthen the faith, as well as to become aware of our call to evangelize, produce fruits and plant new seeds of fraternal life, here and throughout the whole world.

They are derived from an initiative that began in 1997 with a Missionary Team of the province. It was entitled, "Daily Missions." It attempted to involve our seminarians, some priests, the Daughters of Charity and the active participation of the laity from Vila Popular of the Menino Jesus Parish in Diadema, São Paulo.

The evaluations were highly positive on the part of the team. This indicated that such an experience ought to continue. That is how the Popular Missions of the Vincentian Family were born.

Why are they **holy**?

- Because they continue the very mission of Jesus Christ, holy, anointed and consecrated by the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19).
- Because they take place in a favorable time, par excellence, a time full of grace.

Why are they **missions**?

- Because it is a time of going out, walking, meeting people, sharing, helping, allowing oneself to be helped, to be received, to receive, to laugh, to cry, to be happy, to be enthusiastic but, above all, it is a time of commitment.
- Because it is gathering, being sent to all peoples, above all the most needy, those who do not live the happiness of community because they are abandoned, excluded, etc.
- Because the mission, before being a job to be accomplished, is life to be lived in communion; because the most important thing in the life of each human being is to be able to meet with and relate to others as persons, to be well in one's own life and to live with dignity.

Why are they **popular**?

- Because they spring up from the base, from the ground level, from the midst of the people.
- Because they are made up of simple people who opt for the poor: men, women, children, adolescents and youth, called together to be subjects of their own history. That is the work of the mission.
- Because the missions intend to redeem the culture and popular piety of the poor.

Why are they from the **Vincentian Family**?

- Because St. Vincent de Paul is the inspiration and patron of the mission.
- Because Vincent de Paul was a man deeply aware of the signs of the times, listening to the voice of the Spirit, who is the protagonist of the mission, and deeply rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who is the originator of mission and the reason for our proclamation of the Word.
- Because the group is made up of different branches of Vincentian inspiration.

The purpose of the project:

- To concretize the missionary compassion of Christ for the abandoned, the downtrodden and those who suffer, so that they might be nourished by word and bread through the carrying out of the Vincentian Popular Missions.

The specific objectives:

- To strengthen the popular organization through evangelization at different levels, promoting the integral development of persons;
- To participate in some way in the life situation of the communities and of the people;
- To have direct, concrete contact with the people through home visits, in which all the houses are visited, regardless of religious belief or profession. We make ourselves present as friends;
- To hold street meetings, penitential processions, actions of solidarity and other activities;
- To carry out at least one activity related to the area of formation;
- To hold at least one activity in the area of the celebration of the Eucharist or the Word;
- To have some activities in the social domain, with regard to charity and solidarity;
- To have a major gathering of the people at the beginning and the end of the mission;
- To strengthen the popular organization;
- To awaken and strengthen lay leadership;
- To develop social, recreational and formative activities for children and youth;
- To support the family structure.

5. PROVINCE OF ZARAGOZA

Formation of Agents for Pastoral and Missionary Animation.

The renewed history of the missions to the people in our province began in 1982 at a meeting of six Vincentian missionaries with the Visitor, Fr. Rafael Sáinz, in which the organizational bases were established.

Lay missionaries began to be incorporated in March 1984, in the mission of Segovia, in which we collaborated with the Province of Madrid. More than 80 laypersons have worked as active missionaries on the team: men and women, married and single, representing all age groups. There is a fixed number of about ten collaborators, some of whom have been with us since 1984.

The missionary team is composed of Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and Vincentian Lay Missionaries. The province designates an average of six confreres to serve permanently, and others occasionally, each year.

The team usually gives 12 missions per year. These normally last for one month, but in some areas, where the population is small, the missions last only two to three weeks. We have also worked in different countries of Latin America, especially in Honduras.

We have worked in parishes which have special difficulties. As St. Vincent said, we have tried to help the most needy. Because the secular clergy has seen us as a positive element over the years, we have never had to offer ourselves; we have always been sought out or requested. Part of our purpose (C 1, 3°) is to “help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.”

The purpose of the project:

- 1) To convert the different parishes where we mission into evangelizing parish communities with affective and effective influence toward the poorest;
- 2) To help the priests, as well as the laity, in this work.

The specific objectives:

The work begins by motivating those who are closest in order that they might be capable of going out to evangelize, helping them make an accurate analysis of the reality and planning with them the action of the important moments of the mission. We have periodic meetings of three days or more. We call this the preparation time.

Afterwards comes a month of important time (which in our tradition and documents has been called “mission”), in which principally:

- We go out to meet everyone in the community by way of visits according to the style of Christ, who came down and drew close to us;
- We develop, through daily meetings, a communal sense of prayer, converting these moments into real prayer “workshops”;
- We invite the community to celebrate joyfully daily;
- We proclaim the good news by age groups;
- We prepare the greatest number possible of laity from the community itself to be animators of the faith;
- We attempt to raise the awareness of the communities in order to develop charitable works and services to abandoned persons. We promote help for the third world;
- We organize continuity with the people. We continue to accompany them, motivating them in this work. This is one of the services most appreciated both by the laity and the pastors.

In closing, I would like to remind all of you of the **object of the Mission Award**: “To acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individual or groups of confreres that promote in a noteworthy way their missionary work.”

I want to thank the recipients of this award for their missionary creativity in their processes to evangelize the poor. I hope that all the projects presented above will help to stimulate missionary creativity among confreres in other provinces.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General