

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 25 January 2007

*Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul
and the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission*

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!

... the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal (C 2).

As previously announced in the circular after our December *tempo forte* council meeting, we have selected three projects as the winners of the Systemic Change Award for 25 January 2007. We had a total of 18 projects presented, from which we chose the three winners. They are: 1) from the Province of Madrid, Spain: a project on hospitality for and integration of transients in Andújar; 2) from the Province of Curitiba, Brazil: a project for helping street people in the city of Curitiba regain their rights and dignity; and 3) from the Region of Vietnam, Province of Paris, France: a project for helping mountain children with their schooling.

I want to thank all those who submitted projects, corresponding to the Systemic Change Award. In particular, I am grateful for the creativity and example that you give to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, through your efforts, together with the poor, to bring about changes in the structures that oppress them. I remind all the members of the Congregation of the Mission that the overall purpose of the Systemic Change Award, as well as the Mission Award, which we will be offering again on the feast of Saint Justin De Jacobis in July, is to stimulate our efforts at evangelization and service to the poor throughout the world. The economic benefits that

come from these awards certainly help in the execution of the project, but I consider this secondary to the overall goal of these awards, which, as I stated, is to keep alive that fire for doing good things, as a sign of love for the poor, as we walk together with them, our brothers and sisters, on the road to salvation and for the honor and glory of God.

Below, you will find a brief summary of each of the projects.

PROVINCE OF MADRID

Project “Welcome and Integration of Transients” in Andújar

Andújar is situated in a geographic zone which unites the north with the south of Spain. This accounts for the influx of many people without resources, who lack housing and the possibility of integration into society. The parishioners of the Parish of the Divine Shepherd, for which the Congregation of the Mission is responsible, detected this need and created, together with the members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Parish Charity, the Association of the Vincentian Family of Andújar, which is responsible for the “Saint Vincent de Paul” welcome and integration center.

Purpose of the project:

That the transients and the homeless might have space, time and means in order to heal their wounds, recover standard habits and integrate into society, living an independent life.

The following programs were developed:

- “Welcome” that provides a day’s stay and covers the basic necessities.
- “Help in emergency,” when the person requires an extended stay.
- “Social integration” both for the new transients and the regulars. If it is detected that they do not have the capacity to follow the process (the sick, those in excessively chronic situations), they are steered toward other resources.

The program’s duration is approximately one year and includes three phases: welcome, recuperation and integration into society. During this period, they have various activities in order to arrive at: adequate living together, growth in self-esteem, recovery of work habits, professional qualification, etc. The final months of this program are carried out in protected apartments, as a first step toward independent living.

At the same time that they try to give back to these homeless people the dignity that they thought lost, the persons who are at their service (volunteers and hired staff) mature in their faith, serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.

PROVINCE OF CURITIBA

Project “Macon” in the city of Curitiba

The population of “street people” is growing in the city of Curitiba. Little by little, these human beings are losing their dignity, their self-esteem, their family ties and they are taking refuge in drugs and prostitution, because they are unable to manage their own lives.

In the face of this situation, the priests and seminarians of the Vincentian Seminary, Our Lady of Grace, timidly began their service by taking food to the square in front of the cathedral on certain nights. The foundation, Social Action of Curitiba, invited them to participate in a joint service. From that was born the project, “Macon,” to recall the experience that Saint Vincent had in the city of Macon, and which later united other public and private organisms of the city.

Purpose of the project:

To give people who live on the street, in the center of the city of Curitiba, a space where they can take care of their basic needs, recover their self-esteem, become socially integrated, and exercise their rights as citizens.

In order to “take care of their basic needs,” there is the Cohabitation House, offered by the prefecture, where meals, facilities for personal hygiene, clothing, health care and physical and cultural activities are available.

For the purpose of “recovering self-esteem,” the possibility of collaborating in the work of the house, times of spiritual reflection, individual and group work in order to stimulate their own resources and develop a sense of community.

The “social integration” is carried out by promoting professional workshops, which promote relationships among them and offer professional qualification for future integration in the marketplace. Courses in management of their own resources in order to arrive at financial independence are also given.

They are oriented toward the “exercise of their rights as citizens” through information about the resources of the social-assistance network in accord with their needs.

Participation in the project permits the seminarians to be involved directly in the service of the poor, in the line of Vincent de Paul, and in collaboration with other public and private institutions. At the same time, it has enabled the formation program to establish the Association of the Miraculous Medal in the province.

REGION OF VIETNAM (PROVINCE OF PARIS)

Brief History of the Project:

Father Marie Augustin Nguyen Huu Gia, Superior of the house of Kadeune, and the confreres of his Vincentian community work in collaboration with two communities of Daughters of Charity in the area in the service of the poorest of their mission. These are the mountain people, ethnic minorities of the Don-duong District, Province Lam-Dong, Vietnam.

These mountain people are extremely poor; many are illiterate and not very civilized. The population is about 25,000 inhabitants, of which 6,000 children and young people between the ages of 10 and 20 attend the elementary and secondary schools sponsored by the State. The educational level and the quality of education leave much to be desired: 30% of the students quit their studies in the middle; very few reach the final year of secondary school and most fail the university entrance exam.

The reasons for these scholastic failures are: The mountain students do not assimilate courses given in the Vietnamese language, because they speak another language. In addition, they do not have the means, nor the possibility of studying at home, because work in the fields and keeping watch over the cattle takes up all their time.

Project:

To help and promote, as far as possible, the scholastic success of the children by the following means:

- paying the school expenses for the poorest, thanks to benefactors.
- constructing a hostel in order to permit these children to do their homework, study and review their lessons. It will allow those who are 15 km away or who have transportation difficulties to spend the night there. Developing a scholastic library.
- finding teaching coaches to help the students who are weak in Vietnamese, mathematics, and modern languages.
- in the future, opening an apprenticeship center for trades: carpentry, masonry, sewing, information technology, etc.

Purpose of the project:

- To raise the standard of living of these ethnic minorities
- To allow the mountain children to be schooled until the final year of secondary school, if possible
- To give them a place to study and do their homework after class
- To do remedial schooling
- Human formation. Catechism classes, formation of catechists

This hostel could be, in the future, a breeding-ground of Vincentian vocations and a formation center for catechists.

Favorable conditions for carrying out this project:

We have a team of collaborators, land for constructing and the sum of 80 000 000 Vietnamese piastres (around 5,000 USD).

Each of these projects concentrates on the most abandoned, empowering them to face the reality of their times. Each is clearly in line with the thought and charism of our beloved founder, Saint Vincent, who continues to challenge us when he says:

The Little Company of the Mission dedicates itself to serve the poor, who are God's "chosen ones." Because of this love for the poor, we have reason to hope that God will love us. Therefore, let us go forth and work with renewed love in service of the poor. Let us seek out the poorest and most abandoned. Let us realize that the poor are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy to render them our small services (SV XI, 392-393).

I look forward to more new and exciting projects in our next Mission Award — prior to the Feast of Saint Justin De Jacobis in July — which should be submitted no later than 30 April, in time to be studied at our *tempo forte* meeting in May.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General