FEATURE:

The Larger Vincentian Family

Presentation

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In the last few years we have talked a lot about the Vincentian Family. What is included in that expression is not so precise. What are the limits of the Family? Who should be considered its members? It seems clear, and increasingly more evident, that charism of the founders cannot be limited to the fidelity of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The old references to the "Double Family" are no longer used because the Vincentian Family is not double, but rather more numerous.

In 1995, in number 4-5 of **Vincentiana,** corresponding to the months of June-October, Fr. José Maria Roman wrote an article entitles *The Vincentian Family: An Unceasing Renewal.* He began the article with the same questions with which I began this presentation. Despite abundant studies and meetings to think about planning for action in the last thirteen years, the precise limits of this reality have yet to be marked out. Surely the works of God do not fit into the strict categories of our minds and the Vincentian Family continues to be in state of Unceasing Renewal

The above-mentioned number of **Vincentiana,** completely dedicated to the Vincentian laity, gave a presentation of the branches which Roman highlighted as belonging to the Vincentian Family in the strict sense, that is, *Congregations or Associations which either owe their birth to the direct initiative of St. Vincent or one of his successors or which have explicitly declared themselves as spiritual descendents of St. Vincent* (**Vincentiana** 4-5, 1995).

On July 3 1995 a meeting of the leaders of the four principal branches of the Vincentian Family was held at Rome. A fruit of that meeting and to promote a desire for mutual understanding and unity, the four branches committed themselves to writing a short presentation about themselves. This was published as a supplement to **Vincentiana** already in three languages. The Vincentian Marian Youth and the Miraculous Medal Association were excluded from this supplement because they were not present at the meeting in Rome.

The General Assembly of 1998, convoked with the motto *With the Vincentian Family we confront the challenges for the Mission on the threshold of the new milenium,* the Congregation of the Mission, in tune with the calls of the Church, felt the need to express its desire for communion in living of the charism and action for the Mission with the larger Vincentian Family. *Our General Assembly,* wrote Father Maloney, the superior general, in the introduction to the final document of the Assembly, *gathered many representatives from the larger Vincentian Family with a view to renew and concretize our commitment to follow Christ as Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.*

In note 2 of the final document from the General Assembly of 1998, it says: *The expression, Vincentian Family, which will appear repeatedly in this document, should not be taken in a jurical-canonical sense, but rather as a pastoral term. By Vincentian Family we mean to refer to the group of congregations, organisms, movements, associations, groups or persons who, directly or indirectly, prolong the Vincentian charism in time, either founded directly by St. Vincent de Paul or find in him the source of their inspiration and dedication to the service of the poor. The Congregation of the Mission considers itself a part of this Family.* The concept of the Vincentian Family has widened then.

Responding to this desire for a broadened vision, **Vincentiana,** which already in number 4 of 2006, contained, as the Superior General, Fr. G. Gregory Gay, affirmed: *updated information on the different branches of the Vincentian Family... in order to give value to the peculiarity of each one, foment unity in the Vincentian Family and develop common projects for the poor,* wishes to present some of these other congregations which might be included in this **Larger Vincentian Family.**

(Translation: John Patrick Prager, C.M.)