

GENERAL CURIA

SYSTEMIC CHANGE AWARD

Rome, 25 January 2009

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!

As mentioned in my circular for our December *tempo forte* meeting, there were eight applications presented for the Systemic Change Award. From these eight, we selected three that we considered met the criteria for Systemic Change. Let me repeat briefly the questions each applicant was asked to respond to for this award.

- Explain briefly how the project involves the poor themselves.
- Identify the holistic vision of the plan.
- Identify any particular emphasis the project gives to self-help and self-sustaining programs.
- How does the project foster transparency; for example, promoting good money management and maintaining careful controls over the use of assets.
- How does the project construct a shared vision among a diverse range of people: the poor themselves, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments and NGOs, the private sector.

Obviously every project can not fulfill ideally all of these criteria, but we felt that the ones selected have done a fine job and each is a project that will help the poor help themselves.

PROVINCE OF BARCELONA

Environmental Protection of the Lands of the Coffee Producing Workers in Honduras

The first award goes to the Province of Barcelona with its mission San Pedro Sula in Honduras. The confreres hope to achieve:

1. a bettering of the economic social and cultural conditions of the country people in the mountain areas surrounding San Pedro Sula;
2. defense of the right to a healthy environment;
3. leadership of the country people in their social transformation;
4. promotion of laws which respect the environment, thus protecting the land and the health of the people.

The principal component of the project is involving the participation of the people of the area in planning, executing, monitoring and evaluating the project. The people involved in this project are the farmers themselves, delegates of the different Christian communities, promoters of health, principally women, and the land and environment pastoral commissions who have done an analysis of the environment with regard to water treatment.

The culture of the country people includes a cosmic vision of the earth closely related to their own experience of God as creator. The project helps the people understand the environment and its importance for harmonious living among all peoples with creation. The area in which the project is being realized is a reserved area which is subject to a plan for environmental control. Two public institutions work in close conjunction with this project: the Division of Water and the Honduran Cooperative for Development of Forests.

The vision of the project is to help to raise the environmental consciousness of the country people by giving them tools to participate in the elaboration and practice of environmental controls that public sectors are trying to develop. The overall goal of the project is to help the people to better the quality of water in their own homes because improving the quality of water improves the quality of life. The area of Merendon where the coffee cooperative exists, provides the drinking water for San Pedro Sula, a major city in Honduras. So the benefits of the project are widespread. The project involves the participation of those who live in the five parishes in Merendon, government officials, the Church and various land and environment agencies. All those involved in the project belong to a coffee cooperative, one of whose statutes is that five

percent of the capital must be used for a social fund, for the development of the communities.

The project promotes transparency through a team of the cooperative itself with responsibility to oversee and evaluate the activities of the project. The accounting process is under the responsibility of the cooperative and a report is given to the general assembly regularly. An audit is provided by the social pastoral of the parish.

VICE PROVINCE OF COSTA RICA

A Center for Development and Day Care – Saint Vincent de Paul

What the confreres hope to accomplish in this project is to give a human and Christian formation to the most vulnerable, that is to children, single mothers, sick and elderly. Its primary objective is the integral human promotion.

The program involves the poor through:

1. meetings in order that together priorities might be concretized;
2. accomplishing a sense of belonging on the part of the poor involving them in the project according to their own abilities and possibilities:
 - a) children at special risk: to help them in the area of education that is integrated with human and Christian guidance in a healthy and safe environment for recreation
 - b) single mothers: enabling them for work possibilities by giving them psychological support, accompaniment, and some counseling regarding the creation of their own micro businesses
 - c) the sick: to assist with medical assistance, medicine and the improvement of their living conditions
 - d) elderly: to accompany them, especially those who are physically impaired and bedridden and to provide entertainment for them.

Self-help and self sustainment are accomplished by:

- a) giving the children in the day care the opportunity for human and Christian formation;
- b) providing single mothers with the opportunity to get work;
- c) providing workshops on drug and alcohol prevention, vocational workshops and psychological workshops.

The project promotes transparency by having monthly reports of all monies received and spent assuring that the funds will be used exclusively for the project for which they were destined. The books will be reviewed by a public accountant and will be supervised by an incorporated member of the Congregation.

The project contributes to a shared vision by meeting with other Christian groups in order to channel financial assistance and coordinate collaboration. Contacts will be made with the local government and there will be coordination with the National Learning Institute. There will be motivation of and commitment by private businesses in the promotion and sustainment of the project. The project promoters will contact television and local radio stations. Finally, other activities will be done in conjunction with the Red Cross of Costa Rica, the youth social pastoral of the diocese, and the Christian Family Movement.

PROVINCE OF IRELAND

Becoming Neighbor

The confreres hope to provide a welcoming, high quality, transitional housing program to people who are homeless to enable them to move to and successfully remain in independent living.

The project involves the poor. The Vincentian Housing Project offers each person an individual apartment and an eighteen month program to enable them to live independently. Before entering the program they attend three interviews outlining what the program entails. This enables them to understand what is being offered and to choose if they wish to engage in the process of change.

The holistic vision of the plan is the concept of becoming neighbor. It is based on the gospel story of the Good Samaritan. The insight is that when the Samaritan reaches out to the traveler who had been beaten up he, at that moment, became neighbor to the man. The Project is about us as individuals and as a society becoming neighbor to the homeless person and encourages the homeless person to become neighbor once again. It incorporates a holistic response to needs as identified by the homeless person with their key workers.

1. On entering the program each person is assigned a key worker who enables them to outline their vision for the future, to set goals and to plan their own pathway to the future.
2. With their key worker they are supported in outlining their holistic needs. These include accommodation, health, educ-

ation, employment, spiritual needs, personal budgeting, psychological, relationships and identifying support to overcome their addictions.

The project gives emphasis to self-help and self-sustainment by:

1. Working in partnership with both the statutory and voluntary agencies to help identify the cause of homelessness and to design plans to eradicate it. This involves listening to the homeless person and the workers. Our vision for 2010 is that no one will have to sleep on the streets because of lack of facilities.
2. Initiating conversions with staff and volunteers to think about the meaning of their work.
3. Staff volunteers and the homeless being invited to participate in the mission and values workshops of the Vincentian Housing Partnership.
4. Facilitating learning with people of all faiths and those without faith in a search for new ways of becoming neighbor.

Transparency is fostered by submitting the budget to the board of management before the beginning of each year, having an external audit, and monitoring the finances at each board meeting.

The project constructs a shared vision because it is a partnership consisting of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We are members of the Homeless Agency Network. We have a strong Volunteer network, and we work closely with DePaul Trust, another branch of the Vincentian Family. We also work closely with the statutory agencies and are a member of the Vincentian Justice Partnership.

These summaries of the winners of the Systemic Change Award I share with all members of the Congregation of the Mission to stimulate your own creativity to respond to the urgent needs of the poor through systemic change which is a truly concrete way to live out the gift of God's love which motivates us to serve and evangelize the poor.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General