

GENERAL CURIA

JUBILEE YEAR

Rome, 13 May 2009

To the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

As we have heard proclaimed throughout this Easter season, we are a resurrection people and Alleluia is our song!

I write to you today to announce officially the beginning of our Jubilee Year, a year in which we will celebrate as Vincentian Family the anniversaries of the death and resurrection of our founders Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. We do so under the theme of "Charity and Mission." Mission is the focus that we want to give to this year of celebration that begins September 27, 2009 and lasts until September 27, 2010. Our mission, to evangelize and serve the poor, is motivated as always by God's love which we translate into hands-on charity, direct contact with and love of the poor.

We are celebrating our past, giving thanks to God for the wonderful examples of love that he has given us through Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. As we talk about mission in this Jubilee Year and reflect deeply upon its interrelationship with charity, we do so in the way that Vincent and Louise did, with others. We want to focus on the partnership that existed among Vincent and Louise and others who realized the mission. Besides celebrating the death and resurrection of Vincent and Louise, we also celebrate the death and resurrection of a close companion, the first companion of Saint Vincent de Paul, Mr. Portail; he too died the same year, 1660.

They were all involved in a mission of love. They were bonded by love: a deep love of God and a deep love of the poor. They carried out their mission with a passion which was so deep that it continues to be felt and lived in the Vincentian Family throughout the world,

certainly in ways far beyond what Vincent, Louise or even Mr. Portail would have imagined. To give one example of how that mission continued, there is yet another anniversary that we will be celebrating this year: the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint Justin de Jacobis, a great missionary to what is now Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The concept of partnership can better be translated as companionship. That is the sense that we hope to convey to all the members of our Vincentian Family as we collaborate one with another in our evangelization and service of the poor. It seems that companionship is precisely what Vincent and Louise and others experienced as they carried out their mission. And this companionship goes beyond simply a working relationship, it is a life relationship that involves a common mission to serve the poor.

Recently, in a meeting of the Vincentian Family in Germany, their annual MEGVIS meeting, we had an interesting presentation on the analysis of the reality of Germany. We asked ourselves the question, as the Vincentian Family, What are we doing in order to meet this reality? I think that is the question that we need to ask of ourselves regarding our mission. We want our mission today to be ever new and ever creative in order to respond to the needs of the poor wherever they may be; and we want to do it in this sense of companionship, one with another.

We are called, as Saint Paul would say, to be “all things to all people,” because the reality we meet, in many places of the world today, are people estranged from the traditional concepts of Church, people who are unaware of God actively present in their life in and through the sacraments. Somehow, through our mission we have to be present to them. As Jesus said, he has come not to save the healed, but to save the sinner, those estranged. He went after the one lone sheep who had wandered off from the ninety-nine. These lone sheep are the ones we, as members of the Vincentian Family are called to reach out to, to be present to, not to wait for them to come to us, but to move out of ourselves and go to them. That is the concept of mission motivated by true charity today.

In order to honor Saint Vincent in this 350th anniversary year, I think it is important that we learn more about his companions, more about Saint Louise, Mr. Portail and others who have shared in this common heritage. That is precisely what we hope to accomplish as we begin our Jubilee Year, to deepen our knowledge above all of Saint Louise as a mutual companion of Vincent in charity and mission toward those who are poor.

I would like to share with you a number of different activities that have been planned at the international level. Several committees have

organized activities to help us to celebrate well and to present and give witness to our heritage before the world in which we live today. The **Heritage Commission** will send out themes each month to the world-wide Vincentian Family to be reflected on to help us deepen our spirituality. (See Attachment 1) The **Projects Committee** has decided on a project that we as the heads of the Vincentian Family have approved; a project that will be a pilot project serving the poor in Haiti, the poorest country of the Western Hemisphere; a project that is based on micro financing; a project that we hope will help to involve participation of all the members of the Vincentian Family in a concrete way. This is a project by which we can connect with the reality of the poor in Haiti, get to know that reality in and through persons who are poor, and be able to support them in a real concrete way, not only with our financial aid, but also with our words of support and solidarity. (See Attachment 2)

The **Celebration Committee** has prepared two celebrations for us. One will take place on the eve of the anniversary of the death of Saint Louise de Marillac in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. André Cardinal Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris, in a letter of 24 April 2009 wrote: "I will welcome you (the Vincentian Family) with joy to the Cathedral of Notre Dame for the 6:30 pm Mass on 14 March 2010 in honor of Saint Louise de Marillac." The following day on the feast of Saint Louise we will celebrate the Eucharist at the rue du Bac. And on September 25 we will celebrate together with our brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul. More information on both of these celebrations is forthcoming. (See Attachments 3) The **Secretariat Committee** has prepared a small pictorial publication concerning the life of Vincent and Louise and some examples of how the charism is lived out today.

These various activities of the different Committees are being guided by the **Executive Committee** which responds directly to the leaders of the branches of the Vincentian Family. The financial aspect is worked out by the **Finance Committee**. (Further details of these activities can be found on Famvin.org, entry of 3 April, in the summary of the most recent meeting of the heads of the Vincentian Family held in Madrid in January.)

We hope to stimulate the creativity of the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world through these activities at the international level. These activities help us to think globally, and encourage us to act locally. For example, we have encouraged the Provinces of Italy, Eritrea and Ethiopia to celebrate at the local levels the 150th anniversary of the great missionary Justin de Jacobis.

Similar things can be done throughout the world-wide Vincentian Family. We would like to know about these activities, that is why we have created a window on the famvin web page where you can announce the activities that will take place at the local level, helping us all to celebrate, meditate and deepen our own walk with Vincent and Louise in this time of Jubilee.

As has been the theme for our celebration for the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul for the last two years, with this 350th anniversary we want to continue the subject of systemic change, a subject that in some sense has received much attention and some reaction on the part of some because of its political ramifications with other ideologies, which is not our intention. Our interest is to use this contemporary sociological expression as a concrete way of helping us to be agents of transformation through that gift that God has given us that characterizes who we are: that is agents of charity. Our hope is to promote a charity that is not a “handout” but a “hand up.” Together with the poor and from their reality we can work and evangelize in a way that will make this world a better place to live.

We encourage all of you to continue to deepen your understanding of this very simple concept that at times we make too complicated, a concept that is being deepened in different workshops throughout the world. Thus far we have had a workshop in Mexico for Vincentian leaders, which will be followed by workshops in Brazil in June, in Cameroon for all of Africa-Madagascar in July, and in Bangkok in Thailand for all of Asia-Oceania next year. In years to come we will be developing these workshops in Europe and in the United States, workshops to help Vincentian leaders learn the methodology of systemic change and to put it into practice together with the poor whom they are serving around the world.

I conclude now with a new prayer for the Jubilee Year, a year of charity and mission. I hope that the same spirit that filled the hearts of Vincent, Louise and their companions might fill ours as well, as we continue to give witness and serve our lords and masters, those who are poor.

Lord God Almighty, Father of the poor, you give us the grace to celebrate this year the 350th anniversary of the death of St. Vincent and St. Louise. We thank you for this immense grace. Through their intercession grant that we allow ourselves to be transformed more fully by the Spirit you gave them. May the Spirit of Charity so fill our hearts and minds that our love for our brothers and sisters, who are marginalized and rejected by society, be gentle, attentive, compassionate, pro-active and inventive unto infinity.

Make us rediscover the audacity of Vincent and Louise, the diligence and sweetness of an ever-renewed love of the poor that may help them change their lives in earnest.

Help us make our faith strong and humble in a world that seems so far away from you yet that thirsts so much for you. Make us become a sign of hope for many, as were Vincent and Louise, companions in life.

Grant that we do not back down in the face of difficulties but be ready to dirty our hands in favor of the poor, our masters. Help us learn from them to become your true sons and daughters, worthy heirs of the charism you have entrusted to Vincent and Louise for the good of the Church and of all humanity,

May this jubilee year be for our Vincentian Family a year of grace and conversion, and for those we love a year of many blessings. Amen.

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

Attachment 1**Heritage Commission**

The Heritage Commission has chosen to reach each individual member of the Vincentian Family, in preference to sponsoring an international symposium. There will be twelve short reflections (one for each month of the jubilee year) that will be available through the internet, accompanied by guidelines and suggestions for use. This process will rely heavily on local initiative and creativity.

Our goal. We hope to reach each member of the Vincentian Family worldwide. This is a grassroots vision. We hope that members of the Vincentian Family will organize themselves once a month during the Jubilee Year to deepen the Charism we share, to know each other better and to build bonds of friendship and collaboration. It is our fondest hope that the people to whom we are sent to serve and the co-workers with whom we work side by side will be an integral part of our celebrations. Our hope, in doing this locally, is that the world might know by means of thousands of small (or even large) expressions and events that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise have taught us to love our neighbor.

The means. The twelve short reflections will set the theme for each month of the Jubilee Year. The purpose is to deepen our appreciation and love for our vocation and to celebrate the charism with the people we serve and the people with whom we serve. We anticipate this will happen through the sharing of those who come together, because the charism is carried not on paper but in the lives of the members of the Vincentian Family. The reflections are aimed at sharing understanding, experience, hopes, and, action.

Our action can be not only on behalf of poor people but with poor people, so that they and we can sense we are members of one family, a family drawn together by God's love. We can think of sharing with them around the same table, having reception for them (*une verre d'amitié*), welcoming them to share their experience of Vincent and Louise with us, or, if we are in schools, inviting the faculty, staff and students to enter into our reflection and action, and the same is true if we are formators.

The Twelve Themes are:

1. Our Reason for Celebrating Saint Vincent and Saint Louise Today: Rediscovering Their Dynamism and Being Filled with Their Spirit

2. The Role of Interiority and Devotion in the Vincentian Family
3. The Spirit of Saint Vincent
4. The Spirit of Saint Louise
5. Who is Jesus for Saint Vincent?
6. Who is Jesus for Saint Louise?
7. Service to Poor People
8. Evangelization of Poor People
9. The Different Forms of Poverty
10. Celebrating this Anniversary with Poor People
11. In What Ways the Charism of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise Is Lived Differently in the Various Branches of the Vincentian Family
12. The Collaboration of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the Service of Poor People

The process will involve the production and distribution of the twelve reflections through Famvin in the official languages. We ask the Vincentian Family in each language area to see to the translation of the reflections in their own area, if this is desired. Each country or language group may re-publish them in a simple form or a more sophisticated form as time and talent permit.

Attachment 2**Pilot Project**

In view of the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Louise and St. Vincent in 2010, the international leaders of the Vincentian Family named a Projects Committee to develop a specific initiative in favor of the poorest of the poor that would involve all the branches of the Family. They asked that this initiative also be in continuity with the Family's focus on systemic change.

At the beginning of 2009, the Projects Committee suggested several options to the leaders of the Family. From among these options, the leaders selected a pilot project in microfinance based in Haiti. In that context, the Committee is exploring microfinance as an effective response to the global challenge of extreme poverty. Microfinance, combined with educational programs and social services, has proved to be an effective instrument in transforming the lives of many who are experiencing poverty. The Committee will devise means for promoting maximum Family involvement from both Haiti and abroad and for giving the project a specific Vincentian thrust. It is anticipated that such a pilot project could serve as a model that might be followed in other places.

The Projects Committee met in Paris in early April, 2009, in order to proceed with concrete planning. At that meeting, it was decided that, as a first step, it is essential to visit Haiti in order to enter into a dialogue with the councils of the various branches of the Family to understand the expectations of the Family, and to learn about the needs of the poorest of Haiti's poor. The Committee believes that, before formulating a project, it is vital to explore the context of the country, to identify possible partnerships, and to involve the poor in the process.

A small subgroup comprised of Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M., Professor Laura Hartman (DePaul University) and Yasmine Cajuste (JMV) will visit Haiti in August, 2009, in order to gather information and, as a first priority, to meet with members of the Vincentian Family.

Subsequent to that visit, the Committee will propose means by which the worldwide family will be able to participate in this initiative. Further information will be provided as details about the project are concretized.

The Committee is enthusiastic about the opportunities presented by this further commitment to working together as a Family during the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent and St. Louise. In our discussions, we focused intentionally on

inclusion, subsidiarity and solidarity as our principles for decision-making. We look forward to working with our Vincentian Family members in Haiti to serve the needs of those living under intolerable conditions.

Attachment 3**Celebration Committees**

The date of the celebration in Rome at the Basilica of St. Peter is set for Saturday 25 September 2010 at 5:00 pm, to accommodate the best participation of the pilgrims. Cardinal Franc Rodé will preside at the concelebrated Eucharist: the Holy Father will send a letter to all the Vincentian Family on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, and (perhaps) will greet those present at the end of the Eucharist.

At the celebration, special places will be reserved for the sick and those who help the handicapped. At the Offertory there will be a special sign to express the Vincentian charism (symbolic gifts). We have obtained a Plenary indulgence for those who will participate (physically and spiritually) at the celebration in Paris (Sunday March 14, 2010 at Notre Dame) and in Rome (Saturday September 25, 2010). As a note, there is already each year a Plenary Indulgence for March 15 and September 27.