

The Association of the Miraculous Medal: A Uniquely Vincentian Association

by Enrique Rivas Vila, C.M.

Perhaps this article's title will draw some attention. When we talk of the various branches of the Vincentian Family we usually line them all up, distinguishing one from the other by each branch's purpose, or by what it does or by its foundation date or church approbation, or perhaps by how important it may have been to the development of the other branches, such as the case could be for the Congregation of the Mission or the Daughters of Charity. Actually each branch has its own unique personality even if they all have much in common, having sprung from the common Vincentian foundational charism.

By pointing out the AMM as a "unique association," we want only to highlight what it is in its own identity that distinguishes it from the other branches. It is the only Vincentian Association to which all members of all the other branches can belong, whether they be laypersons, priests, vowed members or members of an apostolic society. Indeed, one would have to say that *everyone* belongs, consciously or not. It is enough to have received the Medal of the Virgin, carry it, and invoke Mary with the same ejaculation that she herself taught us. These are the conditions for being an Association member, according to St. Pius X's pontifical approbation. In fact, all of us Vincentian Family members have received the medal at one time or other during our lifetimes.

ITS MOST CHARACTERISTIC MARKS

1. It is an Association born out of a mystical experience

Catherine Labouré was a woman who grasped the presence of the sacred. She herself, years after the Apparitions, narrated the story of these many experiences of the living God. Thus in her writings she states:

“The day of the Most Holy Trinity, Our Lord appeared to me as a King, with the cross over his breast, in the Blessed Sacrament. This happened during the Eucharist, at the Gospel. It seemed to me that the Cross was sinking below the feet of our Lord and it seemed that He was being stripped, all adornments falling to the ground.”

“I was favored with another great grace, that of seeing Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I saw him all the time while in Seminary, except at those times when I doubted. Then, the next time, I did not see anything because I wanted to go deeper and had doubts about this mystery. I was thinking that I had been mistaken.”¹

The manifestations of the Virgin Mary that gave origin to the Medal of the Immaculate Conception exist in this world of interiority and encounters with God along with the invitation to found an Association in order to reveal and spread the message that had been received.

1.1. Catherine tells the story

We have heard it many times. Told by Saint Catherine, repeated on many occasions at the behest of her spiritual Directors, her story describes three apparitions where she heard the message that brought about the Medal and everything having to do with it.

In the first apparition, occurring on the night of July 18-19, 1830, the Holy Virgin Mary, with a gesture of motherly concern, welcomed Catherine into a long conversation during which she encouraged Catherine to be open to the task she wanted to entrust to her.

The second apparition, on the afternoon of November 27 that same year, revealed the means to transmit the message. Just like a great designer, Mary sketched the face side and reverse side of the medal in a language that would make sense to simple people, for anyone willing to take refuge in the power of this perfect summary of all of salvation history.

The third apparition, at some undetermined date, dealt with the final touches on the iconography of the Virgin holding globe of the world in her own hands thus suggesting that she is the sure way to the encounter with God.

¹ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *Catherine Labouré et la Médaille Miraculeuse. Documents authentiques. 1830-1876*, Paris, Lethielleux, N° 564, p. 335.

1.2. An Association fully designed by the same Virgin Mary

Mary wanted to pass on her message through an Association. It would be the expression of all which the Medal contains. Perhaps everything really began from that point on. It was Mary herself who asked Sister Catherine Labouré, “tell your Director that an Association be founded....”

Catherine tells the story this way:

“I remember that one day I said to Father Aladel: ‘The Holy Virgin asks of you a mission. She desires that an Association be started, and you are to be its founder and director. The group will be a Confraternity of Daughters of Mary, to which Holy Virgin will grant many graces. Indulgences will be given them. They will be very happy.’”²

1.3. With a clear purpose: to spread a message

In the context of the apparitions, the Association requested by Mary seems to be the fitting means to carry to everyone the message that she brought us from heaven.

The message is in the Medal. Everything is about the Medal. It is the means through which graces are poured out, just as the seer repeatedly reminds us. These graces undoubtedly refer to the participation in the divine life which we are offered once we open our hearts to Jesus’ message. In reality, the Medal is a call to the encounter with the mystery of Jesus, expressed in the Cross which fills up the whole reverse side of the medal, and which sets hearts on fire. This is expressed by the two flaming hearts appearing behind her, clearly identified as icons of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, an invitation to identify oneself with this flaming love that consumes them.

The characteristic emphasized on the medal’s reverse is that this cross lovingly comes to us through Mary, since it lies over a large “M,” clearly referring to the Mother of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth.

This is what Saint Catherine tells us when she describes the apparition of November 27:

“Then there appeared the Holy Virgin as an oval image on the front side of which was written, in letters of gold, these words: ‘O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.’ Then there was a voice that told me: ‘Have a medal minted based on this model. All those who wear it about their

² R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 637-638, p. 357.

neck will receive great graces. The graces will be abundant for those persons who carry it with faith...'

Suddenly, after having contemplated this image, it seemed to me to revolve and I then saw the reverse side of the Medal."³

"Concerned to know if it would be necessary to add something on the Medal's reverse side and after have prayed a great deal, I seemed to hear one day in meditation a voice that told me: 'The M and the two hearts say enough.'"⁴

Sister Catherine herself suggests that the Medal is a language that must be read. And this is how the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Èvelyne Franc, explained it in her intervention at the last Synod of Bishops, in 2008:

"The miraculous medal offered to so many people in the world is a simple tool for catechesis, a summary of the history of salvation which allows for the proclamation of the Word of God."⁵

2. An Association

And so, the Medal in itself is a sufficient means to approach the mystery of Jesus Christ, for the heart of anyone who welcomes its message and understands its content, feeling the impulse to share that content with others. The important thing, however, is that the Blessed Virgin invites the creation of an Association to transmit the message.

To speak of an Association presupposes to highlight the union of persons with a purpose of fulfilling an objective. It is a call to gather together in order to coordinate a common task.

2.1. Its constitution, requested by the Church

Since 1832, the epoch when the Medal began to spread out and graces multiplied for those who had received it. Above all, since the publication of St. Catherine's confessor, Father Aladel, to respond to questions that had come from so many people as well as those in the Church⁶ concerning the Medal's origins, associations started

³ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 455-456-457, p. 295.

⁴ R. LAURENTIN - P. ROCHE, C.M., *o.c.*, n° 455-456-457, p. 296.

⁵ Intervention of Sr. Èvelyne Franc in the Synod of Bishops, October 14, 2008. *Ecos de la Compañía*, 6 (2008), 391.

⁶ [J. ALADEL], *Notice historique sur l'origine et les effets d'une nouvelle médaille...*, Paris, 1834.

appearing spontaneously in response to the Virgin's invitation to better live out the Gospel in true Christian communities according to the spirit and style of that time.

Many such associations were founded. Some, like the one at St. Ginés parish in Madrid, were founded ten years after the apparitions. Don Juan Carreras, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission since 1837, established an association in the Church of San Luis de los Franceses, in 1840; in 1845, however, given the small size of the church, the association was moved to the San Ginés Parish. Pope Blessed Pius IX, in 1848, recognized it, leaving the faculties to approve their statutes to the Cardinal of Toledo, which he did on May 10, 1849. This Association eventually took on the title of "Royal" granted by Queen Isabel II in 1855, since the whole royal family belonged to it.⁷

The creation of these Associations continued throughout the rest of the XIX century. In 1847 the Holy See approved for Paris an "Association of the Holy Medal of the Immaculate Conception," which was dedicated particularly to the girls and young women of the colleges of the Daughters of Charity.⁸

But there were associations that, in their spontaneity, had very little in common with other associations; in addition, in many cases they were influenced by some spiritual trends that were completely foreign to the message of the rue du Bac. Nor were they helped much by church structures that constituted and approved them in any way they saw fit to do so.

In face of this reality, by the end of the XIX century the superiors of what has since been called "the double family of St. Vincent de Paul," that is to say, the Vincentian Missioners and the Daughters of Charity, decided to intervene to attempt to coordinate and move forward "the" Association about which the Virgin had spoken and whose creation she had entrusted to a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Aladel.

The Vincentians took this on as their own task and, at the same time, a unified project, since the Virgin had not spoken of Association in the plural but rather in the singular, one which should be the custodian of how the message was shared.

⁷ BENITO PARADELA, C.M., *El culto y la devoción a la Milagrosa en España durante el siglo XIX*, in *Anales C.M. Madrid*, 43 (1935), 609-614. MARIANO TORRES, *La Archicofradía de la Medalla Milagrosa en la Parroquia de San Ginés de Madrid*, Madrid, 1946.

⁸ JOSÉ DELGADO, C.M., *Mensaje de la Rue du Bac*, Madrid, 1968, pp. 181-187. Trae una amplia bibliografía sobre el tema.

It is clear that the Virgin spoke of one association of “daughters of Mary.” This never was understood in the restrictive sense, since “daughters” and “sons” of Mary are all Christians. Perhaps the expression could be read in the sense in which the Virgin Mary invites us to feel ourselves authentically her “sons and daughters,” fully trusting in her word and message just as any child would do with their mother or father.

This multiplication of Associations that had been established throughout the XIX century compelled the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity at that time, to try to unite and strengthen all those associations into a one and only Association. To this end papal authority was requested of the pontiff at that time, St. Pius X, in order to bring about this unification and approbation.

And, to that effect, the Pope issued a decree of approbation and gave the Association its first Statutes.

2.2. Subsequent Approbations

That was the first Church approbation and a determining factor for later development of the Association, which reached great heights as far as the number of groups and members. In addition, it lived through its first and most difficult crisis through its activities during the Spanish Civil War and World War II, along with the recuperation that came after these conflicts.

a) *The approbation of St. Pius X (1909)*

There is one precedent in St. Pius X's approbation in 1905, at the behest of the bishops of Poland, of an association with the name “Society of the Immaculate Conception of the Sacred Medal.” Perhaps this inspired the petition presented in the name of the family of St. Vincent.

Fr. Antoine Fiat, C.M., Superior General of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity from 1878 through 1914, went to the Pope to ask that he make an approbation which would apply to all the Church. And, in effect, through the Brief *Dilectus Filius*, issued July 8, 1909, the Pope approved that very society definitively and universally.

b) *The originality and the force of the 1909 approbation*

In that Brief, the Pope gave the Association some statutes, summarized in seven articles, which constituted all other Statute written afterwards on both the national and international levels.

The originality of these Statutes can be seen in these characteristics:

– This is an Association “of the faithful,” so that, in accordance with Canon Law, all the faithful of the Church, be they priests, vowed or laypersons, (cf. Art. V) are able to belong.

– The condition for belonging to the Association is “to carry the sacred medal suspended from the neck over one’s heart, blessed and authorized by a priest with that faculty, and according to the rite approved by our predecessor, Leo XIII...” (ibid.). It is not necessary to register the name in any record (cf. Art. VII, & 3°).

– Members take on no obligation; it suffices to repeat frequently the invocation carved in the sacred medal: “O Mary conceived without sin...!”

– Perhaps most important in the history of the Association is that its supreme authority remained tied to the person of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, since, as the same Pope confirmed in his document, he does so “as much to look to the unity of the Association as for its perpetuity” (cf. Art. VII, & 2°). The authority that binds together and gives unity to the Association is not in the base of the association, nor in any democratic process of decision-making, but rather it is the person of the Superior who will always exist, call it what you will, who, as the Pope says, will give permanence to the Association. This papal decision is one of the characteristics of uniqueness of the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

c) *The Statutes of 1998*

Logically the adaptation of the juridical texts the teachings flowing from the Vatican II Council, presuppose a Statutes revision. In 1990 the Holy See approved some modifications. That same year a new rite of blessing and imposition of the Medal was approved.

But the International Statutes approved by Pope St. Pius X, marked by his conciseness, ended up inadequate when facing the complexity of the life of the Association in so many different cultures and countries. For those reasons some new International Statutes were proposed and were approved by Rome on February 19, 1998.

In those:

– They continue to recognize that this is an association of the faithful, i.e. with members who are ordained, vowed, and lay, and for which reason that it is not just a lay organization. This is very logical because anyone to whom the medal has been given and who wears it, fulfills the condition be a part of the Association as stated by Pope

St. Pius X in the 1909 approbation. Therefore, in the Association there can be lay members, religious, those consecrated by vows, priests, and even bishops.

– They continue to affirm that their Director General is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, to whom belongs the naming of the national Directors or Presidents and who, for the same reason, act in his name.

– There is a very important distinction when speaking of the members: it distinguishes between members in general and special members (Art. 4, nn. 1 and 2).

Those are “members in general” who carry the Sacred Medal blessed by a priest, etc.

And “special members” are those who have been inscribed in the Association... understood as those who carry out activities proper to the Association in whatever way; and in this sense too, a priest or religious man/woman or Daughter of Charity could be “special members” of the Association just like a layperson, with the same rights and duties described in the Statutes, as long as they participate actively in the works of the Association.

d) *New International Statutes*

For a few years now the International Council of the Association has thought it was the right time for a new adaptation of the International Statutes, because of its expansion into new countries and cultures. In only a few years it had moved from being established in 20 countries to 53, with plans for new foundations in even more countries. In addition, there is the reality of many legal lacunae in important areas making redefinition necessary for smooth and proper operation. For this reason the previous International Council had designed a project, since then adapted for today, where national Associations were studied with the intent of presenting a text for study and analysis at the International Gathering. This took place in Paris in November, 2009. Now that text with those meeting’s reflections is undergoing final revisions in the Commission for Redaction, so that it can be proposed for approbation by the Holy See.

The central ideas behind the proposed text for these new Statutes are very simple. The first is to find total consistency and continuity with the Virgin’s idea, but in the context of the Church and the world today. The second has to do with being faithful to the directives delineated by the Church in the successive approbations, but especially in that of Pope St. Pius X, in 1909.

That original continuity requires that we foster that climate of prayer and contemplation in which the desire of the Virgin Mary was grasped, as expressed to St. Catherine Labouré; for that reason and, for the first time in any Statutes, one whole chapter appears, dedicated to the Spiritual Life.

Mary's desire that a C.M. Father be the founder of the Association presupposes a clear linkage with the Vincentian charism. Evangelization of and service to our brothers and sisters, especially to those who are poor, from the perspective of Vincentian contemplation of the face of Christ, is one proposal for this Association to thrive within our Vincentian Family.

The second continuity moves us to rediscover an Association made up of the faithful. This means that each and every one of us is a protagonist — we are the main actors. Apart from the unique role of the Director General, clarified in Pope St. Pius X's request that this be the Superior General and who for that reason has to be a priest, all other roles and responsibilities of the Association can be carried out by any of its members, be they priests, consecrated or laypersons. This applies to all offices, the National Director or the presidents or whichever other task; these are roles that can be carried out by a Daughter of Charity or a C.M. missionary or a layperson or any religious, male or female. It is not any person's status but rather the quality of that person that makes it possible to carry out the function.

Should it happen that the AMM ever define itself merely as a lay association, the priests — C.M. or diocesan, Daughters of Charity or religious men and women — would then logically be unable to carry out any function other than as spiritual advisors or consultants. The possibility is prevented in the ongoing project of new Statutes, and falls within the logic of the juridical definition of the 1909 and 1998 Statutes.

3. The AMM, Today

3.1. A Social and Ecclesial Reality

We do not have Church or international statistics. We do know that we have many thousands of associates. In Spain alone, to cite an example, last year all members and groups were counted in order to estimate the reach of the Association's evangelizing activity. In October 2008 we had 33,897 members (special or active) in 444 groups or associations, each month reaching 249,518 homes with the message inviting them to provide their home-chapel for the visits of the Virgin, and the contact with those families that receive it. We are established in practically the majority of Spanish dioceses.

Much of the same thing, with higher or lower numbers, could be said of Mexico, Peru, Cameroon, India, Australia, Venezuela, the United States, etc... of all those countries where the Association has taken root.

In many countries, the Association is an organization that gathers its members periodically for prayer, formation and reflection, bringing members together for feast days, fiestas or shrine pilgrimages, for active Vincentian service to the poor, etc. These happen with regularity, that is sometimes quite frequent such as weekly, or more occasionally such as once a month, or during the important liturgical seasons.

In other countries, the Association relies on a logistical center of communication and information, maintaining this relationship by ordinary mail or by other information media with many thousands of persons who have given their names to the AMM; at a distance, it shares information, prayer journals and requests, the celebration of novenas, participation in mass intentions... etc. Rarely do these members gather together, but they do feel connected to the Association through the central coordinator.

These are the only kinds of statistics we have for the moment. Even so, the important thing is the dynamic which these groups and the Association's members are living.

3.2. Expectations

The celebration of the International Encounter of the AMM which took place in Paris, November 15-20, 2009, as well as that which presumably was learned and communicated among those participants who attended from so many countries, has opened up expectations for the future of the Association and raised them higher. The fact of having together studied the text of new International Statutes for the AMM has helped discover essential points of convergence in those areas where all of us are involved, while, at the same time, keeping in mind the differences in how things are actually carried out, depending on the country.

These fundamental characteristics that constitute the essence of the AMM are picked up in these Statutes; they apply to the whole Association and, for that very reason, they are meant to be the basis for Statutes proper to the AMM in each country.

One would expect these Statutes to strengthen the Association, consolidating in their basic directives everything needed to guide all its proceedings; but there is also a more focused dynamic for the program sketched out by the Virgin Mary in St. Catherine's apparitions. These, in today's world and church, can and should be

understood as a much more intense commitment to evangelization and service by means of the great catechesis of the Medal itself. This, along with the members' involvement in a serious spiritual life, lived out in the joy of fellowship, in communion with each other, and with the experience of deepest gospel love, ought to be the witness and sign which the Association could offer to today's world.

All in all, the International Gathering of November 2009 dealt with the Statutes. But now we hope for Church approval not only for the juridical text but also for the directives and characteristics which we studied and decided to propose as guidelines for the Association in the near future. The 1909 Statutes elicited an ample response which was translated in the creation of many Association groups and a vitality so remarkable that even today the historical testimonies from that time are surprising. We all hope that the gift of some new Statutes, something the Association itself actually formulated during this Gathering, be the occasion of a new life-giving phase, remaining faithful to Mary's great gesture of trust in 1830, and re-enchanted for today.

I would like to offer, as my conclusion to this article, the fundamental directives of the proposed Statutes. Although not yet approved by Rome, these directives already represent a large part of our reflections and how we hope to strengthen the AMM with their help.

3.3. The aims of the AMM

In the new Statutes, the text for approval says in its article 8:

“The Association has as its end:

- To follow Jesus Christ by the example of Mary, disciple and model of Christian life.
- To spread Marian spirituality by using the message of the Miraculous Medal.
- Sanctification by means of Holy Communion, a spiritual life and the apostolate.
- To serve and evangelize. In general, this is an apostolate of evangelization and charity to families, responding to their most urgent needs and poverty. This mission is exercised primarily by means of the Home Visits, development programs and the celebrations proper to the Association.”

Keep everything that matters — this has kept the AMM alive over the years. We know now that it is clear that the AMM is really about an encounter with Jesus Christ, through Mary. A part of this task is personal salvation, understood as evangelizing and serving; these are the top priorities for the whole Association and for each one of its members.

3.4. Characteristics that define the AMM

There are some characteristics that we want to use to clearly define the identity of the AMM. They were spelled out in previous Gatherings, and we believe that they should continue to be.

a) *The Ecclesial Characteristic*

- Since all its members, from their baptism, are called to participate in the salvific mission of the Church in communion with other Catholic organizations and under the direction of their pastors.
- Because the fulfillment of all its ends is linked to the mission of the Church.
- Because it has been approved and recognized by the Church.

b) *The Marian Characteristic*

- Because they share a Christian spirituality that has a distinctly Marian dimension.
- Because the Association rose, born out of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830.
- Because all its members feel called to know, live, and spread the message of these apparitions of 1830.

c) *The Vincentian Characteristic*

- Because the Association has been born from within the Family of St. Vincent de Paul, whose charism is the service and evangelization of the poor.
- Because the direction of the Association has been confirmed by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

3.5. Its own virtues

These are the expression of its own essential characteristics, and the work in which the Association intends to highlight as living force for its members.

The Association is energized by its practice of the four virtues or basic activities that express the spirit proper to it. These four virtues spring from the Message from the apparitions and are taken up by each and every one of the Association's members in their efforts to fulfill what has been entrusted to them by the Virgin Mary, and what they have been charged to do.

These virtues are: to pray, to live in communion, to evangelize, to serve Christ in their brothers and sisters, especially those who live in poverty.

a) To Pray

The Medal, the key and expression of the complete Message of the Apparitions, is an ongoing invitation to prayer: the ejaculation is very explicit, in this sense: “O Mary, conceived without sin: ‘Pray’ for us who have recourse to thee!” and the symbols drawn from the Medal open us to continuous contemplation of the great mysteries of salvation.

But there is more: that same Virgin Mary invites us to approach the altar in order to meet ourselves in prayer, as brothers and sisters.

Prayer and contemplation are necessary for our groups.⁹

b) To Live in Communion

The Blessed Virgin asked that an Association be created. The invitation to spread her message presupposes to do so as a group, in authentic Christian community. Community is constituted in brotherly love. This is not about a merely external association, helped along in superficial bonds and relationships. The power of the Association resides in the Christian love that gathers it together. It will be in the value of “See how they love one another!”

For this reason, the Association fosters gathering together for its members in knowing one another, in sharing one common spirituality based on the ideal of one apostolic project. Meetings for formation and prayer, gatherings on the diocesan or national levels, *romerías* (street processions), pilgrimages, and so on, all these are good to strengthen such a gathering of the heart “in its depth” which the authentic spirit of communion presupposes.

c) To Evangelize

Mary requested that we spread devotion to the Medal. This is her catechesis. And this is “our” catechesis. More and more we make it clear that presenting the Medal is not to present a miraculous image or talisman. It is to catechize, to give while explaining the content

⁹In reality, this is one thing necessary for every Christian, just as Benedict XVI recently pointed out: “Mystical knowledge and experience of God is not something reserved to exceptional people but rather is for all the baptized.” General Audience celebrated in the Paul VI Salon, Wednesday, September 16, 2009. The AMM assumes, encourages and sets up for its members this mystical experience of God.

of its message which is none other than the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It cannot be given out without catechesis beforehand. Whoever receives it should understand the meaning of each symbol that Mary placed on it. In this way they would speak about her and help others to draw close to Jesus of Nazareth.

d) To serve Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially those who live in poverty

We are convinced that the Virgin Mary appeared to a Daughter of Charity for the very reason that all that encompasses a Daughter's vocation is precisely Jesus Christ serving the most Poor. This was a message for the Poor, for those of simple hearts, able to understand without refusing, and to accept by means of the authority offered. The wider Family, composed of all those who feel inspired by the charism of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, understood it this way from the moment they knew of the apparitions and their message.

The Poor, the sacramental image of Jesus Christ, are the beneficiaries of the Message. The Association knows well that it is their servant.

Within this Vincentian way of thinking, we assume that our task and all our gifts, no matter what kind they be, are totally at the service of people in need. For this reason, activities of material service to the poor are justified, and gathering funds for these development projects and programs, and even to having the Association involved institutionally in a parish's charity program, or similar organizations as occurs in many cases. As well, these activities happen in collaboration with other branches of the Vincentian Family in service of the poor.

The Association understands quite well that it is a Vincentian Association, because the Virgin desires it so. The different branches of the Vincentian Family (Daughters of Charity, Vincentian missionaries, the AIC [Ladies of Charity], Vincentian Marian Youth, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Vincentian Lay Missioners, etc.), each born from the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul — something they have tried to realize and live out in every moment of their history — have always interpreted the Virgin's message to a Daughter of Charity as a call to everyone who lives out the charism of "Service to Jesus Christ in the Poor," or Vincentian charism, so that they would transmit the message of the Medal especially to the Poor and those of simple heart. For this reason, the Medal belongs to everyone, and each member of any branch of the Vincentian Family can also be a member of the AMM.

As a Vincentian Association, the AMM lives out a great concern for the Poor. For this reason, from the Vincentian charism's perspective, not only is the message spread out, but also is concretized in many projects to help others, especially those in great need, financed with whatever help it receives, especially offerings collected during the Home Visit of the Virgin or through letters through the mail. There are many projects to help others, economic assistance or personal assistance, undertaken on all levels to bring about systemic change, both on the global level as well as through service and attention to the most needy on the local level.

3.6. The apostolate of the AMM

The traditional apostolate of the Association has gradually taken form in two ways: in the cultic services in honor of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, and in the Virgin's Home Visit to houses.

a) *The celebrations*

From the beginning the Association has cultivated celebrations both liturgical and popular devotional in honor of Most Blessed Mary. Novenas, triduum, feast days, street processions, the monthly celebration of the 27th, remembering the monthly date when the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830. The Association has always nurtured these activities, taking care to find a priest who, by his preaching or with his reflections, could evangelize the faithful and solemnize public functions. This is still happening today.

There are Sanctuaries which are centers of these AMM devotions. Through them they keep in touch with members who often live large distances away, such as occurs in the United States, in France, in Australia. The connection happens by means of mail, with the sending of donations and intentions, or the reception of bulletins and instructional flyers.

b) *The Home Visit*

Since 1915, when the practice started in Teruel (Spain) of carrying to homes small glass cases displaying the image of the Miraculous Virgin, there have been thousands of home altars which, in a humble but direct way, conveyed a message to families who welcomed this practice one day a month in their homes. How many stories could be told about how the simple presence of the Virgin, in this image, could touch hearts whether they be of her fervent children, her distant children, or even those reluctant to receive her at all. There

are thousands of stories, many found in our magazines, with others known only to her and to those involved.

It would be difficult to find any organization, civil or religious, with such a large and frequent forum for communication. The Association intends to share that message, not only with the presence of the Virgin's image — which is much in itself — but also by means of bulletins, pamphlets, ministerial invitations to prayer, etc., directed at the families visited in addition, to inviting those families to formation talks, catechesis, prayer, and to group celebrations on the 27th of each month and Novenas, Triduums, and Pilgrimages, etc.

The Home Visit exists in many countries, especially in Latin America, where sometimes the daily transfer of the image from one house to another presupposes a true procession with the image of the Virgin carried on *andas* (handheld processional platforms).

One great concern for the Association is to rightly guess about how to do these things well and effectively, in a way consistent with contemporary family Catholic teachings and faithful to the basic catechesis of the Medal.

4. Looking toward the future

Formation concerning the Association's own existence and purpose is possibly the greatest challenge we have today. For a long time now the association developed to fit in with the times and to provide for the spiritual needs of its members. It could have easily fallen into pietism or into an activism centered on easy pastoral activity, such as would have been to carry over a past epoch's home visit altars, or its few people who were participating in a Christian environment, or to do nothing other than just keep on passing out medals. This does not mean that we should be sorry for what has happened. Home visits have produced much good fruit. But now perhaps we need to update this practice to make it not only more suitable for today's Church but also to restate that very same evangelizing message from those apparitions for our own times.

This Jubilee Year of the AMM, convened by the Superior General and just closed this past November 20th in Paris, hopefully has been an occasion to reflect on the AMM's history, now one century. We also hope that this has disposed hearts toward a distant horizon, because the Association still has much to do today and in the future. We rely on the Blessed Virgin's very first urging: "Let an Association be founded..., to which the Holy Virgin will grant many graces. They will be showered with indulgences. They will be very happy."