

# International Meeting of the Brothers: Challenges and Recommendations

Paris, 3 June 2010 – Feast of Corpus Christi

## **350 Years and the Vocation of the Brother Continues**

1. In October, 2007, in Santo Domingo, there was a meeting of brothers of the Congregation. This meeting was organized by the Latin American Conference of the Vincentian Provinces and the participants reflected on the formation and the mission-vocation of the brother. The fruit of this meeting was approved in a document entitled: *Conclusiones y desafíos del 1<sup>er</sup> encuentro de Hermanos vicentinos de América Latina (CLAPVI)* [Conclusions and Challenges of the First Meeting of the Vincentian Brothers in Latin America (CLAPVI)]. As a result of this meeting CIF organized a meeting of the brothers on the international level.
2. From April 9 - June 4, 2010, the International Center of Formation, Saint Vincent de Paul (Paris), sponsored the First Session for Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission. On this occasion twenty-six brothers representing fifteen nationalities gathered together and attempted to renew and up-date their vocation by means of an integral formation. Taking advantage of this opportunity we reflected on the challenges that are placed before the Congregation of the Mission with regard to the mission-vocation of the brother in the present world.
3. Beginning with our own reality within the Congregation, it should be noted that *the number of brothers in the Congregation has decreased. In 1960 there were 510 brothers; in 2009 there were 159. This is a reflection of what is happening in the Church at large. The reason: questions about the role of the brother in the Church.... In Saint Vincent's time the brothers constituted 31% of the members of the Congregation.... In general the brothers in Saint Vincent's era were educated and not simply assistants (servants) to the priests. The greater number of them entered the community*

*because they wanted to live a simple life in the midst of a community of prayer in order to serve the Lord and the poor.*<sup>1</sup>

4. Within the present framework of Vatican II the brothers are called to a fuller participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church, especially in following Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. For this reason the brothers ought to have an integral formation in all areas: human, professional, intellectual, and spiritual. In light of Vatican II the presence of the brothers in the community takes on a new light with regard to their responsibility to build the Kingdom of God and to discover and up-date their role in the Congregation of the Mission.
5. Basing ourselves on the CLAPVI document we have formulated this document in order to share the challenges that we encounter with regard to the mission-vocation of the brother in the Congregation of the Mission. We also offer our recommendations to all our confreres and all the Provinces, taking advantage of the proximity of the 2010 General Assembly so that our reflections might be appraised.

## **Identity and Mission**

6. Following the ideal of Saint Vincent, our Constitutions present our vocation: to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we are clerics and lay persons, Vincentian missionaries.<sup>3</sup>
7. In the majority of countries we are known by the name "Vincentian Fathers." This expression excludes the reality of the brothers and as a consequence, the very nature of the Congregation. We wish to be known as "Vincentian Missionaries."<sup>4</sup>
8. The lay Vincentian missionary has been traditionally called a coadjutor brother. The word "coadjutor" does not appear in our Constitutions. Rather this word stems from a mentality that views the brother as a second-class missionary whose only purpose is to help the priest. We wish to eliminate said word from the vocabulary of the Congregation, and more importantly,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, *Conference: The Brothers in the Congregation, Yesterday and Today*, CIF, Paris 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Constitutions*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Constitutions*, 52 & 1.

we wish to eliminate said mentality. We would like to be known as “Vincentian brothers.”<sup>5</sup>

9. The brother, as a lay person consecrated for the mission, is different from the lay person. This difference is derived from the vows, especially the vow of stability by which the brother commits himself to evangelize the poor for the rest of his life as a member of the Congregation.
10. The brother, as a lay person consecrated for the mission, is different from the consecrated religious in that his vows are not pronounced for the purpose of sanctification but rather are a means to achieve the end of the Congregation.
11. As Vincentian missionaries, clerics and lay persons, we participate in the same mission-vocation. The brother, different than the cleric, ought to live his mission-vocation from the perspective of his consecration as a lay person.

## Profile and Formation

12. In accord with the directives of our Constitutions: missionary candidates in the Congregation have to have an integral formation<sup>6</sup> that takes into account the following vital dimensions of being Vincentian: human, spiritual, intellectual, apostolic and community. It is urgent to rework the two *Ratio Formationis*<sup>7</sup> for the Congregation of the Mission, taking into account the mission-vocation of the brother in all its dimensions. A brother should participate in this Commission.
13. We believe that it would be good for the integration and the formation of Vincentian missionaries to have the priest and brother candidates reside together in the same house during the time of initial formation. It would also be good if during this time a brother could actively participate in the

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<sup>5</sup> *Constitutions*, 52 & 1,2.

<sup>6</sup> *Constitutions*, 91 & 1.

<sup>7</sup> There was a great debate with regard to formulating a *Guide for the Formation of Brothers* and a *Ratio Formationis*. At the end of the discussion the results of the voting were as follows:

14 votes to reformulate the *Ratios* of initial formation that exist in the Congregation;

10 votes to write the Guide;

0 votes to formulate a *Ratio Formationis* exclusively for brothers.

formation process, living in the same house or going there on a regular basis.

14. **Vincentian Dimension:** We believe that Vincentian formation is fundamental in order to form ourselves as Vincentian missionaries. We recognize that we have had little formation in this area because it was not a dimension of our formation and therefore it is necessary to deepen ourselves in this area. It would be good to know about the exemplary life of the brothers in the Congregation, especially those who ministered with Saint Vincent.
15. **Human Dimension:** Historically, and even at the present time, in some provinces the brother is not considered in a serious manner and therefore has low self-esteem. The role of the brother in the Congregation is being recognized but this recognition ought to be increased so that there is a level of equality among all Vincentian missionaries. Brothers, for their part, ought to be aware of this reality and form themselves in order to achieve emotional balance and affective maturity. They should be given motivation and support and should also be open to assistance.
16. **Spiritual Dimension:** Generally our prayer has become a monotonous activity and does not allow us to have a good experience of God. We are attached to the Liturgy of Hours and when this disappears or when work overwhelms us, prayer disappears. In our formation we are lacking a school of Vincentian prayer that introduces us to the need for prayer and that has as its starting point the reality of the poor.
17. **Intellectual Dimension:** In order to achieve the end of the Congregation it would be good to form ourselves adequately:

*General Criteria:* As we have mentioned in #12, it is necessary to have an initial formation that is equal to that of the clerics. We believe this is necessary:

- to deepen ourselves in the spiritual life and to know better Christ evangelizing the poor;
- the poor need the best in order to be evangelized and served;
- it is basic for pastoral ministry;
- the formation of the laity is a priority and an urgent need in the Church. People are better prepared and we must be on a par with them in order to provide them with a qualitative formation;

- it is necessary if we are going to work with the Vincentian Family;
- it will allow the brother to participate in the theological dialogue of the community and in pastoral planning;
- it will help self-esteem and allow us to feel equal to the clerics.

*Particular Criteria:* In special circumstances the formation should be adapted to the ability of the candidate.

18. The Statutes<sup>8</sup> indicate that the missionaries need a special and professional formation that is in accord with the individual's abilities and the need of the mission. In order to better fulfill the end of the Congregation, the brothers are in urgent need of this specialization.
19. **Apostolic Dimension:** Today it is clear that the brother has many and diverse possibilities for apostolic ministry as a Vincentian missionary.
- **In the Congregation:** This has been the traditional environment for the brother's work, providing services in the community. We do not reject simple services, but we believe that now is the time, with adequate preparation, to broaden the horizon of the work to the offices that the clerics have... works that are not dependent on the Sacrament of Orders (treasurer, administrator, formator).
  - **In the Church:** We recognize that the apostolic work of the brother is expanding in this area. We believe that the brother, because of his situation as a lay person and through his encouragement and formation, is able to promote the laity as pastoral agents within the Church. The brother can receive some ministries instituted by the Church (lector and acolyte) without losing his character as a lay vocation.<sup>9</sup>
  - **In the world:** The laity are called to sanctify and evangelize the realities of the world. As a lay person the brother can be the presence of the Church in the midst of these realities (education, health, means of communication...) when this is in accord with the provincial and community plan.
20. **Community Dimension:** Due to the traditional role of the brother, it is possible that the brother has been a passive member in the life of the community, with a tendency to isolate himself.

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<sup>8</sup> *Statutes*, 40 and 48.

<sup>9</sup> *CIC* 230.

Today we ought to be active agents in the building of community.

21. With this understanding we believe that it is necessary that the clerics understand the need to promote the integration of the brothers into the life of the community. We propose that the themes and conclusions of the First Session of CIF for the brothers be studied in community meditations, in the evaluation of community and provincial plans, in formation houses, and in continual formation sessions.
22. For a greater integration of the brother into the life of the Congregation it would be good to assure their presence in Provincial and General Assemblies. We suggest that the General Assembly assure the presence of at least one brother for each Conference of Vincentian Provinces.

### **Vocational Promotion**

23. As indicated in this document, our Vincentian identity is fundamental and thus vocational promotion ought to present, in the first place, God's call to be a Vincentian missionary.
24. It is necessary to prepare the brothers for the ministry of vocational promotion and also to make available materials that present the vocation of the brothers.
25. Whenever possible the brothers ought to participate in the Commission of Vocational Promotion and in specific actions of vocational promotion (meetings, talks, workshops, retreats, etc.).
26. We think that some basic criteria can help in the process of selecting brother candidates. We suggest that a candidate be between the ages of 18-30, have at least a secondary school education,<sup>10</sup> and good physical and psychological health.
27. As has sometimes happened, we think that we should not "force" the candidates to be clerics. The path would be to promote personal discernment, and for that vocational accompaniment is fundamental.

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<sup>10</sup> According to the scholastic program of each country.

**Follow-Up on the Meeting**

28. We believe that it would be good and necessary for the brothers to maintain an on-going communication in order to follow-up on the challenges and the recommendation of the First Session of CIF for Brothers.
29. It would be helpful to organize meetings of Continual Formation for the brothers on the level of individual Provinces, Conferences of Provinces and the international level.