

CEVIM
(CONFERENCE OF VISITORS OF EUROPE
AND THE MIDDLE EAST)

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The Conference of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission of Europe and the Middle East is composed of the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of Europe and the Middle East: Holland, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, Paris, Toulouse, Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Salamanca, Portugal, the Middle East, Turin, Rome, Naples, the Vice Province of Cyril and Methodius and the regional superior of Belgium.

CEVIM was envisioned during the Visitor's meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1989) and held its first meeting in Paris during Easter (1990). From that time the Visitors of Europe and the Middle East have maintained, without interruption, their conference and have met every year in different Provinces during Easter week. We have also come together during the time of the General Assemblies and the meetings of the Visitors of the Congregation.

During the 2004 General Assembly, the missionaries who participated in this gathering, met as a continental group and accepted lines of action with regard to the commitment of the Assembly. This round table highlights the more important lines of action and outlines that path we have traveled, its lights and its shadows.

1. Strengthen the Conference of Visitors of Europe and the Middle East (CEVIM) with new statutes and a new structure

In order to fulfill this commitment, CEVIM studied and finally approved new Statutes for the Conference in 2005 during their meeting in Trier, Germany. The new structure is composed of a Permanent Council which meets three times a years and the President, vice-President and Secretary, who have held office for a longer period of time, have created a more effective way of working together and a more effective means of promoting the different initiatives.

The methodology that was followed during the general session of the Conference involved simultaneous translation in the four

official languages of CEVIM (English, French, Italian, and Spanish). We worked together in language groups to deal with those matters which would lead to specific proposals. All of this has provided us with wider participation in the decision making process and in carrying out our decisions and agreements.

The creation and actualization of the web page CEVIM, through a process of simple permission for the user, allows us to access information and documents and has become an important means for mutual sharing and knowledge.

2. Initiate a European plan for initial and permanent Vincentian formation

This commitment has become real with the creation of an Inter-Provincial Internal Seminary which was agreed upon by eleven European and Middle Eastern Provinces. The other two European provinces have occasionally participated in this project even though they did not sign the agreement. The formation at the seminary is done in one of these areas and languages: French, Italian and Spanish.

The meeting in Rome, January 2008 of the missionaries of CEVIM who work in formation led to an exchange of criteria and mutual knowledge. The Final Document of this meeting makes us aware of the formation processes of the Provinces, moves us toward the consolidation of a solid plan of formation and we are sure that this constitutes a valuable contribution to the revision of the *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation of the Mission.

The CEVIM organized two meetings for young confreres: in Budapest (Hungary) during July 2007 and in Castellnovo (Spain) during June 2008.

In January 2007, CEVIM sponsored a meeting in Zaragoza (Spain) of the provincial treasurers. The General Treasurer of the Congregation participated in this meeting.

In January 2009, CEVIM sponsored a meeting in Naples (Italy) for those missionaries engaged in parish ministry.

All of these meetings had simultaneous translation in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish). This is one of the primary difficulties that we encounter during these meetings since the translation of the documents and interventions involves a costly infrastructure and laborious human effort.

CEVIM is planning to hold, by linguistic areas, a continental session on Systemic Change with the participation of the coordinators and advisors of the different groups of the Vincentian Family. This will take place after the General Assembly of 2010.

3. Promote collaboration with the Vincentian Family and other Organizations that are working in Brussels so that we can participate in projects of social solidarity with the European community

In successive sessions of the Conference of Visitors of CEVIM we studied ways to carry out this commitment that we made at the 2004 General Assembly. Finally, in the session that was held in Krakow during Easter 2008, which included the participation of Maritchu Ral, the European representative of the International Association of Charity, CEVIM agreed:

Aware of the importance of the participation of the Vincentian Family when making decisions that affect peoples lives, above all the poor,

a) The Visitors of CEVIM, through the Permanent Council, will maintain contact with and collaboration with the representatives of the AIC which by statute enjoys participation in European organizations.

b) The secretary of CEVIM will communicate to the Visitors information that may be of interest to the Provinces and the requests for information solicited by representatives of the AIC.

c) Each one of the Visitors can communicate to the representative of the AIC concerns, information or petitions related to persons or groups that are most neglected in their countries.

d) The Conference of Visitors of CEVIM will promote collaboration by reflecting upon the Vincentian response to poverty and by encouraging the AIC groups in each country.

This relationship is producing fruits, though not easily measured, with regard to sensitivity and participation of the Visitors and the missionaries in making decision that effect the poor.

4. Promote meetings for study and exchange of ideas among the confreres to examine the phenomenon of immigration and Islam in Europe and to do this from a common Vincentian perspective

CEVIM celebrated their annual conference in Istanbul (Turkey) 2006 and dedicated several sessions to the phenomena of immigration and Islam in Europe. The meeting of 2009 was held in Beirut (Lebanon) and focused on the same phenomena.

The provinces have agreed to an exchange of some missionaries in order to respond with greater competency to these new realities.

Certainly this commitment should be made more concrete in the coming years.

5. Promote an exchange of confreres among the European provinces

The Visitors must come to a concrete agreement in order to actualize this commitment that was assumed in the 2004 Assembly.

In fact, the provinces of CEVIM have, during these last years, promoted an exchange of missionaries with some positive results.

The most significant inter-provincial collaboration (not only an exchange of missionaries) has become visible during recent years, especially in relation to the Vincentian Family.

This commitment must also be further developed during the coming years.

6. Other Commitments

At the time of the 2004 General Assembly, CEVIM formulated some commitments to be pursued on a local and provincial level. I limit myself here to recalling those commitments:

- To be mindful of the vocational dimension in all our apostolic activities.
- To promote in the European provinces a common style of evangelization and charitable activity.
- To promote community relations of friendship, confidence and respect.
- To promote the spiritual and Vincentian life of the members of the community.

Finally, CEVIM has taken on other commitments which, though not explicit commitments during the 2004 Assembly, have contributed to our creative fidelity to the mission:

- Mutual invitation among the Provinces to participate in the retreats organized by the Provinces.
- Supporting the Vice-Province of Saint Cyril and Methodius and the mission in Albania.
- Reflection in order to respond to the urgent mission needs of Turkey, Romania, and Greece.

Together with the commitments that are stated here and the accomplishments that we were able to achieve, there is no doubt that the Spirit wishes to invite us to break new ground. But I ought to stop here since I have been asked to review the past, to outline the path we have traveled during the past six years.