

# FORMATION OF THE LAITY IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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I am thankful to Father Gregory Gay, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, for inviting me to participate in this panel.

## 1. Lay Formation, a recurrent theme and a constant concern

During the last Encounter of on-going formation and renewal of life (April 12-16, 2010) in the Province of Rio de Janeiro, the Vincen-tian Missionaries who are ministering in different works spoke in small groups, as well as during plenary sessions, about the impor-tance and the need of formation for our mission and for the laity.

At this time we are living in a rich environment of experiences in the area of lay formation, an environment that points out the need for a better and more organized formation (a system of formation plans and programs) in order to respond to the needs of the present realities, in order to attend to the demands of the laity and thus realign our human and financial resources.

## 2. Foundation

**a) Article 1.3. of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission states:** *we shall help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.*

We have defined missionary ends that we want to achieve. Among these ends is the preparation of people for pastoral ministry in the future, especially the preparation of leaders for diverse ministries. This means that we help to prepare people for different pastoral ministries: priests, deacons, brothers, religious women, catechists, teachers, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, music ministers, youth ministers, etc. The preparation of other ministers of the clergy and the laity for a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor is one of the principle ways of achieving the end of the Congregation of the Mission.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LAURO PALÚ, *Dimensão apostólica e pastoral de nossa vida*, Encontro de Formação Permanente e Revisão de Vida na PBCM, 12-16/04/2010.

**b) The Statute of the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission**, Article 3 refers to the activities that are undertaken by the Province:

- To promote courses, talks, congresses, seminars, symposiums and conferences;
- To offer and foment education for good citizenship;
- To offer and support activities of formation and promotion in communities where this is lacking;
- To promote beneficent, philanthropic activities that are directed toward assisting those in need, activities that promote collectivity, the common good, and social concern. This involves the concession of gratuities for contributing their services and for providing the use of their moveable and unmoveable goods.

The formation of volunteers in the Province of Rio de Janeiro is moving toward a social solidarity among citizens. That is, the individual with a bond of solidarity with other citizens, with the guidance of a Social Service professional, with a critical awareness of the reality, with an ability to work with individuals in the process of social participation... such individuals engage in complimentary activities of social assistance that are directed toward the population that is socially excluded. This is a citizen who is aware of the political and social reality. This is an ethical social individual who is convinced of the importance of human dignity and life, who is not indifferent to the reality of selfishness and the lack of solidarity in the capitalist society. Thus, this is an individual who is inclined toward social transformation and human-social development.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. General Principles

“Our process of formation is dialectical: it does not divide but harmoniously integrates prayer and action, faith and life, and does this on different levels and in dealing with the specific content of each level. Thus formation consists of a movement of integration that is complimentary, enriching and more productive.”<sup>3</sup>

In the first place formation seeks the sanctification of the laity in their specific and proper vocation. Every Christian adult, mature in the faith ought to be a witness of the transforming encounter that

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<sup>2</sup> JAIRO MELO ARAUJO, *Voluntariado: na contramão dos direitos sociais*, Cortez, São Paulo 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Diretrizes Básicas para a Formação na PBCM, 3.

flows from a personal relationship with the Lord and a commitment to the mission that was carried out by the Son of God who became incarnate and lived in the world: to evangelize the poor.

#### 4. Constant Concerns – Principles

**a) Vincentian identity:** *“Christ and the poor are the essential and indispensable perspectives of Vincentian formation and the sources of true formation.”*<sup>4</sup>

**b) Begin with the reality** of the poor and the reality of the agents of transformation (lay missionaries and Vincentian volunteers). To seek concrete responses and transformations for the challenges presented by these realities.

**c) Integral formation.** To carry this out it is necessary to be mindful of Christological-Trinitarian elements, mystical, human, communitarian, relational elements, attentive to the sign of the times and the reality of the poor and the community.<sup>5</sup>

**d) Team work and fraternal life** in accord with the Vincentian charism and Vincentian spirituality.

**e) Generate new multipliers.** Mature Christian and Vincentian individuals who are willing to become involved in the recruitment and formation of new missionary followers of Jesus Christ.

#### 5. General and specific formation

We are firmly convinced that formation does not occur and cannot be limited to courses (whether, long, short or medium in their duration), seminars, congresses and other activities of this type. Formation accompanies people in every moment and condition of life and includes every dimension of their existence, that is, human-christian, communitarian, spiritual, apostolic and Vincentian. The local community is the place where the laity will encounter the specific sphere for their formation because it is there where they live and ordinarily where they are involved in the mission.

Within this broad process it is important to develop a specific formation so that the laity can make a specialized contribution to ministry and confront specific problems with regard to the Vincentian mission.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Síntesis del Encuentro Internacional de Visitadores de la CM, México 4-14/06/2007.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **6. Levels of formation**

In the Province of Rio de Janeiro, lay formation involves three levels:

### **a) Permanent Accompaniment**

- branches of the Vincentian Family, appointed or chosen spiritual advisors for the Vincent de Paul Society, AIC, AMM, VMY, MISEVI, and others
- other works: missions, parishes, schools, and others

### **b) Systematic Formation (evangelization and human promotion)**

- classes that involve theological courses
- publication of books and articles
- courses in theological-missionary-Vincentian formation (Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro)
- post-mission
- social projects developed in areas where there is a lack of resources
- education of young people and adults (Saint Vincent de Paul School, Rio de Janeiro)
- social center Padre Raimundo Gonçalves
- financing of formation courses and activities

### **c) Occasional activities (talks, retreats, formation encounters, etc.)**

- pastoral ministries, movements, parishes and diocese
- Congregations of Religious Women, Brazilian Conference of Religious (CRB)

## **PROJECTS OF LAY FORMATION:**

### **two experiences**

#### **1. Course of Vincentian Missionary Formation**

##### **Responsible:**

Vincentian Family, Region of Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro.

##### **Objectives:**

1. Provide the laity with a greater understanding of the missionary vocation: the objective and content of the evangelizing

mission of the Church, and specifically, the popular mission of the Vincentian Family.

2. Strengthen the missionary spirit for service together with the poor.
3. Seek responses to the challenges that are presented to the Vincentian mission with regard to the social, political, economic and cultural realities.
4. Capacitate pastoral ministers for the popular missions of shorter duration.

**Beneficiaries:**

Lay people committed to the evangelizing mission in the church, preferentially with the poor; lay people committed to works in the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family, especially those who participate in the missions of the Vincentian Family. Minimum age: 16.

**Organization of the Course:**

Initial Formation (Basic Course) is offered in two modules with the following way: eight bi-weekly encounters of three hours.

On-going formation occurs through seminars. Each participant registers for two seminars a year. Each seminar is composed of four encounters that take place bi-weekly and the session is for three hours (one theme is dealt with).

**Places where these are undertaken:**

Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro.

**Finances:**

Financed by the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

**Subsidy:**

Each participant is asked to contribute 5.50 to cover costs of photo-copying and refrigeration.

**Content:**

- Integration of the participants
- Sacred Scripture
- Introduction to Ecclesiology: the Church of Vatican II and the Latin American Church
- Vincentian Studies
- Liturgy

- Methodology of the Vincentian Popular Mission
- The reality of being missioned
- Spirituality: spiritual retreat
- Sociology: analysis of the Brazilian reality

## **2. Volunteers of the Social Projects**

### **Responsible:**

The Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

### **Objective:**

To capacitate the volunteers who develop activities in the area of social projects in the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

### **Beneficiaries:**

Volunteers involved in the social projects.

At the present time we develop reflection activities on Vincentian volunteer work into three groups:

- Volunteers of the CPF Project (Building and Preparing for the Future)
- Students embarking on social projects (students in the middle school and the Saint Vincent de Paul School)
- MAS groups (Multipliers of Social Action) – a group of mothers and friends of the Saint Vincent de Paul School.

### **Organization:**

Formation and spirituality encounters at least twice a year.

### **Content:**

The work themes in these encounters are developed with the methodology of Vincentian social action. Initially we contextualize the life and work of Saint Vincent de Paul. Then we begin and continue a study of the five virtues and reflect on the practical application of these virtues in our lay personal and community life.