

ONGOING FORMATION AT CIF

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A brief History

After Vatican II the need for ongoing formation of confreres was discussed in many General Assemblies. Finally the Assembly of 1992 decreed that a center for such a program should be established. After his election, Fr. Bob Maloney declared, "We will not discuss the question of a Formation Center anymore, we will establish one." As a result two confreres were recruited for the project: John Rybolt of the then U.S. Mid-West Province and Jean-Pierre Renouard of Toulouse. A bit later Luis Alfonso Sterling of Colombia joined the team. Thus, the Centre International de Formation-Saint Vincent de Paul was born. It found home at the Maison Mère here in Paris. The first session was held from September 4 to December 9, 1994. In 1996 Jean Pierre Renouard returned to Toulouse and his post was taken over by Kasimierz Stelmach of Poland. In that same year Luis Alfonso Sterling returned to Colombia. In the beginning of 1999 Kasimierz Stelmach was replaced by Florian Kapusciak. Later in the year Juan Julián Díaz Catalán took the place of Florian Kapusciak. In 2003, after nine years as director John Rybolt was replaced by Hugh O'Donnell. In 2008, also after nine years as Assistant Director Juan Julián was replaced by José Carlos Fonsatti. Last year Marcelo Manimtim replaced Hugh O'Donnell as director. You see, the team at CIF is rather young.

Aims of CIF

The mission of CIF is to cultivate the vocation of each confrere to follow Christ the evangelizer of the poor as a member of the Congregation. This basic mission is realized in the following objectives.

1. To deepen the personal commitment of each participant. A deeper appreciation of St. Vincent and the Constitutions and the experience of community among the participants contribute to this personal renewal. According to the former directors, the objective of personal renewal is achieved through the

experience itself rather than through specific sessions focusing on personal renewal. Many participants liken the experience at CIF to that of the Internal Seminary.

2. To help the participants to know each other. At CIF we witness how the gifts and goodness of the confreres break through the barriers of language, culture and background. Here is the dynamics: in the time that they spend together confreres spontaneously build community.

I would like to make a point here. The personal renewal and the community building that happen at CIF depends significantly on the readiness and conditioning of each participant. CIF is designed neither for therapeutic treatment nor for spiritual direction. Yet the wonderful things that have been happening do happen because of what the participants bring and contribute to the session. CIF is a place not so much where one looks for a solution to a problem. Rather it is a place where one deepens his commitment to missionary life.

3. To promote the unity and internationality of the Congregation. When confreres from different parts of the world come together they realize that amid the variances in formation due to cultural adaptation, they possess the same spirit and aspiration. At the same time, the experience of community at CIF gives the participants a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves and their own provinces. CIF provides the setting for an experience of a truly international community.
4. To promote inter-provincial collaboration. Ways in which this happens: confreres enrich each other by living and forming community, confreres from different provinces share their expertise and experience, provinces support the participation of other provinces through the scholarship fund. We wish that when the participants go back to their own provinces they would undertake initiatives that would further collaboration with confreres from other provinces they have met at CIF.

Programs of CIF

1. The backbone of the CIF is the three-month long program of ongoing formation. Aspects of Vincentian life as covered by the Constitutions and Statutes are treated with in-depth presentations by experts. This is enriched by a look into St. Vincent and his life, the history of the Congregation and complemented by visits to the Vincentian places.

2. The Heritage Program started in 2000. This is intended for confreres who have considerable experience of community life and ministry. Here, there is less input from “experts;” instead, the participants are the experts who share their experience.
3. Servant Leadership Training. This was designed as a response to the felt need for leadership training among the confreres. The first leadership program in 2006 was for local superiors and other local leaders; the second in 2008, for Visitors and other provincial level leaders.
4. Session for Brothers. You have heard of the first international gathering of the Brothers on the congregational level. This was done in the context of ongoing formation. The Brother-participants look forward to continuing the contact and collaboration among the Brothers in the Congregation.

Our Proposals

The numbers show that there is still room for more sessions at CIF, either for the long session or for the Heritage session. There are reasons why certain provinces are not able to send confreres in greater numbers.

1. It is difficult to free confreres for three months. Yet with advanced planning this can be done. We acknowledge the efforts made by provinces. Because confreres could not be freed for three months, they come for the shorter Heritage session.
2. The course as it is done in Paris is expensive. At the moment the cost of participation is 5.000 euros for the long session and 2.000 euros for the Heritage session. That is a stiff price for many provinces, but especially for those which may have the numbers to send but find themselves with severe financial limitations. The numbers we have provided show that the potential candidates for CIF programs may be coming from these provinces.

There is an existing scholarship fund. Each year CIF receives from the General Curia 10.500 euros. This is complemented by donations from some generous provinces. The practice we follow is to offer half-scholarship to provinces which request them, i.e., 2.500 euros per participant for the long session and 1.000 euros for the Heritage session. What we have is sorely limited, as Visitors in increasing numbers have asked for scholarship.

What can we do?

CIF is an organ created to answer the need of ongoing formation of confreres in the level of the Congregation. If we believe that the confreres are our greatest resources and that ongoing formation of confreres is of vital importance, we need to pull our resources together.

1. We would like to encourage the provinces to make the sacrifice for the future by freeing up confreres so that they can take part in the programs at CIF. Financial assistance may be sought from aid institutions outside of the Congregation. We understand that, in many instances, it is far easier to secure funding for projects of apostolates than for formation of our members. There exist, however, possibilities that provinces can tap into.
2. Participation at CIF by confreres from poorer provinces have been helped by generous contributions of certain provinces. We would like to continue to appeal to the provinces to the sharing of resources by contributing to the scholarship fund of CIF.
3. This Assembly may recommend to the Superior General and his Council some specific ways in which the ongoing formation of confreres is supported for the long term in the congregational level.

We have another proposal: that the program of CIF be opened to other members of the Vincentian Family. In the past we had participants among the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy, Vincentian Congregation and several lay persons. We will continue with the sessions of ongoing formation programs for confreres. At the same time, however, we will address the expressed need of Vincentian formation from among the leaders of the other branches of the Vincentian Family. This will be a new program since the program for confreres is centered around the Constitutions and Statutes. We can design a program in collaboration with representatives from the other branches of the Vincentian Family. They will help us define more concretely the needs of more diversified participants as well as devise the content and methodology that would best answer those needs.

Thank you so much for your attention.