

V - CONCLUDING DOCUMENTS

SYNTHESIS

“CREATIVE FIDELITY FOR THE MISSION”

1. The 41st General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission is being held in Paris during the year that marks the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Sts. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. The choice of the city where the two inaugurated new ways of mission and charity is an added challenge to us to achieve the theme we have set for ourselves: Creative Fidelity to the Mission (*Constitutions 2*).
2. Gathered from all parts of the world, we acknowledge ourselves to be holders of a legacy that seeks to reinvigorate itself in new forms in a constantly changing world. A new methodology seems to be called for that favors dialogue and exchange of experiences of service and evangelization of the poor. For our part, we are urged to break down fear, nostalgia for the past, apathy and disillusion, and put greater trust in the Holy Spirit who continues to act in each of us. The liturgical celebrations and prayers, rich with international color, language and rhythms, not only enrich our coming together but invoke the Lord to guide our reflections, steady us through our mistakes, and prompt us to respond to the future with courage, enthusiasm and generosity.

THE LORD CALLS US IN THE CRY OF THE POOR

3. Fidelity to our charism means to follow Christ's love and service of the poor. The poor come alive to us through the videos that punctuate every session. The poor are not mere categories; they are real people with real needs and suffering. They speak to us because they trust that we will listen to them, hear their stories, and not turn our backs on them. Our response will go beyond the minute of interiorisation, the personal prayers and

liturgical celebrations. Like St. Vincent who saw the face of Christ in the poor of his time and went about remedying their suffering, we will be courageous enough to share their poverty. Moved by love, we will go where the poor call us, even where others have not dared to go, and find ever creative ways of meeting their needs.

4. Who are we who try to respond to the needs of the poor? We are “wounded healers.” We see a diminishing number of members in some provinces, hopeful increase in others. In some communities, confreres experience disenchantment, while others search for fulfillment in ministry outside of the community. All this demands of us to reassess the meaning of our being a community for the mission: brothers who are dear friends (*Common Rules* 8.2), solicitous for the well-being of one another, recognising the dignity of Brothers and promoting their full participation in community life and the apostolate as Vincentian missionaries, caring for those who are sick and in difficult situations, sharing faith and strengthening each other mutually in prayer. The Lord calls us to live and form each other in community. Grateful for what the Lord continues to accomplish through us, we are encouraged to offer our way of life as worthwhile for others to adopt and follow.
5. The Lord blesses our efforts to be faithful to our mission. With our limitations yet with generous efforts, we see examples of creative ministries of our confreres in:
 - a) Attention to the poor in extreme situations of poverty;
 - b) Moving from crisis intervention to processes of rehabilitation;
 - c) Responses to the challenge of new evangelization: e.g. to the unchurched, to the youth;
 - d) Renewed means of popular mission: itinerant mission and missions to indigenous peoples;
 - e) Offers of holistic education as a way of liberation;
 - f) Formation of the clergy and laity for the service of the Church; ministry to the clergy beyond the seminary apostolate;
 - g) Dialogue with culture in the world today, engagement in ecumenism, and work for justice and peace.
6. We acknowledge the diminished presence or, in some cases, the absence of our confreres in traditional ministries like popular missions and seminary work. On the one hand, this may be due to demographic, cultural and religious changes. On the other, they are challenges for us to discover or re-examine pastoral

responses to the new forms of poverty. Seeing what the Lord has done and is doing through us, we, in the manner of St. Vincent, would like to do and be “more” for the poor. The call to creativity is, for us, at the service of fidelity to the mission.

RESPONDING IN GREATER CREATIVITY TO MISSION AND CHARITY

7. All our persons and our possessions belong to the poor if we truly believe, beyond simply saying, that they are our lords and masters. **Ongoing formation** looks into disposing the best of our resources, the confreres, toward evangelization and service of the poor. This disposition explains the passion with which we continuously configure ourselves with Christ, the evangelizer of the poor, a process that involves transformation of the whole person. We see the community as the place where we appreciate our gifts, encourage initiatives and develop our abilities for community life and ministry. In this endeavor, the normative texts serve as guides for action and we avail of all the opportunities offered in the local communities, within the provinces, and in the whole Congregation.
8. The **material resources of the community** are the patrimony of the poor, St Vincent reminds us. The wise management of resources, on the one hand, must conform to the basic rules of justice within the community and, on the other, assure the viability of the work of mission and charity. Ancillary structures within the Congregation, like the Vincentian Solidarity Office, support the projects of the community by entering into partnership with donors/funding organizations and ensuring an equitable and effective distribution of resources. As in the time of St. Vincent we bring a larger group of people into the circle of mission and charity.
9. A more effective service of the poor wherever they are found demands that we strengthen the **collaboration in the worldwide congregation**. This is expressed in several ways:
 - a) At the level of Conferences of Provinces there are shared programs of initial formation, ongoing formation of strategic personnel (superiors, economies, formators, spiritual directors, young confreres, etc.), promotion of Vincentian spirituality, collaboration in missions *ad gentes*, stabilization of internal structures of Conferences, and greater communication between Provinces.

- b) Common concerns are also taken up in particular Conferences: secularization and re-evangelization, religious fundamentalisms, flight from the Church to evangelical groups, ethnic tribalism and inter-cultural intolerance, and localizing the “face” of Vincentian charism and formation, the Word of God as key element in evangelization and formation.
- c) Initiatives within the provinces or conferences that benefit the whole congregation also abound: exchange of personnel, support of formation of confreres in other provinces, advancement of Vincentian studies.
10. To achieve creative fidelity to the mission is the underlying reason for **reconfiguration** in the community. In the highest level, the internal reorganization of the General Curia, with specific responsibilities for each Assistant General, is a response to the need of more effective coordination of the concerns of the whole Congregation. The revision of Statutes is a normative response to the shifting landscape of personnel distribution and pastoral commitment that occurs in the Congregation. Reconfiguration is a creative response when it directs personnel and resources for more effective mission and charity rather than mere maintenance or consolidation of structures and programs that may have seen their usefulness. It finds justification in resources that are not only better utilized but even strengthened, in a revitalized sense of belonging to the community and a renewed sense of fulfillment among confreres of even diminished number.
11. **Systemic Change** subscribes to the view that there are not only poor persons but that in societies, there are structures that keep the poor oppressed and impoverished. As a pastoral practise it focuses on breaking the cycle of poverty in its causes and empowers the poor to take responsibility and direction for their destiny.
- St. Vincent told the confreres, *If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others* (Conference of December 6, 1658). Systemic change is a framework for organized and effective charity. It involves the interrelationship between proclaiming God’s word, pastoral activities and engagement with systems that affect the poor. Projects of systemic change put us in collaboration with persons, agencies and institutions outside of the community. We must, therefore, constantly discern on the

implications of such collaboration on our community life and on the extent of our engagement with these agencies and institutions.

12. **The Vincentian Family** is formed by laypersons and communities of consecrated life that are inspired by the life and charism of Vincent and share the *ethos* of loving service of the poor. What unites all the members of the family is the passionate love for the poor after the manner of Sts. Vincent and Louise. In serving the poor we experience that we have a lot to learn from each other, not least our being evangelized by the very poor that we serve. Collaboration is built on respect for the distinctness of mission of each branch and the competence of its leaders. At the same time we hear the expressed need of animation of leaders and their formation in Vincentian spirituality. Collaboration is to be sought at all levels in order to guarantee the essential: that the poor are served as a revelation of the love of the compassionate God.