

Circular letter on the occasion of the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul 2019



Rome, 12 August 2019
Birthday of Saint Louise de Marillac

To all the members of the Vincentian Family.

My dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

In 2017, we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian Charism. We gave thanks to Jesus for keeping the charism alive, for the many women and men from diverse walks of life who dedicated themselves over these four centuries and for those who continue the unconditional service of Christ in the person of the poor every day with so much commitment, passion, and love.



Because of its divine inspiration, the Vincentian Charism always shows us the path to respond to the needs of the ever-increasing number of people in the world who are abandoned, living on the margins of society, and neglected spiritually, materially, physically, emotionally. As one of the fruits of the Jubilee year, we, members of the different branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family, wished to launch an initiative that would help us deepen our collaboration and effectiveness in responding to the “cry of the poor.”

To this end, we inaugurated the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) during the October 2017 Vincentian Family Symposium in Saint Peter’s Square, in the presence of Pope Francis. The FHA is a worldwide initiative focusing on homelessness in its many forms. It supports Vincentian Family members in addressing one of the most pressing needs of our time so we can ‘welcome the stranger’ in our communities.

Service of the homeless is not something new for the branches of the Vincentian Family. For a long time, they have been involved in successfully responding to these tremendous needs in an effort to end homelessness around the world.

This initiative intends to bring all 150 branches of the Vincentian Family together in the fight against homelessness. The FHA is coordinated by an international board; a commission with international membership accompanies the FHA in all the countries around the world. Specific goals include learning from each other, helping one another, and acting together in direct assistance to the homeless, as well as collaborating in advocacy, thus becoming a stronger and more effective force. To help us achieve the goals, the Commission of the FHA offers many tools for tackling a phenomenon affecting 1.2 billion people worldwide.

When we speak of homeless persons, we have three groups in mind:

- a) people who live on the streets
- b) refugees who are displaced from their homes
- c) people living in substandard housing.

None of them has a real home and is, consequently, homeless.

I am very grateful for the progress made so far. In particular, I would like to mention three initiatives: 1) the vibrant and successful Vincentian International Conference on Homelessness (Rome, November 2018); 2) the Vincentian Family’s influence in making homelessness the priority theme of a major United Nations meeting (Commission for Social Development, January 2020 session) for the first time; and 3) the growing collaborative participation in the FHA’s 13 Houses Campaign.

The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul this year, at the beginning of the 5th century of the Vincentian Charism, thus becomes a wonderful opportunity to deepen engagement in the FHA and our cooperation across branches, or to start participating and collaborating in this initiative. The goal is to involve all the branches of the Vincentian Family: congregations, lay associations, and societies in all 158 countries where the Vincentian Family is present.

Many branches of the Vincentian Family already are engaged very actively in the FHA. Many are still on the way.

With this letter, in view of preparations to celebrate the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul in all countries where the Vincentian Family is present, I would like to invite the National Councils of the Vincentian Family to unite their members. In countries where one does not yet exist, I encourage one of the leaders to call a meeting of all the representatives of the different branches. In either case, it is for a very concrete goal: engaging together in the FHA project.

Branches of the Vincentian Family might participate in the FHA in various ways:

- 1) Provide information to the FHA on your homelessness projects. This will allow the FHA to map our collective global impact, proving the strength of the Vincentian Family's homelessness ministry.
- 2) Offer your expertise to the wider Vincentian Family. The FHA is looking for projects that could welcome a young leader for a short exchange to gain experience. You could also engage in partnerships with other groups involved in the homelessness sector.
- 3) Engage in research, conversations, and learning opportunities that can help us better grasp the reality of the many devastating refugee crises, too often forgotten.



In addition to the three above-mentioned points, for the upcoming Feast of Saint Vincent, I would like to encourage all countries where the “13 Houses Campaign” has yet to begin to take concrete steps to launch it. The “13 Houses Campaign” is one of FHA’s projects that directly affects the lives of homeless persons.

The name “13 Houses” comes from an initiative of Saint Vincent de Paul in response to the devastating poverty in Paris in his time. Together with the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Ladies of Charity (AIC), he had built 13 houses for children without one.

The goal of the “13 Houses Campaign” is to engage the branches of the Vincentian Family in a given country to build together homes for those who do not have one. The number of houses or the creative ways to find accommodations for the homeless will differ from country to country. In some countries, the Vincentian Family may build two or ten houses; in others, more than thirteen. In any case, we can all take part in the so-called “13 Houses Campaign.” The Commission of the FHA is ready and eager to help make this a reality thanks to its expert team to help you plan and design your project and, if needed, to help you find funds for it

through twinning, partnerships, the Solidarity Fund, or grant writing.

I encourage all the international, national, and local leaders of the different branches of the Vincentian Family, together as a branch on the international level or separately on the national or local area, to get in touch with the coordinating committee member Mrs. Yasmine Cajuste (fha.info@famvin.org) to send or receive information. You also can visit the FHA website: vfhomelessalliance.org.

Here is a link to a video encouraging participation in the “13 Houses Campaign”:

<https://youtu.be/42xwaMfCjO4>.

I hope that, for all members of the Vincentian Family, the annual celebration of the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul will help us to work ever more effectively in the service of the poor. As we engage with persons in need, others help carry our needs. It becomes a holy exchange, a holy ground.

May Saint Vincent de Paul, the “Mystic of Charity,” help us to grow more and more in our relationship with God and the poor, enlightened by the Spirit and with an increased desire to become Mystics of Charity ourselves.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



Tomaž Mavrič, CM,
*President of the
Vicentian Family Executive Committee.*