

History of the National Conference of the Visitors of the US (NCV)

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In December 1973 Fr. James Richardson, CM, Superior General, met with the Vincentian Provincials of the US and expressed the desire that they take responsibility for translating into English the 14 volumes of St. Vincent's *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*. From all accounts this meeting was the unofficial beginning of the National Conference of Visitors in the US.

The five American Visitors began to meet annually. After their meeting in Chicago with the Superior General in 1973, they met in Dublin with the English-speaking delegates of the General Assembly in 1974. The 1975 meeting was held in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and the city of St. Louis was the site for the 1976 meeting.

In 1977 the meeting of the English-speaking Visitors was held in Houston, Texas. Present at this meeting were the five American Visitors, Fr. James Richardson, CM, Superior General, Fr. Rafael Sáinz, CM, Vicar General, Fr. Farid Jabre, CM, Province of the Orient, Fr. Richard McCullen, CM, Province of Ireland, and Fr. Keith Turnbull, CM, Province of Australia. At this meeting Fr. Richardson reminded the participants that he had suggested regional meetings of Visitors at the General Assembly of 1974. At that time there was not much response to his suggestion so in later communications to the provinces the Superior General said that he and the assistants were prepared to attend regional meetings. The presence of the Superior General or his delegate at the annual meeting of the American Visitors has continued to this day.

In 1978 the five American Visitors formed an association called the Vincentian Conference. It was decided at that meeting to initiate a three-year cycle for meetings. The first year the American Visitors would meet by themselves; the second year the Visitors of Ireland and Australia would be invited and in the third year, which will alternately coincide with the General Assemblies, a meeting of the five American Visitors and the Visitor of Ireland with the Visitors of Asia would be proposed. The Conference decided to name its president on a rotating annual basis.

Even in these early days of the Conference, the possibility of interprovincial cooperation was discussed in the following areas: formation program, vocation recruitment, seminars on Vincentian spirituality, rural ministry

and exchange of personnel. By the October 1979 meeting in Los Angeles, California, the American Visitors reviewed and approved the Constitutions and Bylaws of the Vincentian Studies Institute. Also at that meeting Fr. James Richardson, Superior General, stated that the authority for the project of the translation of the works of St. Vincent lies in the hands of the American Visitors.

The first meeting of the VSI was in March 1980 in Northampton, Pennsylvania, at which the Visitors expressed the desire to meet more regularly with the Visitatrixes of the Daughters of Charity. Discussions began on possible future cooperation in formation programs, handling investments in accord with social justice, programs of continuing education and vocation recruitment. One can see in hindsight the beginnings of a discussion of a national mission plan.

By this time in the history of the Conference, the American Visitors agreed that their annual meetings were very helpful as times for mutual sharing, for focusing on the present situation, and for planning for the future. Such is the narrative history of the National Conference of Visitors. These early years of the National Conference of Visitors in the US planted seeds for our present garden in the year 2002.

From the beginning of the Conference until 1992, the Visitors met once a year. With the inclusion of the five Visitatrixes from the Daughters of Charity of the US on the governing board of the Vincentian Studies Institute the meetings began to be held twice a year. After the General Assembly of 1998 it was decided that the Visitors and Visitatrixes should include representative leaders from the branches of the Vincentian Family in their meeting.

With the passage of time the NCV has continued to expand its workload. Ongoing involvement includes the following: the Vincentian Translation Project, the Vincentian Studies Institute, the Common Novitiate, a relationship with CLAPVI, meetings of formators, a National Convocation, etc. In 1997 at a meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, the Superior General, Rev. Robert Maloney, CM, asked the Visitors to begin considering some form or reconfiguration of the American Provinces. A national committee was formed, and for the next three and a half years many surveys, town meetings, and other forms of consultation occupied the time of the Visitors and all the confreres in the US. At the end of 2001 each confrere in the US had the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire about the reconfiguration of the provinces. The responses from the confreres were given to the Superior General at the National Convocation in San Antonio, Texas, in January 2002.

After examining with the members of the General Council all of the letters and responses to the questionnaires, the Superior General invited the five Visitors of the USA, as well as two Visitors-Elect to come to Rome for a final

consultation. The result of that final consultation was the establishment of the National Conference of the Visitors of the US (NCV). In making this decision the Superior General had the unanimous consent of the members of the General Council and also the unanimous support of the five Visitors and the two Visitors-Elect. The central mandate for the Conference is given in Article 4 of the decree. “Within the next three years, using a broad based consultation process, the National Conference will develop, and provide a report to the Superior General on, a mission-driven plan for: a. the renewal of community prayer and community life in the houses of the Congregation of the United States; b. the Apostolic works of the entire United States; c. vocation, ministry and formation in the United States.” The National Conference of Visitors will now have a President appointed by the Superior General for a three-year period. It will also meet at least three times a year, rotating its meetings throughout the five Provinces. “While respecting the right of individual provinces to initiate and pursue plans of their own in regard to interprovincial collaboration or reconfiguration, the National Conference, at some time within the next five years, will formulate a recommendation to the Superior General about the next step, if any, to be taken in the process of reconfiguring the provinces of the United States” (Article 6).

At the October 2002 Conference meeting in St. Louis with the Superior General present the Visitors approved the Statutes for the Conference and began the planning for the implementation of the national mission-driven plan called for in the Superior General’s decree, which was effective July 2002.

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