

APRIL 2020



NUNTIA

Newsletter of the Congregation of the Mission

“VINCENT HELPS”: ORGANIZING IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

The Philippines is a country frequently visited by calamities such as typhoons, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, fire and the latest pandemic. Indeed, there is never a year when one of these catastrophes has not wreaked havoc on our people especially the most vulnerable. There are even years when these occur simultaneously or one after another within a short period of time. The DC and CM groups and the Vincentian Family branches are almost constantly on their feet to respond creatively and collaboratively whenever the need arises. Below is an example of one such initiative.

Early this year—January 12 to be exact—the sudden eruption of Taal Volcano in the tourist city of Tagaytay caught everyone by surprise. This calm and scenic volcano’s last eruption was in 1977. The Vincentian Family immediately rose to action. Led mainly by the CMs, the DCs, and a good number of volunteers, they organized relief assistance by creating “Vincent Helps”. They made daily trips to Tagaytay City and nearby towns of Batangas Province to offer facemasks, food provisions and water to the affected residents temporarily housed in public schools and covered courts. Towards the end of the relief operations, they started planning the long-term rehabilitation of the most vulnerable evacuees—the residents of the volcano island itself. Two Vincentian social workers

(a CM and a DC) joined the Local Government Units (LGUs) in looking for available lots to build houses for those who could not go back to the permanent danger zones. Unfortunately another unprecedented disaster interrupted the planning: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The existing Vincent Helps structure was revived to respond to this pandemic. However, since the coordinators of the organization could not meet because of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and lockdown, the four communities at the St. Vincent Seminary Complex in Quezon City assumed the responsibility.

The organization is comprised of a Response Team (acting as the core group) with the following committees: Resource Mobilization committee, Operations committee and Documentation committee. The Resource Mobilization team utilizes social media to create awareness and online fund sourcing. They also coordinate with banks and money transfer facilities. This group has been most successful in raising funds locally and abroad.

The Operations team is divided into two groups: the “supply” team and the “distribution” team. Taking precautionary measures very seriously—because a good number of senior confreres living within the complex are susceptible to the virus—the purchasing and distribution teams are composed only of four and two persons,



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Communication Office

respectively. Coupled with strict protocols on protection and disinfection, they minimize the risk of possible contamination.

While some generous donors contribute food items, most is purchased from wholesalers. About 50 volunteers (priests, sisters, seminarians, staff and parish youth) do the packing each day. Three times a week another set of volunteers prepare 400 cooked meals for homeless people and street dwellers. The distribution team brings the food packages to different drop off points or hubs located in depressed areas around the city such as those families living in the slums and under the bridges. Volunteers wear “Vincentian” themed shirts and are accompanied by priests in clerical garb for easy identification as a “church” group which facilitates trips to distribution hubs. They also implement basic safety measures like social distancing, wearing of facemasks and disinfecting to lessen exposure to the virus.

The Documentation group consists of the Social Media and Creative team and Data Gathering and Chronicler team. They put up #VincentHelps and #Frontliners to create social media awareness, advertisement and online fund sourcing. A Facebook page has been set up for posting updates in social media platforms and data gathering for distribution; they also maintain a database for recipients and donors. The Vincent Helps FB page also features articles, reflections and homilies to inspire people, send messages of hope, and most importantly, assist the faithful in reflection and spiritual growth through daily morning prayer, prayer requests, and daily online

masses (in coordination with the De Paul House FB page).

A month into the lockdown, we have distributed 18,663 grocery packages, 4,400 ready to eat food packs and 105,340 pieces of bread (pandesal). Grocery package or relief packs include rice, canned goods, noodles and vegetables. The total amount shared through these programs is Php 4,452,438.73 or 88,000 USD..

Cases of infection continue to rise despite extensive lockdown and community quarantine. Ineffective leadership, political bickering, shortage of protective equipment for front liners, limited number of testing kits, lack of government funds for social assistance and disorganized distribution of aid further complicate the dire situation. The government appears to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. The President and his advisers remain undecided about lifting the lockdown.

Meanwhile, many of the poor defy government orders to stay home because they are more afraid of dying from hunger than from the invisible virus. St. Vincent’s insight remains as practical as it was in 1617: The poor sometimes suffer more from lack of “order” than from lack of charitable persons.” (SV, XIII, 423) Vincent Helps is our modest attempt to organize charity to ease a bit the sufferings of the most vulnerable.

*Fr. Gregg Bañaga, Jr., CM
Visitor
and Fr. Geowen Porcincula, CM*

BUILDING THE FUTURE AFTER THE PANDEMIC

I would like to share with you some information with which I am sure you are all familiar.

Today we have been in isolation or quarantine for more than 40 days. In one way or another we have witnessed a tragedy that we could not have imagined and that we will never forget. Beginning with Italy, more than 175,925 persons have been infected with the coronavirus and some 23,227 people have died (the good news, 44,927 people have recovered).

We could add the numbers from all the various countries throughout the world but then this

would become a statistical presentation of an historical tragic event. Furthermore, for us these statistics are not merely numbers because the numbers represent people who have a story, a family, a concrete reality. These are people who have either died or who are struggling to survive this virus.

During this time, we at the General Curia (like most people throughout the world) continue in quarantine in order to protect our health.

We do know, however, that sooner or later we will once again move about on the street

and we will recover some sense of “normal”. Nevertheless, we will not return to things the way they were before, the way they were when we entered this process of self-confinement more than one month ago.

I do not want to be a “messenger of bad news” but, we must assume that we will not find the same reality: friends, family members, and even confreres and sisters or members of the Vincentian Family will be missing; we will encounter people who are mourning the departure of their loved ones (family members whom they were unable to accompany during their final hours); we will find that the poor have become poorer and that communities and provinces which were already suffering from poverty are now in even greater need. But there is more.

We will find that people have strengthened the bonds of solidarity and are not indifferent, that people have learned the meaning of loneliness. Men and women have shared the anguish and pain of others. We will discover that families have learned that the Church is not constituted by some building or by priests and bishops and religious women but that every baptized person is an integral part of the Church and they are able to celebrate the Word in their own home. Indeed, people have learned that each and every home is a church, a domestic church. Hopefully this will bring an end to the clericalism that Pope Francis has denounced on numerous occasions.

We will find a reality with both positive and negative elements: a society that has become more technologically savvy as the result of many families using means of communication that they had not been previously utilized. After more than 40 days of quarantine, we will find a world that has completely changed. This has been an appropriate time for reflection, and I have pondered many questions: how will we act in this “new tomorrow”; how will we carry out our mission especially as members of the General Curia?

I must admit I do not have answers. At times the future is somewhat uncertain. What I do know is that we will not return to the world as we once knew it. Perhaps the manner in which we have lived these days of self-confinement reveals how we are going to live the days that are coming. We have celebrated Holy Week and Easter together. Usually we would have been involved in various commitments but this year we had time to reflect and to think. During these

days we have listened to the invitation of the Risen Lord: peace be with you! Even though it might have been difficult to accept those words, nevertheless it is as though the Lord were speaking to each one of us: peace be with you! I believe that in light of so much suffering and pain that we have experienced, we are being sent forth to bring peace to all people.

Pope Francis has written a Plan to Rise, a reflection that was published in the Spanish journal, *Vida Nueva*. He reflected on the text from the gospel of Matthew in which Jesus encouraged the women to be joyful. He stated that he realized that asking people to be joyful during this time of pandemic could be seen as “a bad joke”, as unreal. Nevertheless, the Risen Lord has risen to new life and shares that new life not only with the women in the gospel but with all humankind. Furthermore, the Pope affirms that this Risen Lord can renew our life and the life of our community.

The Pope offers various suggestions with regard to the future. Here I mention just a few of them:

- It is the movement of the Spirit that opens new horizons, awakens creativity and renews the bonds of friendship that enable us to say “here we are!” “present!” as we confront the great task that awaits us.
- This is the time to look anew at that which is possible and to do so with the realism of the gospel.
- We cannot write the present history or the future history if we turn our backs on those men and women who are suffering.
- The globalization of indifference will continue to be a threat and a temptation. Hopefully we will find the cure in the practice of justice, charity and solidarity.
- Let us not be afraid to live that which is known as the civilization of hope which is willing to combat anguish and fear, sadness and discouragement, passiveness and weariness.

I want to conclude this reflection with the words of the Spanish journalist, Carlos Candel, who affirms: We can continue to look the other way as we have done up to the present time. We can continue to want to return to a state of “normalcy” and think that the coronavirus was a small anomaly that we had to confront. We have not understood that none of that is possible ... Therefore, I would not like us to return to some “normal situation”; I would also not like us to take

on a fatalistic attitude, one in which we believe that we can do nothing and that everything has been decided. We must resist such temptations. We must believe that life will be and can be distinct, a life that truly guarantees our survival, that gives priority to the well-being of people, that takes care of our environment and does not destroy it. Let us move out into the future believing that now more than ever before the love that motivates us ought to be creative unto infinity.

*Jorge Luis Rodríguez B., CM
Office of Communication*

“I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD” (MATTHEW 25:35)

Utilizing those words from the 25th chapter of Saint Matthew’s gospel, I want to share with you the mission that the Daughters of Charity have undertaken in the Province of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (Bogotá-Venezuela) during this worldwide pandemic/quarantine.

Each day more than 250 street people come to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Walk-in Center which is directed by Sister Nohemí Sánchez, DC. They arrive at noon in order to receive lunch, perhaps the only meal they will eat during the day. These men and women are our brothers and sisters and at the same time they are hungry and homeless. They are sheltered under the mantle of God’s mercy as well as through the generosity of many benefactors and the service of the Daughters of Charity.

Many benefactors have joined in this struggle to obtain food for these brothers and sisters who live on the streets. Each day God invites people to help mitigate the hunger of these individuals who are homeless. The Vincentian Family, under the leadership of Father Tomaž Mavrič, CM, took the first step when the National Councils were invited to organize themselves on behalf of the most vulnerable and needy members of society. We were encouraged in this effort by the words: In the

Vincentian Family we continue to globalize charity not indifference.

Many hands are involved in this daily ministry. Sister Cecilia Triana, DC (the Visitatrix), together with Father Álvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM (Provincial Director of the Daughters) and a group of Daughters and some young postulants, help in the alleviation of the hunger of these people who live on the streets.

At the same time, our brothers and sisters who are homeless also have a mission; they help us spread devotion to our Lady of the Miraculous Medal by distributing medals to the people they encounter on the streets of Bogotá. Their mission has a twofold purpose: first, to ask our Lady of the Miraculous Medal to protect the people of Colombia and people throughout the world during this pandemic and second, to make our Lady of the Miraculous Medal more widely known. The older Daughters of the house put together the medals that are distributed throughout the city.

We give thanks to God for the ministry of the Daughters among those persons who are poor and marginalized.

Sister Sandra Emilce Vivas Ramírez, DC

VINCENTIAN MISSIONARIES: 200 YEARS OF MISSION AND CHARITY IN BRAZIL

In 2020 the Vincentian Missionaries, members of the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission (PBCM), are celebrating two hundred years of presence and service in the country of Brazil. At the end of November, 1819, animated by the missionary spirit to go throughout the world and inflame the hearts of people with the

love of Christ, two Portuguese members of the Congregation of the Mission (Father Antônio Ferreira Viçoso and Father Leandro Rebelo) arrived in Rio de Janeiro and in 1820 established the first mission in Caraça (Brazil).

1. From the shrine in Caraça, the Vincentian mission expanded and slowly encompassed

various regions of Brazil. From 1820 until 1970 the confreres were involved in the formation of the diocesan clergy, in the promotion of popular missions and in the education of young men and women.

The Vincentian Missionaries (the “Lazarists”, the “priests and brothers of the mission”, as they are also known in Brazil) ministered in the formation of the diocesan clergy. With a selfless love and generous service to the Church, the members of the Congregation accepted the administration of nineteen diocesan seminaries (major and minor seminaries), thus ministering from the north to the south of this country. Relying on confreres from the Province of Paris, this group collaborated in the formation of countless priests. These members of the Congregation, with a boundless dedication (an expression utilized by the historian Riolando Azzi), provided much needed assistance to the bishops who were committed to the reform of the church during the second half of the nineteenth century. Following the directives of the Council of Trent, their ministry strengthened the seminaries and the spiritual, moral and intellectual renewal of the clergy.

In various cities, the members of the Congregation organized missionary centers where teams were formed that preached popular missions. The Vincentian popular mission was offered free of charge and had a duration of one-month. The confreres developed a doctrinal catechesis in simple language and their teaching was focused on conversion and frequent participation in the sacraments and other official pious activities. Special attention was given to those people who were poor through the development for several programs that provided them with assistance. In light of so many difficulties, the great pastoral zeal of the confreres enabled them to reach out to countless cities and towns throughout Brazil. The missionaries provided much assistance in the process of evangelization and the religious instruction of the people.

The confreres were also engaged in the ministry of education especially in schools that they administered (the school in Caraça was their primary educational institution). This ministry was characterized by teaching the humanities and the primary objective was formation of one’s character and conscience, formation of the human person. The educational ministry

of the confreres also encompassed diocesan seminaries and seminaries for the formation of members of the Congregation (these seminaries received many students from poor families and even though the majority of them were never ordained, the students received many benefits with regard to their personal and cultural formation).

2. As a result of the Second Vatican Council, the ministry of the confreres experienced a series of changes. The Council documents had a great impact on the life of the Province and the years of 1960-1990 could be viewed as a period of crisis and great changes: the confreres no longer directed the diocesan seminaries; the popular missions ceased; the Province experienced a great vocational crisis (many priests and brothers abandoned the Congregation and the seminaries of the Congregation were closed).

Faced with a series of changes and events that were unleashed by the Council, confronted also with diminishment in personnel, the Province engaged in a great effort to renew and reorganize its missionary and administrative reality. Up until 1970, the confreres dedicated their efforts to the service of the Church, especially through their ministry of the formation of the clergy. They developed a strong historical identity as “missionary/teachers” of the clergy. At the same time, there was little innovative ministry on behalf of the poorest and more vulnerable members of society. The confreres had developed a strong personal and community identity that, as a result of the profound changes in the Church and in society, came to a sudden end.

During this post-conciliar era the missionary activity of the confreres began to take on a new form through parish ministry. In a process of on-going renewal, the members of the Congregation became more aware of their primary purpose, that is, the evangelization of the poor. New parishes were accepted in poor neighborhoods and the pastoral ministry took on an element of liberation. The Province also opened new missions *ad gentes* (confreres were sent to Mozambique and the Amazon). The ministry of the popular missions was once again initiated but with a new spirit and with the participation of the laity.

With regard to the ministry of formation, the confreres sought to renew their own seminaries

through the introduction of a new pedagogy. In collaboration with the larger Vincentian Family, a new formation area arose, namely, formation of laity (especially among the lay members of the Conferences of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Lay Vincentian Missionaries). The Shrine in Caraça was completely reformed and the result was a process of evangelization from the perspective of culture, tourism and ecology. With regard to the educational ministry, the School in Rio de Janeiro achieved a notable development with the introduction of a pedagogy of liberation which in turn intended to form social activists and develop activities and projects of social promotion among the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

3. At the present time, the sixty confreres of the Province have exerted themselves in achieving a creative fidelity which has emphasized missionary service among the poor. In a very modest way the members of the Province are present to and in the Church in various localities and they minister in parishes, (especially in poor neighborhoods), providing retreat opportunities, formation of candidates for the Congregation, occasionally minister with the diocesan clergy (retreats, seminars, spiritual direction, etc.), popular missions, missions *ad gentes*, formation of the laity, education of young people, collaboration with the Vincentian Family and collaboration in the

promotion of social projects with the poor.

In this time of epochal change, the mission of our province confronts many challenges on a personal, pastoral and institutional level. The members of our province recognize that they are heirs to a great history, one that must be remembered and valued, a history of many holy and wise confreres; a history in which the members were involved in innumerable and very significant works and achievements; a history oriented toward evangelization. We are called to build on that history and create a new story. We feel challenged to discern, listen to and accept the calls of the poor; to revitalize our missionary identity; to develop a new understanding of our vocation as well as a new spiritual sensitivity and a new missionary praxis.

Throughout its history, the province has been able to move forward as the result of the ministry of more than five hundred fifty confreres, priests and brothers, men from Brazil and from other countries, as the result of the ministry of countless friends, collaborators and benefactors. We are profoundly grateful and we render homage to all those who have participated and are currently participating in this two-hundred-year-old history of mission and charity.

*Fr. Eli Chaves dos Santos, CM
Visitor*

“HE SAW, WAS COMPASSIONATE, AND CARED FOR HIM”.

The Church in Brazil has proposed these words of the Good Samaritan as a theme for the Fraternity/Sorority Campaign.

During this time of the pandemic the question arises: how can we best be neighbor to others?

We, priests and seminarians at the Vincentian Seminary of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, students of philosophy and theology, want to be neighbor to others, especially neighbor to those who are homeless and living on the streets.

Sixteen years ago, this house of formation became involved in a project called MAKON which cares for men and women living on the street (we minister to these individuals on a weekly basis). At the beginning of March, the mayor told us that

the place where we served food to more than 200 people would no longer be available to us and so our ministry was suspended.

We became concerned and desired to serve these individuals, our lords and masters, but unfortunately the pandemic made us change our plans and we entered into a state of obligatory isolation.

Yet calls for assistance continued and we looked for ways to provide help and to continue to work together with the Daughters of Charity (who administer the Saint Joseph’s House of Welcome), with those who administer the Movement of Street People and other governmental organizations. Thus, we have been able to provide lunch to a group of street dwellers each Saturday.

To be with the poor and listen to them, to become neighbor to them and attend to their pain and suffering is a demanding attitude that today requires boldness and detachment. Our community organized teams and we strive to serve not just a plate of food but to enable the individuals who approach us to experience the love of God as they receive a plate of food.

May God help us and make us strong and courageous to face the challenges of the present moment. May we all experience the protection of Mary, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and Saint Vincent de Paul, our model for following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

*Joelcio Sailbot, CM
Province of Curitiba*

VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY AGAINST COVID-19: “13 HOUSES” CAMPAIGN AND CORONAVIRUS

Donate:

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/13Houses-Campaign-coronavirus>

The “13 Houses” Campaign is expanding due to COVID-19 to support the poorest of the poor and the homeless. All monies raised by FHA through Depaul International will be distributed to Vincentian Family members working with the poor and the homeless.

In Fr Robert Maloney’s reflection on St Vincent de Paul’s personal response to the various pandemics that occurred during his lifetime, he speaks movingly of Vincent’s conviction that, no matter what the circumstances, **WE MUST NEVER ABANDON THE POOR.**

He also reminds us that we must take all reasonable precautions to protect our health in serving the poor at a time like this. Though the entire world is suffering at the moment it is the poorer countries, and the poorest within those countries, who suffer most.

To date the 13 Houses Campaign, launched by the FHA in November 2018, has housed approximately 5,000 people globally through the commissioning of innovative and collaborative projects of Vincentian Family members at national level. Faced with this overwhelming, worldwide, crisis engendered by COVID 19, the FHA is adding another dimension to its Campaign aimed at supporting the poorest, especially those experiencing some form of homelessness, with no safe home to shelter.

We have identified 5 initiatives throughout the

world that urgently need financial help to attend the immediate needs of homeless people in the Philippines, Rwanda, Peru, Lebanon, Ukraine. FHA is also activating partnerships with other Vincentian Family schemes focusing on the COVID-19 emergency and prevention of homelessness for those who have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

All monies raised by FHA will be distributed to Vincentian Family organizations working with the poorest and the homeless globally. We will tell the stories of how funds have been spent and the difference it has made.

[You can read more about these initiatives](#)

[here.](#) Please share this appeal with your contacts!

IN DIALOG WITH THE PROVINCES OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

We all are aware of the hard time humanity is going through, the health crisis brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic, where many human losses have occurred and where new scourges have begun to emerge, such as isolation, loneliness, unemployment, poverty, hunger and other situations which are known to everyone.

During this time, many confreres have contacted the communication office, contributing articles and reflections on how to face this challenge. But there have also been important initiatives to provide care to the most vulnerable people, the elderly, the sick and the poor.

Today we want to reach out to the Provinces with a series of live broadcasts in which the Assistants General will engage in dialog with some Visitors about these circumstances and how they perceive the future of the Congregation.

In this initiative the Communications Office seeks to unite the provinces in communication, especially at this time., especially at this time. We will do this using our Facebook channel, [@congregaciondelamision](#)

During the dialogue, the Visitors will respond to three key concerns:

1. How the confreres of your province have been living the reality of the Pandemic, what measures have been taken and how they are getting through this moment.
2. How are they responding in the area of the service to the poor, either as a Congregation or as a Vincentian Family. You might give some specific examples.
3. In a personal reflection, share with us how the Congregation of the Mission can look to the future after the pandemic crisis is over.

The dates when this initiative will be broadcasted are as follows:

Monday, May 4:

Languages: Italian and French

Wednesday, May 6:

Languages: Spanish and English

Friday, May 8:

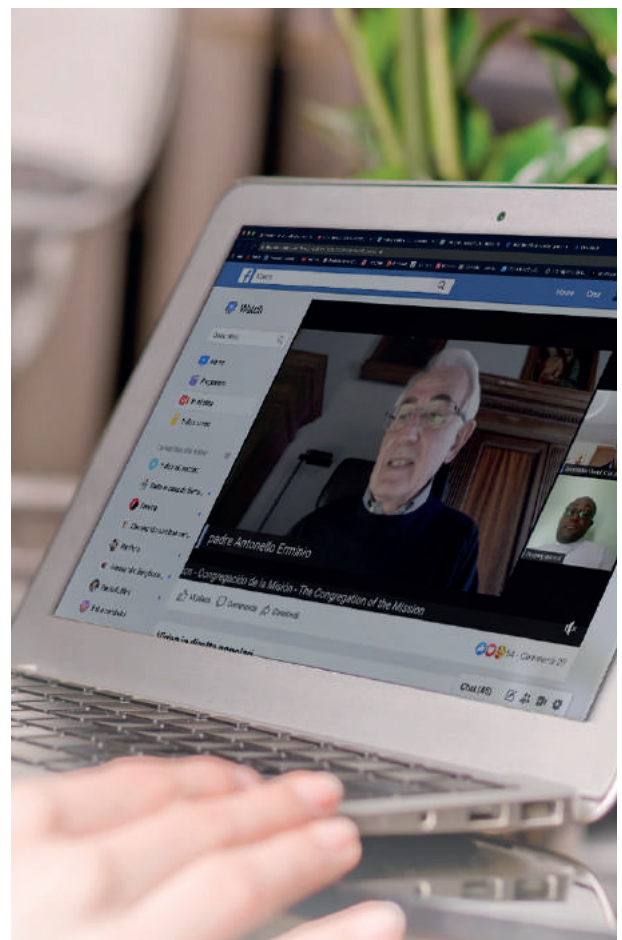
Languages: Spanish and Portuguese

Monday, May 11:

Language: Spanish

Wednesday, May 13:

Language: English



NOMINATIONES / CONFIRMATIONES

CHRISTENSEN ZAMORA Rodis Hernán	01/03/2020 (begins on 16/06/2020)	Visitor of Chile
McDEVITT Patrick J.	01/04/2020 (begins on 01/07/2020)	Visitor of U.S.A. - West
PEREIRA PITA Nélio	12/04/2020	Visitor of Portugal

NECROLOGIUM

Nomen	Cond.	Dies ob.	Prov.	Aet.	Voc.
DÍEZ MARINA Fernando	Sac	05/04/2020	SVP	85	68
PISABAJ RIVERA José Luis	Sac	11/04/2020	AMC	71	50
ESPIAGO PÉREZ Fernando	Sac	15/04/2020	SVP	85	68
BENZAL GONZÁLEZ Raimundo	Sac	16/04/2020	SVP	86	61
DANJOU Gonzague	Sac	17/04/2020	FRA	86	68
NIETO FERNÁNDEZ Felipe Manuel	Sac	17/04/2020	SVP	57	36
VELAYOS FERNANZ Enrique	Sac	17/04/2020	SVP	99	79
BELMONTE GÓMEZ Ramón	Sac	19/04/2020	CAE	95	76
BRINDLEY Stanislaus	Sac	25/04/2020	HIB	91	73
LÓPEZ MASIDE José María	Sac	30/04/2020	SVP	77	60

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