



CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

XLIII GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2022

Instrumentum Laboris

Revitalizing our identity
at the beginning of the fifth century of the CM



Introduction

The *Instrumentum Laboris* that we present, invites us to enter into harmony with the Universal Church through a process of synodality (Cfr. *Episcopalis Communio* 6 and 7), so as to create a Congregation of the Mission that goes out, following Jesus Christ the evangelizer of the poor.

As the framework for our ongoing process of conversion (C2), our goal is to revitalize our identity as we begin the fifth century of the Congregation of the Mission, giving continuity to the Lines of Action of the GA 2016, enlightened by the reflections that emerged at the Meeting of Visitors in Manila (2019) and by the Superior General and his Council. Our tools for this process will be our *Constitutions* and the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG).

That is to say, the Apostolic Exhortation woven throughout all of this document is a tool. It helps us to reflect upon our identity in order to revitalize our identity. The questions and the reflections in the domestic and provincial assemblies are to focus on our identity as members of the Congregation of the Mission.

The preparatory process for the General Assembly 2022 will be structured in three parts using the working document as divided according to the method: *See-Judge-Act*.

- I. **SEE- JUDGE-ACT**: work to be done during domestic assemblies.
- II. **SEE- JUDGE-ACT**: work to be done in the provincial assemblies.
- III. **SEE- JUDGE-ACT**: Results from the two previous steps, which seek to promote a missionary process, whereby, the secretaries of the provincial assemblies will send the commitments suggested for the General Assembly to the Preparatory Commission.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has come to mark the history of our provinces, we place in your hands this working document, that, we hope, on the way to our next General Assembly, will help us to respond to the signs of the times from the three fold dimension of our Vincentian identity: spirituality, lifestyle and ministry (evangelization of the poor and formation of the clergy and the laity).



DOMESTIC ASSEMBLIES:

SEE-JUDGE-ACT

OUR REALITY TODAY

The poverty and spiritual abandonment of the people of the countryside were the signs of the times that inspired St. Vincent de Paul to develop a new spirituality, a new lifestyle and new forms of service. Today we, at the beginning of the fifth centenary of that same route, are called to read our context with the lenses of faith and missionary zeal, because only in this way can we find the signs of the times that are pointing us in the right direction, within the wide variety of cultures and realities in which the Congregation of the Mission is immersed today.

This reality has been well framed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, and for that reason, we intend to offer a synthesis of the challenges and temptations contained therein, divided into four sections.

In order to enrich the reflection of the assemblies, it is important to read the results of the individual consultation with the missionaries, in which more than a thousand confreres have expressed their feelings regarding the current reality of the Congregation. You will find this material in the document "Individual Participation", which is included in the materials you have received.

In order to better discern the results, and in a spirit of synodality, we recommend a dialogue with the people with whom we share our pastoral ministries, especially with the poorest, to listen to them in creative ways and in a climate of trust and freedom, about how they see us, what they think of our way of life, our spirituality and our ministries. The freer and more confident they feel to respond, the more wealth their contributions will contain. This will give us a greater sense of synodality.

I CHALLENGE: REVITALIZE THE JOY OF BEING MISSIONARIES.

The first look at reality is to our inner life:

May the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ". (EG 10)

Francis' warning takes on a particular tinge for the confrere of the Congregation of the Mission, who seeks to fill himself with the feelings and affections of Christ, even more so than his own spirit, which shines above all in the evangelical teachings, as explained in the Common Rules (C4); for this reason, we affirm in our tradition with great firmness that "Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission" and must be regarded as the center of its life and activity (C5).

This invitation to revitalize the joy of being missionaries puts us in a fight against three temptations that could weaken our vocational experience:

i. This practical relativism consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, dreaming as if others did not exist,



working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist (EG 80).

ii. *Selfish indifference: related to the concept of indiscreet zeal warned by St. Vincent (RC XII, 11), this temptation is evident not always from an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue. (EG 82)*

iii. *Spiritual Worldliness: hiding behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, but that which consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being (EG 93).*

Reflection Questions for the Domestic Assembly:

1. How do you perceive in your life the centrality of Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor?
2. Do you think that experiences and times of prayer actually nourish and strengthen you to follow Jesus Christ, or on the contrary, do you find selfish acedia, practical relativism, or spiritual worldliness to have invaded your common life and provincial community? Why?

II CHALLENGE: MISSIONARY CONVERSION.

"I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. "Mere administration" can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission". (EG 25)

"The Second Vatican Council presented ecclesial conversion as the openness to a permanent reform of itself out of fidelity to Jesus Christ: "The whole renewal of the Church consists essentially in increasing fidelity to her vocation... Without new life and authentic evangelical spirit, without "the Church's fidelity to her very vocation", any new structure is corrupted in a short time." (EG 26)

"I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation." (EG 27).

Missionary conversion is, in the language of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the demand for the continuous renewal that we find in our constitutions:

The Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal. (C2)



Reflection Questions for the Domestic Assembly:

1. What are the *actual signs of the times* that call us to further pastoral and missionary conversion? How can we be converted?

III CHALLENGE: THE MYSTIQUE OF ENCOUNTER

§ 1. *Community life has been a special characteristic of the Congregation and its usual way of living from its very beginning. This was clearly the will of St. Vincent... § 2 This fraternal life together continually shaped by the mission, forms a community which promotes both personal and community development, and renders the work of evangelization more effective. (C 21)*

In the individual consultation, missionaries have been asked: *To what extent does the community sustain my spiritual life and ministries?* The response of the vast majority has been: *moderately*, tending more towards less so, a situation that should draw our attention to our community life, which has *the Holy Trinity as its ultimate source of life (C 20)*, and from which we must fight against the disastrous temptation of *the war among ourselves*. Pope Francis says:

"It pains me so much to see how in some Christian communities, and even among consecrated members, we consent to various forms of hatred, divisions, slander, defamations, revenges, jealousy, desire to impose one's own ideas at the expense of anything, and even persecutions that look like a relentless witch hunt. Who are we going to evangelize with behaviors such as these?" (EG 100)

Reflection Questions for the Domestic Assembly:

1. Do you consider common life in the local and provincial community to be an attractive witness of evangelization? Why?
2. Which of our attitudes do we need to heal and which actions do we need to implement in order to improve our common life?

IV CHALLENGE: A LOOK AT SOME DIFFERENT PASTORAL FACETS

In the context of the New Evangelization, Pope Francis accentuates some facets that must challenge us as Vincentian missionaries, always interpreted from our own particular reality.

- i. *Evangelization of the poor, especially the most abandoned (C 1, 2°).*

"For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor "his first mercy". This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have "this mind... which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor, which is understood as a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness". (EG 198)



ii. *Formation of the Clergy (C 1, 3°).*

“Many places are experiencing a shortage of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is often due to a lack of contagious apostolic fervor in communities which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness. Wherever there is life, fervor and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise... Seminaries cannot accept candidates on the basis of any motivation whatsoever, especially if those motivations have to do with affective insecurity or the pursuit of power, human glory or economic well-being”. (EG 107).

iii. *Formation of the Laity (C 1, 3°).*

“...A conscious awareness of the responsibility of the laity that is born of Baptism and Confirmation is not manifest in the same way everywhere. In some cases this is because the laity has not been formed to assume their important responsibilities, in others because they cannot find a place in the local church where they fit in and act, due to excessive clericalism that keeps them out of the decision-making process... and are often limited to intra-church tasks without a real commitment to live out the Gospel for the transformation of society. The formation of lay people and the evangelization of professional and intellectual groups are an important pastoral challenge.” (EG 102-103).

In the individual consultation, about one-half of the confreres are of the opinion that the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy and the laity are not the highest priority of the Congregation, and reference our ministries as the area which requires more conversion at the level of provincial structure. This gives us great reason to go back to our identity, renew it and revitalize it.

Reflection questions for the Domestic Assembly:

1. Do you perceive that, in your local and provincial community, the most abandoned poor are being fully evangelized (using Systemic Change methodology)? Why? What evidence can we find of this?
2. ¿How could we renew our vocation as formators of the clergy and the commitment to create a culture of vocations?
3. Is the formation of the laity, which we offer, solid formation, mature and a process that leads to a Christian commitment of transformation of the world and its structures, at the service of the poorest?

The domestic assembly will bring to the provincial council, or better, to the preparatory commission of their province, their conclusion, in the light of the challenges and temptations presented to us by *Evangelii Gaudium*, on each of the dimensions of our identity:

- I. **How do we see that we are living out the Vincentian Spirituality?**
- II. **How do we see our lifestyle?**
- III. **How do we see our ministries and apostolates?**



PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY

SEE-JUDGE-ACT

DISCERN FROM THE CHARISM OF THE MISSION

For this method of *judge*, we will use the tripartite structure followed by the General Council in its reflections on Vincentian identity: spirituality, lifestyle and ministries.

I. Vincentian Spirituality: The joy of following Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor.

Note: We recommend that you study the First Part: Spirituality, of the document "Individual Participation" included in your materials.

The spirituality of a missionary of the Congregation of the Mission is to make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ, so as to acquire the perfection that corresponds to his vocation (C1). It is, therefore, from Christ that the very mission entrusted to us comes to life, namely *evangelization of the poor and the formation of clergy and laity*.

" Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer". In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that "he has loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us." (EG 12)

This time of the Assemblies in their distinct levels, local-provincial-general, provide us an opportune moment to revitalize our spirituality that give us life and joy, as we begin the fifth century of the Congregation of the Mission,

- Our vows which we have professed: stability, poverty, chastity, and obedience (C 3§3; 28-39).
- The missionary virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, zeal for souls (C 7).
- Apostolic involvement with the world, community life and the experience of God in prayer (C 42)
- The intimate personal attitudes of Christ that our Founder recommended: love and reverence of Father, affective and effective charity for the poor, docility to Divine Providence (C 6). Together with the devotion to the Holy Trinity, the Mystery of the Incarnation (C 48), the Eucharist (C 25§3), and Marian devotion, above all to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (C 49), and the saints and blessed of the Vincentian Family (C 50).



In other words, it is time to let ourselves be inspired by the strength of Vincentian spirituality, which in all circumstances is capable of renewing our missionary heart.

Reflection Questions for the Provincial Assembly:

1. ¿What concrete significance does the expression “to put on the spirit of Christ” have for you? What implications does it have in our everyday circumstances?
2. Why is returning to the Gospel to deepen his spirituality a cause for joy for a member of the Congregation of the Mission?
3. Regarding the vows, virtues, personal attitudes of Christ, which St. Vincent recommended, and devotions appropriate to the Congregation of the Mission, How and why can they revitalize the spirituality of the missionaries?

II. Lifestyle of the Congregation of the Mission: Community with the Spirit for the Mission.

Note: We recommend that you study the Second Part: Lifestyle, of the document “Individual Participation” included in your materials.

Even though community life is not an end in itself, what distinguishes us in the form of religious life is the means to make the work of evangelization more effective. We must not forget that *community life is a special characteristic of the Congregation and its usual way of living from its very beginning and by the clear will and desire of St. Vincent our Founder (C 21), in fact, following Christ, the evangelizer, giving us special bonds of love and affection; the way “good friends” show reverence for one another with genuine esteem. (C 25).*

We all know that even the ideal community encounters no little difficulty in ordinary life, but,

“we need to help others to realize that the only way is to learn how to encounter others with the right attitude, which is to accept and esteem them as companions on the journey, without interior resistance. Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their needs. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or meet with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity.” (EG 91)

If we let numbers 19-27 of the Constitutions enlighten us, we will find a series of aspects that, in actual context, help us to discern the quality of common life that we are living:

- ❖ Team work
- ❖ Authority as a Form of Service
- ❖ Effectiveness in Community Plans
- ❖ Dialogue-Communication
- ❖ Community Discernment
- ❖ Witness
- ❖ Intentional Common Living
- ❖ Corresponsibility



- ❖ Fraternal Correction
- ❖ Prayer
- ❖ Times and Experiences of Profound Sharing in Community.

A profound, serious, charitable, but intense review of our common life, could make the domestic and provincial assemblies an authentic time of grace to revitalize our life style as we begin the fifth centenary of the Congregation of the Mission.

Reflection questions for the Provincial Assembly:

1. Enlightened by C 19-27, which aspects of our common life for the mission need to be strengthened today?
2. As seen in the light of the Gospel, does our community life foster an accommodation and relaxation that keep us or prevent us from going out to the peripheries? Which biblical text might speak to us and help guide us? Why?

III. Our Missionary Option: The Congregation of the Mission Going Forth.

Note: We recommend that you study Part Three: Ministries, of the document "Individual Participation" included in your materials.

The vocation of the Congregation of the Mission, *to evangelize the poor* (C10), should be read and confronted by the call which is made in *Evangelii Gadium 20* to us, *to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.* It challenges us to rethink our apostolic ministries, and, for example, could lead us to think about the political impact of our apostolates and their relationship to ecology, through VIN-JPIC or other ways of making the gospel more effective.

Indeed, here it is not the subject of discussion as to which apostolates are proper to the Little Company; these are pointed out by the Constitutions with perfect clarity: the evangelization of the poor and the formation of clerics and laity (C1).

The key question is whether our provincial works and apostolates follow from a correct reading of the ministries proper to the charism of the Congregation of the Mission, in the particular reality we are living today.

It is necessary that any assessment of our ministries be examined with the criteria offered by numbers 11 and 12 of the Constitutions:

... "to make the Gospel effective" ... According to the varying circumstances of time and place, our work of evangelization in word and action should strive for this, that all, through a process of conversion and celebration of the sacraments, should be faithful to "the kingdom, that is to say, the new world, the new order, the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the gospel inaugurates" (EN, 23). (C11)

These are the characteristics to be kept in mind in this work of evangelization which the Congregation proposes to carry out: (C12):



1.º *clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5);*

2.º *attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;*

3.º *some sharing in the condition of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;*

4.º *genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation;*

5.º *readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation;*

6.º *striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rm 12:2).*

In addition, the Constitutions invite us to give higher priority to some of the ministries in the Vincentian tradition: *the popular missions (C14), the missio ad gentes (C16), collaboration with the Daughters of Charity (C17) and ministries of social justice and evangelical charity (C18)* that we have understood today in terms of Systemic Change. Are these the characteristics that we find prevalent in our current ministries?

Reflection Questions for the Provincial Assembly:

1. How do the criteria in C.11-12 shed light on the ministries we have today? What changes or actions do they call for?
2. ¿What does *leave our comfort zone and go out to the peripheries that need the light of the gospel* mean for the Congregation of the Mission today (EG 20)?
3. What has the Covid-19 pandemic taught us?
4. How should, from the perspective of Jesus Christ, the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy and the laity be understood today? How should we assume our vocation as formators today?

Provincial councils and/or preparatory commissions are invited to develop creative methods to generate open and deep dialogues around spirituality, lifestyle and ministries. The conclusions of this conversation will be answered by the step, Act, which follows.



SEE-JUDGE-ACT

LET US REVITALIZE THE JOY OF OUR MISSIONARY IDENTITY.

Having studied the signs of the times (See) in the domestic assemblies, and by listening to each confrere and the community, discerning and judging in the provincial assemblies, please send to the Preparatory Commission of the General Assembly 2022 **two commitments** for each dimension of Vincentian identity.

Since the commitments should arise from the lines which have guided the reflection from the domestic assemblies, and will shed light in the development and concrete work of the 2022 General Assembly, it is desirable that they be elaborated in such a way as to help to give rise to a genuine process of missionary conversion.

- I. Commitment to missionary conversion in living out our spirituality.

First Commitment:

Second Commitment:

- II. Commitment to missionary conversion in our lifestyle.

First Commitment:

Second Commitment:



III. Commitment of missionary conversion in the means and our works of evangelization of the poor.

First Commitment:

Second Commitment:

IV. Commitment of missionary conversion in the formation of the clergy.

First Commitment:

Second Commitment:

V. Commitment of missionary conversion in the formation of the laity.

First Commitment:

Second Commitment:
