



## Editor's Note

I am most happy to be able to place in your hands this new issue of *Vincentiana* whose theme is based on the material that was presented during the Vincentian Symposium that was celebrated on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our charism. These reflections are intended to rekindle in the members of the Vincentian Family that which was experienced during the time that we gathered together in Rome (12-15 October 2017). In light of this, we dedicate this present issue, as well as the next issue, to reflections on this great event that was experienced by participants from some 99 countries where the Vincentian Family is present and living/sharing its charism with those persons who are poorest. Some 12,000 persons participated in this event and traveled to Rome in order to be present for this First International Vincentian Symposium dedicated to deepening our understanding of the Vincentian charism.

I do not want to make a lengthy presentation to this issue of *Vincentiana*, but prefer to let the words speak for themselves. The words of the successor of Saint Vincent echo in each one of us, words that were spoken when he greeted Pope Francis and stated that *it is an unimaginable grace* to be here to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vincentian charism. At the same time, we can still hear the words of the Holy Father who invited each one of us to be imbued with the charism of Saint Vincent, calling us *to adore, to welcome, to go ... [because] one who loves does not sit in an easy chair looking on, waiting for the advent of a better world, but gets up and goes with enthusiasm and simplicity.*

In this issue, one also will find the circular letter that Father Tomáš sent to the confreres, inviting them to a deeper missionary and fraternal life, calling them to renew their zeal and passion for the missions *ad gentes*. In the reports from the October and

December *tempo forte* meetings, you will find information about the international missions as well as information with regard to the ministry and service of the Congregation of the Mission in the different provinces.

We also offer for your reflection two documents from the Superior General, which reference the celebration at the time of the beatification of the martyrs of the Vincentian Family in Spain, men and women who offered powerful witness to their faith and charity. In the words of Saint Vincent, *there is no greater act of love than that of the martyrs*. I hope you enjoy each one of the documents included in this issue of *Vincentiana*.

Alvaro Mauricio Fernández, C.M  
Director of *Vincentiana*

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM



# Saint Peter's Square Celebration of the 400 Years of the Vincentian Charism

## Greeting from the Superior General to Pope Francis

14 October 2017

Dear Holy Father,

As the Church celebrates this 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, it is with overwhelming joy, happiness, and awe that the Vincentian Family stands before you today, those present here and all those following us through the various means of mass communication.

To mark this 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we organized a three-day symposium of the worldwide Vincentian Family that will end tomorrow. The theme for this Jubilee Year is “Welcome the Stranger” and it served as the focus.

From a small mustard seed in 1617, the Vincentian Family has grown today into a large tree, composed of over 200 branches (lay associations, and women’s and men’s Congregations of Consecrated Life) with some two million members in 150 countries. However, the Vincentian Family is made up also of men and women who, although not belonging to a specific branch, are inspired by the example of Vincent de Paul to follow in his footsteps in the service of the poor.

Four hundred years ago in France, Vincent de Paul had two life-changing experiences: one in the village of Folleville, where he learned of the spiritual poverty of the rural people, and the other, some months later, in the town of Châtillon, where he was confronted with

their material poverty. These brought about a personal conversion in him and he began to respond to the pressing needs he discovered. His approach was to the whole person, helping in a holistic way, where the poverties were urgent: spiritual, emotional, physical, material.

The various branches of the Vincentian Family are present in the fields of formation of the clergy and laity, education, health, social work, direct service to the poor, pastoral work, retreats, parish missions, missions Ad Gentes, and others. The people's needs are great and the territory is vast. We respond to the best of our ability, because Vincent told us to "love God, but ... with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows." We know that the Poor are "Our Lords and Masters," that in the Poor we meet Jesus and in Jesus the Poor, and that "the charity of Jesus Crucified urges us" to serve them.

Your leadership and inspiration continually awaken our hearts, remind us frequently of Jesus's core message, and give us courage and strength to offer our lives in the service of the poor. We want to make ours the words you directed to the world's youth when inviting them "to make noise." We want "to make noise for the poor, on behalf of the poor, and with the poor." You repeatedly incite us to be missionary disciples, to step out of our comfort zones, to go to the physical and existential peripheries of the world. We want to deepen your call. We also want to commit to be a praying Family, for Vincent told us, "Give me someone who prays! He or she will be capable of everything!"

Saint Vincent reminded us too that, "love is inventive to infinity." We wish, Holy Father, to continue seeking new and creative ways to respond to the needs of the Poor. To this end, and to mark this 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we are launching two initiatives today: the Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness and the Vincentian Film Festival. We hope to add these two initiatives to other contributions in the evangelization of today's world.

Holy Father, it is an unimaginable grace to be with you today. We thank Jesus for your person, your gift to the Church and the world, your gift to the Poor. As we request your blessing, we would like to ask you to continue praying for us as we so wholeheartedly promise to keep praying for you.

May the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and all the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family help us continue the mission that will not end until “Charity is Globalized,” until Charity reaches the farthest corners of the earth. Thank you!

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## **Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Vincentian Family on the Fourth Centenary of The Charism**

Saint Peter's Square  
Saturday, 14 October 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good day!

Thank you for your warm welcome, and thanks to the Superior General for introducing our encounter.

I greet you and together with you I thank the Lord for the 400 years of your charism. Saint Vincent generated a zeal for charity which has endured through the centuries: a passion that came from his heart. For this reason we have his relic here today: the heart of Saint Vincent. Today I would like to encourage you to continue this journey, offering you three simple verbs which I believe are very important for the Vincentian spirit, but also for Christian life in general: to adore, to welcome, to go.

To adore. Saint Vincent made countless invitations to cultivate the interior life and dedicate oneself to prayer which purifies and opens the heart. It is the compass for every day; it is like a manual for life; it is — he wrote — the “great book for the preacher”: only by praying does one draw from God the love to pour forth on the world; only by praying does one touch people's hearts when one proclaims the Gospel (cf. Letter to A. Durand, 1658). But for Saint Vincent prayer is not only a duty and much less a collection of formulae. Prayer is pausing before God in order to be with him, simply dedicating oneself to him. This is the purest prayer, that which makes space for the Lord and for his praise, and nothing else: adoration.

Once discovered, adoration becomes indispensable, because it is pure intimacy with the Lord, who gives peace and joy, and dissolves the stresses of life. Therefore, to someone who was under particular pressure, Saint Vincent also advised praying “without mental strain, to immerse themselves in God by a simple consideration with no attempt to gain His presence by emotional efforts, to abandon themselves to Him” (Letter to J. Pesnelle, 1659).

This is adoration: placing oneself before God, with respect, calmly and in silence, giving the first place to him, abandoning oneself trustingly. Then to ask that his Spirit may come to us and let what is ours go to him. In this way too, people in need, urgent problems, burdensome and difficult situations and problems become part of adoration, such that Saint Vincent asked that one “adore in God” even the reasons that one struggles to understand and accept (cf. Letter to F. Get, 1659). One who adores, who takes up the living wellspring of love cannot but be left, so to speak, “contaminated”. And he begins to behave with others as the Lord does with him: he becomes more merciful, more understanding, more willing; he overcomes his own rigidity and opens himself to others.

And thus we arrive at the second verb: *to welcome*. When we hear this word, we immediately think of something to do. But in reality welcoming is a more profound disposition: it requires not only making room for someone, but being a welcoming, available person, accustomed to giving oneself to others. As God does for us, so we do for others. Welcoming means putting things into perspective, setting right my way of thinking, understanding that life is not my private property and that time does not belong to me. It is a gradual parting from all that is mine: my time, my rest, my rights, my plans, my agenda. One who welcomes gives up the “me” and allows “you” and “us” to enter his life.

A welcoming Christian is a true man or woman of the Church, because the Church is Mother and a mother welcomes life and accompanies it. And as a child resembles its mother, bearing her

features, so a Christian bears the traits of the Church. So a child truly faithful to the Church is one who is welcoming, who creates harmony and communion without lamenting, and sows peace with generosity, even if it is not reciprocated. Saint Vincent helps us to appreciate this ecclesial “dna” of welcoming, of openness, of communion, so that in our life “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander [may] be put away from you, with all malice” (Eph 4:31).

The last verb is *to go*. Love is dynamic; it goes forth from itself. One who loves does not sit in an easy chair looking on, waiting for the advent of a better world, but gets up and goes with enthusiasm and simplicity. Saint Vincent said it well: “our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love” (Conference of 30 May 1659). This vocation is always valid for everyone. It poses three questions to each of us: “Do I go to encounter others, as the Lord wishes? Do I carry this flame of charity everywhere, or do I remain locked in, warming myself at my hearth?”

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you because you are moving along the world’s streets, as Saint Vincent would ask of you even today. I hope you do not stop, but continue, from adoration, to draw God’s love each day, and to spread it in the world through the infectious good of charity, of openness, of harmony. I bless you all and the poor whom you encounter. And I ask you, please, that you kindly not forget to pray for me.





# From the Superior General

## Symposium Welcome Letter

October 13, 2017 – Rome

Dear Sisters and Brothers, Members of the Vincentian Family

*May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ  
be always with us!*

With great joy and hope, I welcome you to this Vincentian Symposium ... a time of Grace that the Lord of life and of history is allowing us to live. Yes, we are living in this momentous time which is grounded on the experience of our Founders, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Vincentian pilgrimage of 400 years and the great cloud of witnesses who have pointed out to us the path that we must follow (have pointed out to us that path through the handing over of their lives in faithful service to Jesus ... service on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society: our lords and masters).

During this year we have been celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian Charism. This has indeed been a time of grace for all of us! This year, 2017, has been a year in which we have grown as a family: we have come to deeper knowledge of one another; we have strengthened our collaboration with one another; we have prayed earnestly for those who are poor; we have engaged in the process of systemic change ... In all of this we have served and loved and dreamt as members of one family! All of this has provided us with a timely opportunity to share as one family the gifts and talents that we have received from God and that we graciously place at the service of common projects on a local, national, and international level.

Allow me to recall here those words that have characterized our journey, words that have strengthened us as we continue our journey: *If a person dreams a dream alone, then it remains just a dream; but if we dream together, then the dream is transformed into a reality!* Vincent de Paul frequently stated that our love has to be affective and effective. Contemplating Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus makes our love affective; collaboration, prayer, reflection, planning and ministering together make our love effective.

Vatican II continues to exhort us to live our vocation in communion and participation and to do so mindful of the mystery of the Incarnation (an essential point of reference in the witness that Vincent de Paul has passed on to us): *The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts (Gaudium et Spes, #1).*

Yes, each one of our Branches has its own proper identity but we form one Family, we have one and the same spirituality and providentially, we have received the same charism. Vincent de Paul saw and encountered Jesus in the person of the poor! Vincent de Paul did not walk alone; he invited others to journey with him along the way and today, he continues to invite us to do the same. Indeed, millions of followers, collaborators and witnesses have dared to live and to reveal their love for Jesus through their service on behalf of the poor. That is the very reason why we are here today. Indeed, in the midst of a world where there is so much suffering and where day after day Jesus is crucified anew, we are presented with a new challenge. Will we take Jesus down from the cross? Will we allow the risen Jesus to walk in our midst and share with us the Easter gifts of peace and new life?

We celebrate this Symposium 400 years after the birth of our charism. What a joy to be able to thank God, as a Family, for this great gift! How wonderful to be able to express our gratitude for the maternal presence of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and for the countless men and women who have lived the Vincentian charism, who have given the supreme witness of laying down their lives for the love of God in service on behalf of their sisters and brothers: the blessed and the saints of the Vincentian Family! They are the men and women who have shown us the path that we must follow, the men and women who made real what we have proclaimed in our prayer for this Jubilee Year: *as we hear the cry of your abandoned children, may we run to their assistance, “like someone who runs to put out a fire.”*

Through each and every one of you I extend a warm and heartfelt greeting to the many members of our beloved Vincentian Family who were unable to gather together with us during the time of this outpouring of the Vincentian spirit, but who are nevertheless attentive to the fruits and the commitments that will be entrusted to us by Divine Providence.

WELCOME!!!

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## **Closing Eucharist of the Symposium Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls**

Sunday, 15 October 2017

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

It is with overwhelming joy, happiness, and gratitude that we gather here today at this closing Eucharist of the Symposium, celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism.

We, members of the Vincentian Family, have gathered from around the world, those belonging to a specific branch of the Family, as well as those who, though not belonging to a specific branch, are inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul's life. We follow in his footsteps, seeking to live out his charism and spirituality. Others who would like to get to know Saint Vincent de Paul better are present in person or are joining us by TV, radio, internet, social media, etc. With Saint Vincent de Paul, we can exclaim today, "I would never have imagined that something like this could be possible!"

The mustard seed planted by Providence, by Jesus, in the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1617, has grown to a tree of two million plus members in 150 countries around the world. From a human point of view, this could not happen, but it did by God's plan. This is God's doing, Jesus's doing, in collaboration with people who heard Jesus's voice and followed Him to make this mustard seed grow. From Jesus's point of view, nothing is impossible, and today we are witnesses to this miracle.

Jesus started working on His plan by first inviting Vincent de Paul to change his own life, his own plans, his own ideas and ambitions. Vincent de Paul began the process of his conversion when he discovered the spiritual and material poverty of the rural people, 400 years ago, in 1617. With time, he came to realize that all the effort put into something would not bring lasting fruit, if one were not identified with Jesus, with His ideas, His feelings, His mission, if Jesus did not become the center of one's life. "How blessed are those who give themselves to God in this way to do what Jesus Christ did, and to practice, after His example, the virtues He practiced: poverty, obedience, humility, patience, zeal, and the other virtues! For in this way they are the true disciples of such a Master."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus put the Poor at the center of His mission, at the center of His plan of evangelization, at the center of the Kingdom. Vincent wanted to follow Jesus along this path. The turning point in Vincent's life was when he started to identify with the poor, when he began to realize his own poverty. When Vincent discovered the poor person in himself, when he reached the point of saying no longer "the poor" but could exclaim "we the poor," it became a clear sign that he openly recognized his own poverty, his own weaknesses, his own sinfulness. From that perspective, from that moment on, he went out to meet others.

In this way, the other person – the spiritually, materially, physically, mentally poor person – became part of him, of his family, became his brother or sister. Thus, Vincent de Paul discovered Jesus in the Poor and the Poor in Jesus. As he told his confreres, "How

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<sup>1</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume V, p. 554; Letter 2013a to Joseph Beaulac, [1656]. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD V, 554.

beautiful it is to see poor people if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them!”<sup>2</sup> Vincent lived what he once expressed so strikingly in words: “Your pain is my pain.”<sup>3</sup>

He discovered the unbreakable unity between prayer and service, the Sacraments and service, the mysteries of Faith and service. The Incarnation, the Holy Trinity, the Eucharist, and Mary became the pillars of his spirituality. The virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, giving priority to Jesus and not to persons and things, for the mission, for the salvation of humanity were virtues that Vincent discovered in Jesus himself. They became very much a part of the spiritual structure Jesus was building in the heart of Vincent.

The mustard seed became a large tree. If we remain simply with our thoughts on the past, rejoicing in the accomplishments of the Vincentian Family over these 400 years, and do not keep watering, trimming, and fertilizing the tree, slowly it will start to die. However, by watering, trimming, and fertilizing the tree, that is, by being actively involved today as members of the Vincentian Family, this tree, with God’s grace, can grow even bigger in depth, height, and width, spreading its branches to villages, cities, and countries where it is not yet present. If we want to follow Jesus’s mission through the Charism and Spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul, we must do so with a clear vision of the future, a clear vision of the signs of this time in which we live.

The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, works, moves, encourages, brings fire within the Church through numerous gifts and does not cease to amaze and surprise us, to bring us to the goal of all humanity: the Kingdom, eternal life, life in Jesus, with Jesus in eternal happiness. The Holy Spirit brings to life different charisms within the Church, different paths towards the same goal.

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<sup>2</sup> CCD XI, 26; Conference 19 on The Spirit of Faith.

<sup>3</sup> CCD I, 138; Letter 92 to Saint Louise around 1631.

A specific charism means discovering a particular hue on Jesus's face, being attracted to, inspired by, called to follow Jesus, finding a place in the Church, the way to serve, to live the faith, to participate in Jesus's plan of salvation for every single person and all humanity. As members of the Vincentian Family, we ponder the face of Jesus Vincent de Paul had discovered and by which he was inspired. We see the face of Jesus that changed his life, in which he found the true meaning of his existence and understood the mission he was called to accomplish. We, as his followers, are trying to carry it out in the here and now. Vincent de Paul invites us to deepen in our own lives, and to encourage others to discover and follow, the "face of Jesus" that he left to us.

The Vincentian Charism is a way of life. As a way of life within the Church, it is a road to sanctity, the sanctification of our own lives and the lives of others. We can call the Vincentian Family a movement composed of persons who belong to a specific branch of the Family, as well as those who do not belong yet to a specific branch, but are inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul's way and live it in their lives. This is a movement that is inspired by the "face of Jesus," discovered and followed by Saint Vincent de Paul.

To let the Spirit of Jesus move freely, to collaborate with Him, means we must allow ourselves to be surprised to the point that new branches – or groups of the present branches – may be founded in the future in different parts of the world. To see the "face of Jesus" clearly before our eyes, to grow in charity, to be convincing followers of the Vincentian Charism it is of utmost importance for us:

- 1) To live a deeply spiritual life. The Incarnation, the Holy Trinity, the Eucharist, Mary, the virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, giving priority to Jesus and not to persons and things, for the mission, for the salvation of humanity must be the pillars of our spirituality.

- 2) To combine prayer and action in all we do, being apostles in prayer and contemplatives in action. Vincent had learned that “even if you never said a word, if you’re really united with God, you’ll touch hearts by your mere presence.”<sup>4</sup>
- 3) To discover and see Jesus in the Poor and the Poor in Jesus. Saint Vincent de Paul had a holistic approach to persons, reacting to their specific needs: spiritual, material, emotional, and physical, but in a logical order. This approach, this understanding, this discovery made him a “Mystic of Charity.” We, as members of the Vincentian Family, are called to become “Mystics of Charity.”
- 4) To renew, deepen, and revive our closeness to the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family by spreading veneration of, trust in, and intercession to them at the local, national, and international levels.
- 5) To base our assistance on good formation in all its aspects: human, spiritual, and professional, each in relation to the specific service in which we are involved.
- 6) To continue developing close collaboration with all the branches and members of the Vincentian Family, whether they belong officially or unofficially to a specific branch on the local, national, and international levels.
- 7) To engage more decisively on the path of the “Systemic-Change” model that frees the Poor from their bonds as victims to become instead equal partners for the good of all humanity.
- 8) To keep collaborating with other groups, organizations, and institutions outside the Vincentian Family who share our same goals and vision on the local, national, and international levels.

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<sup>4</sup> CCD XII, 15; Conference 181, Repetition of Prayer, [1658].



“The charity of Jesus Crucified urges us”<sup>5</sup> and “love is inventive to infinity.”<sup>6</sup> Let us seek, together, new and creative ways to come to the assistance of the Poor. Our efforts, struggles, and common dreams cannot stop until Charity is globalized. Our common wish and dream is that more and more people will join the walk toward the Globalization of Charity. May numerous persons begin to follow the Vincentian Charism, joining the different lay associations within the Family, as well as the various women’s and men’s Congregations of Consecrated Life as sisters, brothers, and priests.

Dear young men and women from around the world, if you feel in your heart that Jesus is calling you today, called you during this three-day symposium, to join in our common mission by becoming part of a lay association or becoming a lay missionary, sister, brother, or priest, answer positively, with inner peace and conviction. You will be on the right path, the path that will lead you to the highest point of happiness and meaning in your life.

We are celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism. Not wanting to fall “into ingratitude, the crime of crimes,”<sup>7</sup> we give profound thanks to Providence, to Jesus, for making this small mustard seed grow into a large tree. We ask forgiveness of Jesus and of the people for all the mistakes, faults, and sins committed by its members. We ask for the grace to remain deeply rooted in the Charism. We ask, in all simplicity and humility, to engage with even more fire, dedication, and strength in the mission entrusted to us by Jesus, making even clearer the “face of Jesus,” the “Evangelizer of the Poor,” in the world by watering, trimming, and fertilizing the tree so its branches may reach to the farthest corners of the earth.

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<sup>5</sup> Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity, p. 12. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14.

<sup>6</sup> CCD XI, 131; Conference 102, Exhortation to a Dying Brother, 1645.

<sup>7</sup> CCD III, 42; Letter 1150 to Jean Bourdet, Superior in Saint-Meen, 1 September 1646.

## Mission Appeal 2017

Rome, 22 October 2017

World Mission Sunday

“400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism –  
A call to renew the zeal, passion,  
and fire for the Missions *Ad Gentes*”

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear brothers,

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

My heart is full of joy, enthusiasm, and hope as I write this letter of Mission Appeal to all the confreres around the world on the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism. Providence brought us to this point of history. Providence will lead us into the future.

Let me first express my heartfelt thankfulness for the tremendous witness of love of the members of the Congregation of the Mission toward the missions *Ad Gentes*. This love, commitment, dedication are expressed in different ways:

- by going personally to the missions *Ad Gentes*;
- by deeply committed prayer to accompany the confreres serving in the missions;
- by the openness of the provinces, vice-provinces, and regions to allow confreres to serve in the Missions *Ad Gentes*;

- by a willingness to support financially the foundation of new missions around the world, as well as to help develop and accompany the already existing International Missions in their process toward self-sufficiency.

“If a person dreams alone, a dream remains a dream. If we dream together, the dream becomes a reality”! My dear confreres, in this year 2017, the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, I would like to launch a concrete mission appeal to all the confreres around the world as a tangible sign and fruit of this “year of grace” for the entire Congregation of the Mission, for the entire Vincentian Family.

My concrete call, appeal, invitation is, as a sign of deep thankfulness for all graces received in the 400-year history of our charism, to send 1% of the members of the Congregation of the Mission to the missions *Ad Gentes*. One percent of the total number of missionaries in the Congregation of the Mission today involves around 30 missionaries. To respond to this call, appeal, invitation, we need a positive response from 30 confreres who would be willing to go to an already existing International Mission or to a new International Mission.

We constantly receive invitations from bishops of different mission countries around the world, expressing pressing needs in the various fields of service that our charism embraces: direct service to the poor, formation, etc. Depending on the number of responses, we will be able to answer some requests and respond to tremendous needs in so many corners of the world. By receiving 30 positive answers in this 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, we will be able to:

- reinforce the existing International Missions and
- open new International Missions.

Although the response may come this year, the actual realization of going to one of the missions *Ad Gentes* will materialize in one, two, or maybe three years. This will allow the confrere to have sufficient time to prepare for his new mission and to pass on his present assignment to the confrere replacing him. It also will give provincial, vice-provincial, and regional leadership time to plan and adjust for any changes that need to be made.

- After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer for the missions *Ad Gentes*, please send your letter or email to Rome by 30 November 2017 or again by 20 February 2018, so that we can review requests at our *Tempo Forte* meetings in December 2017 and March 2018.
- Confreres who volunteer should inform their Visitor that they have done so. Later the Superior General will dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
- Your letter should give some background knowledge about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your formation. It should also express any particular interests you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
- Even if you have already written in the past, please make contact again.

Having in mind our present International Missions, as well as future new International Missions, we would like to ask the confrere about his availability:

- immediately in 2018;
- in 2018, later in the year (please specify from what month); or
- in 2019 (please specify from what month).

Providence brought us to this point in history. Providence will lead us into the future.

## **Presentation of our current International Missions**

At this point, I would like to present our current International Missions, two of which, by the tremendous generosity of specific provinces now come under their direct accompaniment. These two are the International Missions in Benin and the Solomon Islands. The Province of Poland will accompany Benin. The Provinces of Oceania and Indonesia will accompany the Solomon Islands. The other International Missions are: Alaska-USA, El Alto-Bolivia, Cochabamba-Bolivia, Beni-Bolivia, Punta Arenas-Chile, Tefé-Brazil, Angola, Chad, Tunisia, and Papua New Guinea.

### **Angola**

The International Mission of Angola in Lombe is part of the Archdiocese of Malanje, which has only ten diocesan priests. Of its 24 parishes and missions, only 10 have a priest. In the others, there is a religious community, or just some laity. The mission is in a very poor location (90% of the population live in rural areas). Illiteracy is almost 90% in the adult population. There is little participation of men and young people in the life of communities and very little perseverance. There is a high rate of pregnancy among young girls. Diseases, such as malaria, claim many lives annually, especially those of children.

We collaborate in different ways. Our main concern is to include and form the laity and the religious who reside in our mission. Our ministry involves visits to the communities, formation of the laity, pastoral work with children, collaboration on the Archdiocesan Biblical Commission, spiritual direction in the Archdiocesan Seminary, retreats to religious, classes for aspirants to different women's congregations, classes for the Missionary Sisters of Saint John the Baptist, accompaniment of the Branches of the Vincentian Family (especially the Daughters of Charity, SSVF, MISEVI, AMM, VMY).

The present superior is returning to his province in January and the other confrere will remain alone. Therefore, there is an urgent need for one or two more missionaries. There are vocations, but work needs to be done on Vincentian vocations, so the third missionary could accompany vocations and support other works.

### **Benin**

The International Mission was established in 2012 as a joint mission of the General Council and the Province of Poland. It began in a very remote and rural area of Benin, almost at the center of the country. Until recently, there were three missionaries, but now there are only two, so they urgently are awaiting at least one more missionary. Their main ministry is pastoral work, formation of the clergy, and assisting all the branches of the Vincentian Family.

Besides the tremendous growth of the pastoral work of this mission, the confreres were able to establish a number of Basic Christian Communities. Most of these include educational infrastructure, schools, and dispensaries. Some of the Vincentian Family's branches are growing in Benin and there are also some religious congregations who share our spiritual heritage and are part of our Family. The confreres are doing their best to strengthen the already existing branches of our Family and to found those not currently present. There is a need for more missionaries. The Benin Mission will pass to the Polish Province in January 2018.

### **Chad**

Chad is one of the poorest countries in Africa and the world. Our mission there started in 2011, as a joint venture between the Curia and COVIAM. It began in a very remote area of Chad, in the parish church at Bebaem, where celebrations were held under a very big tree. Thanks to the efforts made by the confreres, a big new church has been built. At Bebaem, the Daughters of Charity work closely with our confreres for the good of the poor. Last year, the Chad Mission started to expand and grow with a new missionary presence in Moundou.

We are ministering to extremely poor people at Bebalem, a very big parish with around 38 outstations. At Moundou, we are engaged in the ministry of formation of young people, the minor seminary.

There is a great need for more missionaries in Chad. Recently, two other dioceses, N'Djaména and Doba, have asked for our presence, mainly for the formation of their clergy.

## **Tunisia**

The Tunisia International Mission officially began in September 2012. The mission started at “La Goullette,” very close to Tunis. This mission has known many missionaries. Some did not last long for this mission is quite different. Tunisia is an Islamic country. Christians are very few and hidden.

In La Goullette, as well as in Sousse, we have parishes entrusted to us, but our parishioners are principally foreigners, more than 98% are either students coming from the rest of Africa, workers for different agencies, or tourists. There are some other ministries like the direct service to the poor through Caritas or chaplaincy to the Christian prisoners, always foreigners. Therefore, the Tunisia mission's ministries are parish, prison chaplaincy, coordination of the Diocesan Caritas, chaplaincy to various female religious congregations.

The Tunisia Mission is one International Mission in two places, La Goullette and Sousse, with two missionaries in each. There is one canonical house with a single superior.

## **Bolivia**

### The Missions of El Alto: Italaque and Moco-moco

In 2018, we will celebrate 25 years of work among the Aymara indigenous peoples and some Quechua communities. The mission is located in arid and cold mountainous terrain, serving

56 communities in Moco-Moco, and 31 in Italaque. All of them are scattered and difficult to access. In many of these communities, the young leave and the elderly remain. Only the population of Moco-moco and some of its communities is experiencing a rebound thanks to the trade that reaches them.

Building communities of faith has always been the main pastoral challenge with visits to the communities and work with catechists. It is imperative to celebrate the Eucharist and form people for the sacraments. Pastoral work is very diversified: biblical circles, pre-sacramental courses, formation of catechists, pastoral work with families, preparation for feasts, formation of children and young people in groups. There are also programs promoting education, nutrition, health, and social welfare.

What will happen in the future? The two missionaries have been working there for almost ten years. No one has volunteered for this mission, perhaps for fear of height and geographical conditions. Good health and physical stamina are required, but, above all, a strong missionary spirit whose moral and spiritual witness commits them to continuity to everything already undertaken. The diocese does not have enough priests to take over this area.

### The Mission of Cochabamba

In 2009, the diocese entrusted us with a parish on the fringes of the city of Cochabamba. The current pastor and superior has been there from the foundation. Almost all the missionaries who served there were from the Province of Chile, for it had been entrusted with the care of this mission. The community needs at least one more missionary.

The parish was in an unfortunate state. Constant and dedicated work has transformed the face of this mission. It has two distinct areas. One is rural highlands with populations at the same level as the Moco-Moco and Italaque Missions. The priests visit and evangelize



22 communities. In many of these, a small Christian community is just beginning to be established. The work is arduous. The population of 5000 to 6000 people is of the Quechua ethnic group. Many already understand Spanish, but it is still necessary to know and speak Quechua in order to nourish the faith of the people. The other is a “marginal city.” These are settlements or colonies of workers, who moved to the area because they were provided land or housing by the company for which they work or by the government. There are seven chapels and more are needed to care for the 8000 to 8500 inhabitants who speak Quechua and Castilian.

Some existing associations are being promoted, and some of the Vincentian Family. It is typical pastoral ministry in a missionary parish. The priests think that it can be turned over to the bishop for some diocesan priest, but the bishop believes that what has been achieved would be lost with the danger of the parish becoming a sacramental market. The people are very poor and in great need of religious formation, but it is unknown where the intense population growth will lead. It could be used as a vocation center and host the priests of the other two missions in Bolivia.

### The Mission of Beni

The Daughters of Charity had been in this mission for 68 years. The Province of Peru sent a missionary to study its possibilities and conditions. There are now two Vincentian missionaries, who await one or two more missionaries to establish this community fully. The bishop asked the priests to take care of “Kateri,” part of a larger project, EPARU (Rural Pastoral Team), run for some 30 years by the Daughters of Charity. Today it is headed by a “Teachers’ Council” trained to form Christian leaders to serve the indigenous communities throughout the diocese.

Kateri is a “semi-boarding school” for middle school children. It is an educational center in the middle of the selva. The climate is hot and humid, typically tropical. The mission will be to visit

the communities bordering the rivers, all of which are navigable. The trip from the episcopal seat to Kateri takes three days on the boat acquired by the Daughters of Charity for pastoral ministry. Speedboat can shorten the trip to eight or nine hours. Most of the indigenous groups are semi-nomadic. This is a difficult mission, even though all the communities speak and understand Spanish. The missionaries also collaborate with the diocese and in the formation and pastoral ministry of EPARU in harmony with the Lay Team and the Daughters of Charity.

This mission is beginning and much is expected of it. The two area bishops and some of the priests express their hope that the missionaries will encourage not only the native peoples, but also the priests themselves, with their spirituality and missionary strength so necessary to help the incipient Diocese of Beni grow.

## **Brazil**

The Prelature of Tefé is located in the heart of the Amazon rainforest with 264,669 square kilometers and 197,000 inhabitants. The seat of the Prelature is 36 hours from the state capital by ship. It is an immense region with many locomotion and communication challenges.

We are responsible for a parish on the outskirts of Tefé that has three communities. One of them is already the result of our presence. It is an area of urban invasion with approximately 930 families. This new community was named Saint Vincent to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his charism. Soon the bishop will hand over to our care a new mission area with 30 riverside communities and three indigenous villages. The headquarters of the mission does not have a priestly presence. A community of sisters have lived there for nine years, but they will leave in January 2018. There are many evangelical churches. Our people live almost abandoned ecclesiastically.

Our dreams and desires are: leadership training, implantation of new branches of the Vincentian Family (VMY, SSVP, AIC), development of new ecclesial communities, promotion of emerging vocational groups, pastoral ministry for the indigenous peoples, and prioritizing youth.

## **Chile**

Punta Arenas was established in 2013 as an International Mission entrusted to the care of the Province of Chile. It is made up of two centers: the parish of San Miguel, which has three missionaries and is hoping for a fourth; and the distant “Isla Porvenir” with two parishes that are large in area, but small in population. The difficult thing about this mission is the weather. The cold and the wind mean that in the “severe months,” normal pastoral action is almost impossible, leaving only three or four months available. Pastoral work is slow, from person to person, reduced to collaborating on various issues with the diocese: care of the sick, vocation ministry, associations and movements in the parish, and helping elderly pastors.

Work on the island is arduous, not only because of its precariousness, but also because of the need to travel to very remote places (some 400 kilometers away). Some scandals in the local Church have created a strong distrust for priests. Therefore, much care is required, especially in dealing with children and young people. The Mission is young and difficult. It needs strengthening and consolidation.

## **United States**

The Alaska mission ministers to Spanish-speakers in the Archdiocese of Anchorage and, as resources allow, outreach to those who speak Spanish in the Dioceses of Fairbanks and Juneau. The mission is rooted in the parish of the Co-Cathedral in Anchorage, where the confreres are pastor and vicar, serving both English and Spanish populations. The mission needs bilingual men

(Spanish and English) who have driver's licenses, robust health, good professional and personal boundaries, and are willing to suffer in a harsh climate to serve the poor.

The Co-Cathedral is the home church of the largest Hispanic community in Alaska. Outside of Anchorage, one confrere travels every month to Kodiak Island to attend to the spiritual needs of the Hispanic faithful. In the Diocese of Fairbanks, the mission outreach supplies a priest for 12 consecutive days. This priest works in collaboration with the Cathedral's pastor to meet the Hispanic community's needs. Father Andrew Bellisario's appointment as Bishop of Juneau reduces us to two confreres. This makes it difficult to run all the outreach ministries we already have begun. The Mission in Fairbanks is 400 miles away from the community and in winter is accessible only by airplane. Kodiak Island is accessible only by airplane and often the weather disrupts travel plans.

As more confreres who speak English and Spanish come to the mission, the outreach will extend to Hispanic communities in places like Dutch Harbor and Juneau, both of which are accessible only by airplane.

### **Papua New Guinea**

The International Mission in Papua New Guinea began in 2001. The population of PNG is around eight million. Considered a Christian nation, its Catholics number around two million. The Church in PNG is comparatively young, facing many challenges. It needs the help of the missionaries to grow and develop.

The Vincentians are engaged in two important ministries: the spiritual formation of the diocesan seminarians at Holy Spirit Seminary to which we have contributed substantially since 2001 and pastoral care of the faithful at Saint Michel's Parish since 2006. Both are located in Bomana. We also will be taking up responsibility for parishes/missions in other dioceses.

The confreres working in PNG would like to have more members. There are many possibilities for evangelization and social development. Anybody with full commitment and willing to face challenges is most welcome to join our efforts in PNG.

### **Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands' mission began in 1992. The population is around 700,000. A predominantly Christian country, the Catholic population constitutes around 23% of it. The Solomon Islands' church is comparatively young, facing many challenges. It needs the help of the missionaries to grow and develop.

The Vincentians are engaged in two important ministries in the Solomon Islands: spiritual and intellectual formation of the diocesan seminarians in Holy Name of Mary Seminary at Tenaru, Honiara, and pastoral care of the faithful at the Red Beach parish. For many years, the Vincentians have contributed substantially to the formation of good priests for the three dioceses of the Solomon Islands. Besides staffing and administering the seminary, which caters to diocesan seminarians, we also started a formation program for candidates to the Congregation. We already have four priests ordained as Vincentians from the Solomon Islands for the Province of Oceania.

The mission is celebrating its silver jubilee of foundation this year. The General Council has decided to put in place a new administrative arrangement. It reached an agreement with the Provinces of Indonesia and Oceania, which will be operative by the end of this year. The Province of Indonesia will staff Holy Name of Mary Seminary and, in partnership with the Province of Oceania, the Parish of the Good Shepherd. However, the mission will remain open to confreres from other provinces who volunteer their services.

When we speak of the International Missions, we know so well the tremendous challenges that the missions *Ad Gentes* present in

the area of material needs too. Over the years, the VSO (Vincentian Solidarity Office) has received contributions from individual confreres, community houses, and provinces. Many provinces contribute monies for micro projects, as well as matching funds for other projects, all of which go into the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. There is an urgency to help new and struggling missions to obtain infrastructure, that is, community and formation houses, vehicles, and equipment needed to carry out their ministries.

Let me share one project on this subject that has been evolving for the past 20 years and recently came to its final stage: building a common Theologate of the Congregation of the Mission for Africa in Enugu, Nigeria. COVIAM, accompanied by the General Curia, decided to build the new Theology Seminary by the month of July 2019. The present seminary house is already overcrowded, and too small to accommodate all the students that the provinces and missions want to send to the program. The provinces and missions plan to construct another residence alongside the seminary house in Enugu. The new residence will have four floors and include 50 bedrooms, a large multi-purpose hall, three study rooms, four community rooms, and a laundry.

The cost of the entire building is 630,000 USD. So far, we have collected 200,000 USD, but still need another 430,000 USD. Can this project become a reality in July 2019 as tangible fruit of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism?

With all simplicity, even as I express my deepest gratitude for the material and financial help individual confreres, community houses, and provinces are showing in such concrete ways, I would like to encourage you to increase your previous contributions. In addition, I hope that those who, in the past, might not have helped could consider a contribution. Please do so at this time for the new Theology Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission in Enugu, Nigeria. As the donations arrive, we will keep updating you. God willing it will become a reality in July 2019.

**How to contribute to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund  
Contributions from individuals and provincial houses**

- Checks only and those checks should be made out to the **Congregazione della Missione. The bank will not accept checks with any other name.**

Checks should be sent to:

Treasurer General  
Congregazione della Missione  
Via dei Capasso, 30  
00164 Roma  
Italy

- Possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.
- **Clearly indicate that the funds are for the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO)**

**In every case:**

- All gifts received will be acknowledged (if your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable length of time, please contact us for clarification).
- Please inform us if you are making, as described above, any transfer of money.

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the rest of the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family intercede for us!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## Circular – Tempo Forte October

1-6 October 2017

*One must be firm and unchanging with regard to the end  
but gentle and humble as to the means.*

(Letter of Vincent de Paul to François Dufestel (CCD:II:332))

We began our *tempo forte* on Sunday, 1 October, with the presence of Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State. On Sunday morning, we were able to share the Eucharist with the Cardinal and then the members of the Council dialogued with him about the Church in China and Iran as well as the Church's concern for the evangelization of Europe. Our time with the Cardinal concluded with the sharing of a meal.

### **Initiatives of the General Council with regard to the whole Congregation**

#### **1. Presentation of strategies (continued)**

With regard to initial formation, Father Javier Álvarez presented a proposal for the Latin American provinces: on the one hand, better the initial formation in light of the *Ratio Formationis*; on the other hand, take steps that will lead to greater intercultural and international formation as stipulated in the Lines of Action of the 2016 General Assembly.

The General Council views the formation of formators as vitally important. Their formation is more important than any formation plan, more important than the *Ratio*, and more important than any



infrastructure. If there are quality formators, then formation is guaranteed. The General Council encourages CLAPVI to continue the annual encounters for formators and, if necessary, SIEV is willing to collaborate in that endeavor.

This formation plan will be sent to the Visitors of CLAPVI and to the three Visitors of the Provinces of the United States in order for them to be aware of what is being proposed for the Provinces of CLAPVI and, at the same time, to see if there is some way in which they could participate in that plan.

## **2. The Meeting of New Visitors**

This meeting will take place in Rome (8-17 January 2018) and it is foreseen that there will be 20 participants. The objective of this gathering is to deepen the Visitors' understanding of *A Practical Guide for the Visitor* and to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on their service of animation and encouragement, a ministry in which the Visitor is called to engage with the missionaries and with the local communities. The various presentations will be brief and are intended to foster dialogue among the participants. All the details have been concretized.

## **3. Missionaries in difficult situations**

This is another priority for the General Council during the years 2016-2022. Following up on the reflection of the previous *Tempo Forte*, the Superior General asked all the members of the Council to contact the Visitors and ask them to send information with regard to members who are absent from their province. That information should be sent to the Curia in time for the December *Tempo Forte*. More concretely, information should include what is being done to resolve those situations and/or what type of help is needed in order to resolve the situation.

#### 4. The problem of translators/interpreters

This is an ongoing problem. The Congregation needs a team of translators/interpreters in order to assure good simultaneous interpretation during the General Assembly and the various international gatherings. There is also a need for translators who would work on written documents, for example, *Vincentiana* and other documents from the Curia and the Vincentian Family. The General Council established a small commission composed of Miles Heinen, Álvaro Mauricio Fernández, and Giuseppe Turati to present a list of names (members of the Congregation or non-members), so that this matter can be discussed at the next *Tempo Forte*.

#### 5. Other initiatives

During the time of the March *Tempo Forte*, a Commission will be appointed to revise and publish a third edition of *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*. This Commission will not have to begin from nothing. The members will be given the concerns and suggestions that will come forth from the gathering of the new Visitors (January 2018) as well as the reflections of the General Council about the *Guide*. This Commission will also be given the task of revising the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*. Again, the Commission will be given suggestions and the reflections of the General Council.

The members of the General Council have put together their reflections on *the Canonical House, local community, and community ad instar domus*. The General Council would like some of the specialists in Canon Law and our own Common Law to offer some organized reflections in order to clarify those concepts that have concrete legal implications. The same can be said about the privilege of affiliation in the Congregation.

#### Offices dependent on the Superior General and his Council

- For the purpose of organizing in a professional manner

both the Library and the Archives at the Curia, a three-year contract has been signed with a specialist in this area, Ms. Giulia. She began her work at the beginning of October

- We have also contracted Girolamo Grammatico as a collaborator for Jorge Rodríguez (the Office of Communication). He began his work in July and in the coming months much material will be available on our website.
- We are still searching for a Vice-Director of CIF. Some steps have been taken but, at the present time, we have not found anyone to take this position.
- The Coordinator and the Secretary of SIEV, Corpus Delgado and Fransiscus Xaverius Armada, in accord with the Statutes of that organization, have been confirmed for another term of three years.
- In order to provide the provinces with an ability to fundraise and thus finance charitable projects, the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) will offer four courses to form five missionaries in each of them. One course will be given in English, one in French, and two in Spanish. These courses will take place during the years 2019-2022. The objective is to have 20 missionaries formed so that they can in turn raise funds for social projects. The General Council supports this initiative, which will benefit those who are poor.
- Guillermo Campuzano is the representative of the Congregation at the United Nations. At the present time, the five branches of the Vincentian Family have representatives at this organization (there are ten employees and there are distinct budgets). It would seem that the Vincentian Family would have greater strength and efficacy if there were one representative. The Superior General will present this proposal to the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family.

Ten provinces have responded to Father Campuzano's invitation to develop an international Vincentian network for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (Commitments of the 2016 General Assembly). Father will begin to work with the missionaries who responded affirmatively.

### **Financial Matters**

The Treasurer General presented the financial status of the Congregation to the members of the Council and responded to their questions. We will explore the possibility of joining the funds for the *Strategic Planning Workshop* (which at this time is not active) to the funds for the Vincentian Solidarity Office. Such a move could make it possible to raise more funds in order to finance projects in the provinces.

With regard to the contribution of the provinces to the General Curia, it was decided that there would be three types of contribution (dependent on the financial situation of each province).

### **International Missions**

We share with you the following news:

- On 28 August, Nomenjanahary Norbert Raharison arrived at the mission in Sousse (Tunis) where he will minister with Claudio Santangelo.
- In the mission in Benin, the missionaries have informed us that the members of the Vincentian Family in that country have a great desire to come together in order to deepen their understanding of the Vincentian Charism (Vincentian Formation). The last session took place on 18-19 July in Brio and some 80 persons gathered together to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian Charism. During that gathering, there was a celebration of the Eucharist and the film, *Monsieur Vincent*, was shown. That was followed by

a presentation on affective and effective love. The gathering concluded with a festive meal. The celebration took place in an atmosphere of prayer and joy.

On 25 January 2018, this mission will no longer be an international mission but will become a mission dependent on the Province of Poland.

- In October, Rafał Bogdan Brukarczyk joined the missionary team in Punta Arenas (Chile). After three years of ministry in that region, Ángel Garrido returned to his province of origin (Saint Vincent de Paul, Spain). We thank God for his missionary work and pray that God will bless him in his new ministry.
- In the mission in Alaska, Andrew E. Bellisario, was appointed bishop. Therefore, he is no longer a member of the mission team. In June of 2018, we will have a third candidate (thus a missionary team of three persons). Thank you for your ministry and may God bless you in your episcopal ministry.
- The mission in Tefé (Brazil) has a missionary team composed of three members: Rogelio Toro Isaza (Province of Colombia), Paulo Estaquio Venuto (Province of Rio de Janeiro), and Alexandre Fonseca de Paula (Province of Fortaleza). During the meeting of CLAPVI, which will take place at the end of October, the details will be concretized.
- At the end of August, Aidan Rooney left the mission of El Alto (Bolivia) and returned to the Eastern Province (USA). He had ministered in that mission for eight years. Thank you for your ministry!
- On 2 October, the General Council met with the sister of the recently deceased Jesús María Lusarreta Induráin, as well as with his niece, Mrs. Yolanda Torres. They expressed their concern with regard to the various charitable, promotional,

and evangelization projects that Father Lusarreta had begun. They also expressed their commitment to continue to provide financial support to those projects. In contact with the Provincial Administrator, Gilbert Walker, the General Council is looking for a missionary who is willing to carry forward these various projects.

- We concluded this section by reviewing the petition of Archbishop Goetbé Edmond Djitangar, Metropolitan of N'Djaména (Chad), who requested the presence of the Congregation in his archdiocese in order to take charge of the formation of the seminarians. At the same time, the Bishop of Doba (Chad), Martin Waïngue Bani, requested the Congregation to administer a parish there and take responsibility for the formation of the catechists throughout the diocese. It is wonderful to receive these requests because they reveal the manner in which the various bishops esteem the Congregation. Unfortunately, we were unable to respond in a positive manner to these requests because of a lack of missionaries. These invitations will be given to COVIAM for its study.

You are all in my prayers.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## Advent Letter 2017

Rome, November 23, 2017



and, as a consequence, in the Eucharist you find it all.

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

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

In my letter for the feast of our Founder on 27 September 2016, I encouraged us to reflect on Saint Vincent de Paul as a “Mystic of Charity.” From that letter on, based on our Common Rules and Constitutions, we started reflecting about what made Saint Vincent de Paul a Mystic of Charity.

In the Advent letter for the year 2016, we reflected on the “Incarnation” as one of the pillars of Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality. In the 2017 Lenten letter, we reflected on the second pillar of our Founder’s spirituality, the “Holy Trinity.” In this year’s Advent letter, we will reflect on the third pillar of Saint Vincent’s spirituality, the “Eucharist.”

In the tenth Chapter of the Common Rules, in writing about the pillars of our spirituality and talking about the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity, Saint Vincent suggests that in the Eucharist, you find it all. He writes,

*There can be no better way of paying the best honor possible to these mysteries [the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation] than proper devotion to, and use of, the Blessed Eucharist, sacrament and sacrifice. It includes, as it were, all the other mysteries of faith and, by itself, leads those who receive Communion respectfully or celebrate Mass properly, to holiness and ultimately to everlasting glory. In this way God, Unity and Trinity, and the Incarnate Word, are paid the greatest honor. For these reasons, nothing should be more important to us than showing due honor to this sacrament and sacrifice. We are also to make a great effort to get everyone else to pay it similar honor and reverence. We should try, to the best of our ability, to achieve this by preventing, as far as we can, any lack of reverence in word or act, and by carefully teaching others what to believe about so great a mystery, and how they should honor it.<sup>1</sup>*

In the Eucharist, you find and can reflect, meditate, contemplate, adore, and have a personal encounter with all the stages of Jesus's life from the Incarnation on:

- Jesus in Mary's womb
- Jesus in the manger
- Jesus as a child in Nazareth living with his parents, Mary and Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> Common Rules X, 3; cf. CCD XIIIa, 455; Document 117a, Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission (17 May 1658). CCD refers to the series, *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; future references to this work will use, as above, the initials, CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number.



- Jesus in His three-year mission proclaiming the Good News
- Jesus in His suffering and death on the Cross
- Jesus's Resurrection
- Jesus's Ascension
- The Holy Trinity

This understanding that in the Eucharist you find it all is accompanied by other prophetic and inspirational words, coming from his deepest life experience, "Love is inventive to infinity." One of the best known of Vincent's phrases, he used these specific words while talking about the Eucharist, trying to explain what the Eucharist is, what the Eucharist does, what we find in the Eucharist. Jesus's imagination found this concrete means to be with us always, to accompany us always, and to remain with us always until the end of the world. His Love, inventive to infinity, keeps surprising us today, here and now!

*Since love is inventive to infinity, after being affixed to the infamous stake of the cross to win the hearts and souls of those by whom He wishes to be loved –not to mention all the other innumerable schemes He used for this purpose during His time spent among us – foreseeing that His absence could cause some forgetfulness or cooling off in our hearts, He wanted to avoid this danger by instituting the Most August Sacrament, in which He is as truly and substantially present as He is in heaven above. Furthermore, however, seeing that, if He wanted to humble and empty himself even more than He had done in His Incarnation and could make himself in some way more like us – or at least make us more like Him – He caused this venerable Sacrament to serve us as food and drink, intending by this means that the same union and resemblance that exist between nature and substance should occur spiritually in each human person. Because love can do and will everything, He willed it thus; and for fear that, if people*

*didn't understand this incredible mystery and scheme of love, they might neglect to approach this Sacrament, He has obliged them to do so under pain of incurring His eternal displeasure. Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, non habebitis vitam (Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you will not have life (cf. John 6:53)).<sup>2</sup>*

If we find it all in the Eucharist, then it is there that Jesus speaks to us here and now from His Mother's womb. He speaks to us here and now from the manger as a newborn child. He speaks to us here and now as a child in Nazareth. He speaks to us here and now as the person sent by the Father who went about doing good. He speaks to us here and now from His suffering and death on the Cross. He speaks to us here and now from His Resurrection. He speaks to us here and now from His Ascension. He speaks to us here and now as one of the three Persons of the Trinity. The here-and-now reality of every human being from the time of conception until death is ever present in the here and now of the Eucharist, as the here and now of the Eucharist is present in the here and now of every human being.

*When He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, He said to His Apostles, Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum (cf. Luke 22:15), which means "I have ardently desired to eat this pasch with you." Now, since the Son of God, who gives himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, desired this with such an ardent desire – desiderio desideravi – isn't it right that the soul who desires to receive Him, and of whom He is the sovereign good, should desire Him with all her heart? Rest assured, Sisters, that what He said to His Apostles He still says to each one of you. That's why you must try to stir up your desire by some good thought such as "You desire to come to me, my Lord, and who am I? But I, my God, desire with all my heart to go to you, for you are my sovereign good and my last end." The late Bishop of Geneva*

<sup>2</sup> CCD XI, 131-132; Conference 102, Exhortation to a Dying Brother, 1645.

*used to say that He always celebrated Mass as if it were for the last time, and received Communion as if it were Viaticum. That's an excellent practice and I advise you, as strongly as possible, dear Sisters, to adopt it.*<sup>3</sup>

Dear confreres, the time of Advent gives us a wonderful opportunity to deepen and fortify this third pillar of our Vincentian spirituality, the Eucharist, this “Love inventive to infinity,” this place where we find it all! To this end, I suggest taking the following steps to bring to life, renew, or deepen the place of the Eucharist in our lives:

- 1) Before the celebration of the Holy Mass, take time in silence to prepare to accompany Jesus on His way to Calvary, the Cross, His Death, and the Resurrection.
- 2) After the celebration of the Holy Mass, take time in silence to thank Jesus for being able to witness and take part over and over again in His Sacrifice, Death, and Resurrection.
- 3) Once a week, have at least half an hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for the whole community.
- 4) Every time we leave the house to go somewhere, stop at the house chapel or church to ask Jesus in the Tabernacle to accompany us where we plan to go, in the service we are called to deliver, in the task we would like to accomplish.

*After adoring the Blessed Sacrament there and offering God the work they are about to do, they will ask Him for the grace of telling the sick poor what He wants said to them on His behalf for their salvation.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> CCD IX, 265; Conference 31, Holy Communion, 18 August 1647.

<sup>4</sup> CCD XIIIb, 382; Document 186, Preparing the Sick of the Hôtel-Dieu for General Confession (1636).

- 5) Every time we come back from somewhere, stop at the house chapel or church to thank Jesus for all His blessings.

*We should also keep up other worthwhile practices customary in the Congregation, such as to visit the chapel immediately before going out and after coming in, greeting Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.*<sup>5</sup>

- 6) During the day, make some short visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle to help renew our inner peace, to recollect our thoughts, to receive a sign or response to questions and doubts that are present in our minds at a particular moment.

*Now, when someone says something rude to you that you find hard to bear, don't answer back, but raise your heart to God to ask Him for the grace to put up with that for love of Him, and go before the Blessed Sacrament to tell your troubles to Our Lord.*<sup>6</sup>

I asked our confrere, Emeric Amyot d'Inville, a missionary in Madagascar, to share a personal reflection on the Eucharist. May his thoughts inspire your own contemplation.

Saint Vincent accorded a very special importance to the Eucharist, both in the spiritual life of his spiritual sons and daughters and in missionary preaching. It must continue to hold this central place for us today. Allow me to share with you some points that seem to me to be of particular importance for our spiritual life and our apostolate today.

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<sup>5</sup> Common Rules X, 20; cf. CCD XIIIa, 460; Document 117a, Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, (17 May 1658).

<sup>6</sup> CCD X, 150; Conference 74, Love of Physical and Moral Sufferings (Common Rules, Article 6), 23 July 1656.

This first reflection is directed specifically to priests. I would like to highlight an important and sometimes neglected fact: when we, ministers of the Eucharist, celebrate Mass, we become *one* with Christ, because of our *ministerial priesthood*: Acting in the name and in the person of Christ the head, we enter into the “I” of the only high priest, Jesus. We lend Him our voice, our hands, and our heart so that, saying Jesus’s very words in the first person, “This is *my* body... This is *my* blood,” He changes the bread into His Body and the wine into His Blood. A greater intimacy with Christ then occurs for us, priests, which we must savor every day and which gives a very profound meaning to our priestly identity.

By virtue of our Baptism, all of us, Vincentian priests, brothers, sisters, and laity, are the “faithful of Christ,” to use the Council’s expression. Therefore, because of the *common priesthood of the faithful* that we share, it is up to us all, without distinction, to offer to the Father our life and that of all those around us in union with the Eucharistic offering of Christ. During Mass, at the offertory or even during the elevation, let us take time to unite our life and that of the world and the Church to the offering of Jesus to his Father in order to give Him glory and to receive graces and blessings from Him. This is how our Mass takes on a special human density that is offered to God the Father through Christ.

Without distinction, we, who are faithful, all receive Communion, the culmination of the Mass. The words of Jesus in Saint John’s Gospel, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (6:56), must nourish and guide our thanksgiving after communion to make of it a silent and contemplative moment of loving intimacy with the Christ of whom John said, in his introduction to the account of the Passover meal, “He loved his own in the world and *he loved them to the end*” (13:1b). Christ, who *loved [us] to the end* in His passion as in His Eucharist, which is the memorial of that

passion, awaits our love in response to His. This is the time, after communion, to express it to Him in a silent and fervent prayer. Our communion will be as good as our thanksgiving.

Finally, after Mass, far from saying goodbye to Jesus whom we would leave in the silence of the tabernacle, we set off with Him, “remaining in Him and He in us,” to live with Him and in Him our day with its encounters, joys, sorrows, and responsibilities. We go forth with Him to those with whom we live and who are entrusted to our care. We, Vincentians, go out to evangelize the poor, to serve them corporally and spiritually, to proclaim to them the word of life, and to be at the service of their human promotion “following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor” and in union with Him.

“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit” (John 15:5). This is the objective of the Eucharist and the secret of the spiritual fruitfulness of our life and our apostolate.

May the reflection, meditation, contemplation, adoration, and personal encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and Blessed Sacrament, Jesus’s inventive love to infinity, where we find it all, help us to prepare for the coming Christmas celebrations as well as for the lifelong mission we are called to fulfill!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## Circular - Tempo Forte December

4-9 December 2017

*Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #14).*

Our *tempo forte* was preceded by the annual gathering with the members of the Congregation who are studying in Rome (Sunday, 3 December). The time together began with a fraternal dialogue that provided us with the opportunity to introduce ourselves to one another. At 11:00 am, we celebrated the Eucharist for the First Sunday of Advent (and were mindful of Saint Francis Xavier, the patron of the missions). Our celebration concluded with a special meal, after which the 16 students returned to their respective residences.

### **Initiatives of the General Council with regard to the Congregation**

**[1] Presentation of strategies (continued):** For the second time the members of the General Council focused on strategies for developing and responding to the only *postulatum* that was approved by the 2016 General Assembly, a postulate regarding solidarity. Father Miles Heinen provided us with an update in this regard: in September, a questionnaire was sent to all the provinces but only thirteen (13) responded.

After a lengthy dialogue, it was concluded that the development of this *postulatum* should be focused on two realities that have been in place for the past 25 years: Patrimonial Funds for the neediest provinces and the Mission Fund. In view of that, Father Miles will develop a draft for our meeting in March 2018 that will enable us to concretize our vision with regard to solidarity. This plan will then be presented at the Visitors' Meeting that will take place in 2019.

**[2] Missionaries in difficult situations (continued):** The General Council has been charged with confronting and resolving as quickly as possible the various irregular situations that are found in almost every province. Guidelines have been offered to the Visitors who have been requested to send to the Secretary General specific information with regard to those confreres who are in those irregular situations. Some provinces have not yet responded to that request and we once again urge the Visitors to do so as soon as possible.

**[3] Dialogue about the Symposium (13-15 October):** It is hoped that this event will be evaluated since it is certainly the most significant initiative that took place during the Jubilee Year. Therefore, we hope that the Symposium will be evaluated by each one of the branches of the Vincentian Family (listening to those persons who participated in this event).

The General Curia did its own evaluation. For many members of the Vincentian Family this event was very enriching because of where it took place, because of the number of people who participated, because of the festive atmosphere that surrounded the various activities. The General Council feels that some aspects could have been done better, for example, using this event to highlight our identity within the Church and to encourage the need for greater collaboration among the various branches of the Vincentian Family. The members of the General Curia could have been more actively involved in this event.

**[4] A new approach for the consultation process for the appointment of a Visitor:** As everyone knows, there are two methods for appointing a Visitor: election and consultation. In order to facilitate the second option (consultation), the Secretary General has proposed a new approach that outlines certain aspects on which the confreres are asked to comment when indicating their choice for Visitor. This process will help the Secretary General in developing a synthesis of the various opinions. In the consultation process it is important that the confreres not only express their preference but also state their reasons for their stated preference.



## Offices Dependent on the Superior General and his Council

- Father Jorge Rodríguez (Director) presented the Council with a detailed description of the work that the Communications Office has done and is doing. Some proposals for the future were also presented (a distinct way for presenting the circular letters of the Superior General which will be published on cmglobal).

In light of the proposal to take on a part-time professional graphic designer, the Curia wants more time to reflect on the manner in which the Congregation should utilize the various means of communication. The Council has asked Father Jorge to provide them with some criteria in order to engage in such an evaluation and thus look at future needs.

- CIF held its first meeting for Archivists and Librarians. This meeting took place at the Motherhouse in Paris and was positively evaluated by the 25 participants (the majority of whom were Missionaries). Five Daughters of Charity and some lay persons also participated. A future edition of *Vincentiana* will present the content of this gathering and will include the Final Document that was developed by the participants.
- Despite the difficulties that SIEV has encountered in initiating their Masters in Vincentian Studies program (scheduled to begin in September 2018), they continue with their preparation for this initiative. At the present time, they are looking for individuals who will accompany the possible students during the time of their course work. Once that process has been accomplished, an invitation will be sent to the Visitors who will be requested to approach individuals who might be interested in this program.
- With regard to the representation of the Congregation at the United Nations by Guillermo Campuzano, it must be said

that about 20 Visitors have responded positively to the call for greater collaboration with Guillermo. Therefore, we urge those who have not responded to do so as soon as possible.

- The future of the Congregation of the Mission in Holland: As everyone knows and as is recorded in our *Catalogue* (pages 4-6), Holland is a mission that is dependent on the Superior General and his Council. On 6 December, Father Harrie Jaspers (superior) and Father Matthieu Van Knippenberg met with the members of the General Council.

They presented a plan that the confreres in Holland had developed with regard to the future of this mission. It is clear that they are not talking about a mission *ad gentes*, but a mission that is inserted into that secularized part of the world. Their plan flows from an essential question: how to transmit the rich Vincentian heritage in the midst of a secularized country such as Holland? Their plan is focused on three lines of action:

- *Cultural heritage* (chapel, organ, library) – these will be cared for by the confreres in Holland and this will be done with the assistance of the laity.
- *Missionary heritage* – this will be maintained through the beatification of Bishop Schraven (the bishop is and will remain a living witness to the missionary experience in China and in Holland).
- *Spiritual heritage* – it is thought that this heritage can be transmitted through the Saint Vincent de Paul Center which was established several years ago (confreres from Holland and Daughters of Charity, as well as lay members of the Vincentian Family, work together in this center).

This is a spirituality center (inspired by the charitable activity of Vincent de Paul) where there is dialogue with the poor and where people are assisted in making an analysis of the present reality. It is hoped that as the center continues it will develop its plan of action, which will then be reviewed by the Superior General and his Council.

### **Financial Matters**

The Treasurer General, Father Paul Parackal, presented a report on the costs of the Symposium that was held in Rome during the month of October. The Council approved its 2018 budget as well as the distribution of funds to the various international missions (that disbursement was based on a review of the budgets of each mission).

### **International Missions**

- The missions in *Bolivia*: at the present time, there are three missions in that country, El Alto, Cochabamba, and Beni. There are not enough missionaries to maintain these three centers and as a result we must close one of them. The General Council is involved in a process of discernment and there is a great possibility that the mission in Cochabamba will be closed.
- *Papua New Guinea*: seven confreres (from Poland, Oceania, Colombia, and the Philippines) are ministering there. These missionaries are involved in parish ministry, seminary ministry, and ministry at the Malaysian Institute (a center that specializes in providing a process of inculturation to those religious who desire to minister in Papua New Guinea). The mission is composed of two zones: the western zone (dependent on the Province of Indonesia) and the eastern zone (an international mission).

- *The Solomon Islands*: three missionaries are ministering there (two are involved in seminary ministry and one in parish ministry). In January 2018, two confreres from the Province of Oceania will become involved in parish ministry and two confreres of Indonesia will minister in the seminary. Thus there will be seven confreres in this mission (three in parish ministry and four in seminary ministry). The contract with the bishops expires on 31 December 2017, but a decision has been made to renew the contract for another five years (no other modifications will be made in the contract). The contract deals with the confreres ministering in the seminary. It is suggested that the Province of Oceania draw up a contract with the bishops that will deal with the confreres involved in parish ministry. In addition to those contracts with the diocese, a third internal contract will be signed by the Curia, the Province of Indonesia, and the Province of Oceania.
- *The Mission of Benin* (Africa): On 1 January 2018, this international mission will become a mission of the Province of Poland.
- *Punta Arenas* (Chile): three confreres are ministering there: Father Margarito Severino Martínez, Father Pablo Alexis Vargas and Father Rafał Bodgan Brukarczyk. Father Rafał has been requested to take on the role of animator of the community life of the missionaries. The contract with the bishop has been renewed for another three years (no other modifications were made to the contract).
- *Mission of Tefé* (Brazil): three confreres are ministering there: Father Alexandre Fonseca De Paula, Father Rogelio Toro and Father Paulo Venuto. While the juridical status of this mission is being clarified, Father Paulo has been

requested to take on the role of animator of the community life of the missionaries. A superior will soon be appointed. Two contracts have to be drawn up: one with the Diocese and the other with the Congregation (this document will define the responsibilities of the General Curia and the responsibilities of CLAPVI).

### **Vincentian Family**

Here we highlight the report that was submitted by the Systemic Change Commission. This report is composed of an evaluation of the work that was done in 2017 and outlines the work that will be done during 2018.

- With regard to 2017 the Commission was pleased to have engaged in three workshops (Guatemala, India, and Rwanda), each of which was well attended. *The Manual for Systemic Change* has been finished.
- With regard to 2018: a workshop is planned for Panama and the members will participate in the gathering of the Vincentian Family, which will be held in Cochabamba (Bolivia). The Commission has been able to establish regional teams in America, Africa, and Asia (these teams promote a systemic-change approach to ministry). Father Turati (coordinator of the commission) has programmed some regional events.

### **Conferences of Visitors**

Our attention was focused on the meeting of CLAPVI, which took place in Belo Horizonte (23-27 October). Father Aarón Gutiérrez (Assistant General) participated in this meeting. Some of the themes that were dealt with included: systemic change, the new mission of Tefé, priorities of the General Curia for 2016-2022,

review of the commitments that were made during the 2016 General Assembly, report on the School of Vincentian Spirituality in Curitiba (Brazil), the school of formators, the development of a three-year plan (2018-2020). During this gathering a new Executive Council was elected: Father Odair Gonçalves, *Visitor of the Province of Curitiba*, (President); Father Jesús Plasencia, *Visitor of the Province of Mexico*, (Vice-president); Father Gustavo González, *Visitor of the Province of Argentina*, (councilor); and Father Alejandro Paulino, *Visitor of the Province of Puerto Rico*, (councilor). Father José Carlos Fonsatti, Province of *Curitiba, Brazil*, was elected to the position of Executive Secretary.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General



## Of Current Interest

### Martyrs of the Vincentian Family

### Celebration of the Eucharist Beatification

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

11 November 2017

Your Excellency, Cardinal Angelo Amato, representative of his Holiness, Pope Francis; your Excellency, Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid; your Excellency, the Nuncio of His Holiness in Spain; eminent cardinals, archbishops, bishops; esteemed Visitors, members of the Congregation of the Mission, Superiors General, priests, brothers and sisters everyone.

With joy and gratitude, we are celebrating this Vincentian Jubilee Year that commemorates the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of our charism, a gift that was embraced by Saint Vincent de Paul, a unique witness of faith and charity in the Church.

During these days we are constantly reminded of the manner in which Vincent de Paul, as a result of two decisive experiences (Folleville and Châtillon), discovered the need for *charity* and *mission*, two realities that, if they are lived in a radical manner, can lead people to the greatest proof of their love: martyrdom. Yes, charity and mission are two fundamental constitutive elements for the members of the Vincentian Family, elements that have remained fresh and dynamic as a result of the faithful lives of many members of the Vincentian Family.

This missionary perspective and this option for those most in need provide us with a context in which we can situate the courageous witness of those persons who, today, are proclaimed “Blessed.” Today, we gather here in the Palacio de Congresos de Vista Alegre that has been converted into a place of worship and we pray together and celebrate the Lord’s Paschal Mystery. Therefore, united with the whole Church on pilgrimage in Spain and with the universal Church, we give thanks for the witness of love of the 60 members of the Vincentian Family. Those men and women, with great serenity, did not hesitate to profess their faith in the Risen Jesus and did not hesitate to defend the gospel values as they followed the example of Jesus and forgave their executioners.

Our Founder, Vincent de Paul, affirmed the words of Jesus and stated, *there is no greater act of love than that of martyrdom*. Today, the Church, through the ministry of Peter, has proclaimed *Blessed*:

- 24 Missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, proclaimers of the gospel and apostles of charity;
- 16 Missionary/Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, collaborators in the evangelization of the poor, self-sacrificing and committed to God and to those most in need;
- 2 Daughters of Charity, dedicated nurses, ministering at Holy Spirit Hospital in Santa Colma de Gramagnet (Barcelona) where, at the time of their martyrdom, they were caring for those persons afflicted with tuberculosis;
- 5 diocesan priests, directors and spiritual animators of the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Association of the Children of Mary in various towns throughout Murcia;
- 13 laymen and women, members of the Association of the Children of Mary of the Miraculous Medal in Madrid and Cartagena.



The narration of the biography and the martyrdom of these models of holiness and of these men and women who imitated Jesus Christ highlights the fact they that were *courageous witnesses to the faith in the midst of persecution, models of catechists, and prophets of charity* in the various Vincentian lay associations.

Among the priests, brothers, and laity who are to be beatified there are *apostles among children and young people, servants of the poor, and promoters of the lay associations* (the Children of Mary, Catholic Action, and Eucharistic Associations). Some priests were *promoters of vocations to the consecrated life, promoters of forgiveness and reconciliation, and organizers of the missionary activity of the Church*.

May this beatification be for each one of us, and especially for the members of the Vincentian Family, an opportunity for the emergence of grace and a stimulus for growth in fidelity. May God enable us to live our vocation in a creative manner in the midst of a world that is in need of faithful and courageous witnesses who are not afraid to wear themselves out in order to make Mission and Charity real in our midst.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

## Celebration of the Eucharist In Thanksgiving for the Beatification of the Vincentian Martyrs

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

12 November 2017

Santa María, Cathedral of Almudena

### Thanksgiving

During these days we are constantly being reminded of the manner in which Vincent de Paul, as a result of two decisive experiences (Folleville and Châtillon), discovered the need for *charity* and *mission*, two realities that, if they are lived in a radical manner, can lead people to the greatest proof of their love: martyrdom. Yes, charity and mission are two fundamental constitutive elements for the members of the Vincentian Family, elements that have remained fresh and dynamic as a result of the faithful lives of many members of the Vincentian Family.

This missionary perspective and this option for those most in need provide us with a context in which we can situate the courageous witness of those persons who, yesterday, were declared “Blessed.” Those men and women, with great serenity, did not hesitate to profess their faith in the Risen Jesus and did not hesitate to defend the gospel values as they followed the example of Jesus and forgave their executioners.

Our Founder, Vincent de Paul, affirmed, *that ... is what a Christian is made of, and that's the courage we must have in order to suffer and to die, when necessary, for Jesus Christ*<sup>1</sup>. Today, in the name of the worldwide Vincentian Family, and especially in the name of the members of the Vincentian Family in Spain, I want to thank God for the witness of the 40 missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, proclaimers of the gospel and apostles of charity; the two Daughters of Charity, dedicated nurses who cared for those persons afflicted with tuberculosis; the five diocesan priests, directors and animators of the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Association of the Children of Mary in various towns in Murcia; and the 13 lay members of the Association of the Children of Mary and the Miraculous Medal Association in Madrid and Cartagena.

I ask Jesus, the Lord, the Evangelizer and Servant of the poor, that the grace of the Beatification that we have celebrated and lived might become a new incentive for even greater fidelity. Hopefully, we are able to live out our vocation in a creative manner in the midst of a world filled with so much unbelief, filled with people who are hostile to the faith, filled with so many people who do not know Jesus Christ, filled with so many people living in situations of misery. Thus, the daily living out of our lives from the perspective of the words and the deeds of our new Blessed men and women is precisely what the Church and the world expects of us as Vincentians.

As we continue this liturgy of thanksgiving let us engrave on our hearts the words of Saint Vincent, *Remember ... we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ* [CCD:I:276].

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 290; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XI:290.



## The Vincentian Jubilee Year, 400 Years of the Charism

### **Vincentian Spirituality and Prophecy: The salt that never loses its flavor**

By: Stuyardo Marroquín, CM

[This presentation was given on Friday, 13 October 2017, to the Spanish-speaking participants in the Vincentian Family Symposium and has been translated and reproduced here with the permission of the author].

Salt is essential in every kitchen. It is a necessary ingredient in every food. It has often been said that salt gives flavor to food.

Beloved members of the Vincentian Family, after that brief introduction about salt and then, mindful of the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our charism, we can apply those words in an analogous manner to our own life, to the “being” and “doing” of our vocation and also to our experience of the Vincentian Charism.

Let us think about some specific branch of the Vincentian Family or, for that matter, let us think about the whole Vincentian Family in a region or a country. Let us think about them as grains of salt joined together in a container in a kitchen, grains of salt that have become aware of their vocation, aware of God’s calling and as a result, they have made a decision to give flavor to the lives of those persons who are most impoverished (cf., Matthew 5:13).

The members of the Vincentian Family are aware of the fact that they have “a special salty flavor”; namely, the spirituality God has given them that provides them with an ability to love the poorest of the poor and to recognize those poor men and women as their brothers

and sisters. Indeed, the members of the Vincentian Family have been given a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone. Furthermore, aware of the fact that they have this special salty flavor, they know that, as a vital ingredient, they are to season the life of those persons whom they consider to be their lords and masters; those persons who for some reason feel that their life has no flavor; those persons who have been crushed so as to remove all flavor from their lives; and those persons who have been made to believe that they are worthless, that they are garbage.

The Vincentian Family knows that its mission to be salt in the midst of the world of impoverished people is in the hands of the Great Chef: God, who became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and who today suffers in the crucified individuals of present-day history. The Great Chef trusts that the special salt contained in the spirituality of the Vincentian Family will give flavor to the life of God's chosen ones.

Something important occurs in this process of giving flavor to impoverished people, to God's chosen ones. When the grains of salt are poured into a soup that contains tomato, carrots, onions, yucca, and meat, the salt is no longer grains but has become diluted and has now penetrated every vegetable and every piece of meat. The grains of salt cannot be seen in the soup, but as soon as the soup is tasted, one knows that salt has been added. The flavor of the soup has been transformed. So also when we flavor impoverished people, a transformation of love occurs, a transformation of love that in terms of Vincentian spirituality is referred to as affective and effective love.

Something more, however, must be said. In order for those grains of salt to be transformed into a diluted, penetrating flavor, they must first pass through fire. In other words, the grains of salt must be heated together with all the other ingredients of the soup. Thus, for the members of the Vincentian Family, the text of the Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:1-12) becomes the path that allows them to recognize that as men and women, who have a special salty flavor to share with others, they too must pass through fire if they want to be transformed into that “penetrating flavor.”

So then, from the perspective of Vincentian spirituality, what does it mean to be salt?

1. It means that we clothe ourselves in the spirit of those persons who are poor and take up their cause as our own cause. We do not distance ourselves from their painful reality nor avoid examining the causes of their suffering and poverty.
2. It means that we offer comfort, affective and effective comfort, to those who suffer and are sorrowful because their life is threatened by injustice and indifference.
3. It means that we, together with the displaced individuals of this world, seek out those possibilities that will allow all people to be inheritors of the earth, an earth that provides every human being with those things that will allow him/her to live a dignified life.
4. It means that we clothe ourselves in the sufferings of others and take on their pain, disappointments, and frustrations; it means that we do not abandon them and leave them alone; it means that we live in solidarity with them and are by their side.
5. It means that we love in a transparent manner (with no hidden agenda) those persons who are poor and suffering; it means we do not seek honor or power or privilege or some reward (not even heaven). In other words, it means that we love people in a sincere manner because we recognize them as our sisters and brothers.

6. It means that we do not simply pray for them, but that we engage in the struggle to build a world of peace; a world of peace that offers people the fullness of life and provides people with guarantees of justice, equity, solidarity, and fraternity; a world of peace that enables people to experience themselves and affirm themselves as one people with one heart.
  
7. It means, in light of everything that we have said, that we take upon ourselves the persecution, the calumnies, the insults, the abuse, and the suffering of those who are poor; it even means that we accept death and martyrdom on behalf of the cause of the Kingdom of God and his justice. It means that with joy we accept the ultimate consequences of our action and that we are aware of the fact that we have given meaning to our life because we have done what God expected us to do: to give flavor to the life of so many people who believe their lives are devoid of all flavor; to give flavor to the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural realities that generate victims, that continue the practice of injustice, and that are wholly inhuman.

That last point is indeed “the fire” that allows the special salty flavor to penetrate every ingredient in the soup. It is the flavor of those men and women who become and live as witnesses of God’s love: *no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends* (John 15:13). That is what Jesus of Nazareth said and did. Only those who live their life as salt that gives flavor will experience persecution in this world. They will not be endeared by those who generate suffering and injustice. For the members of the Vincentian Family, this will be the fire that proves that they have been “sufficiently cooked,” that they are acting as “flavor,” that they “have penetrated everything in the soup.”

Such is the prophetic dimension of Vincentian spirituality and is a consequence of our “being” as well as our living in solidarity with persons who are impoverished; it is also a consequence of our courageous and radical denunciation of everything that is sinful and that generates war, death, hunger, forced migration, illness, thirst, violence, marginalization, and exclusion. This prophetic dimension prohibits the Vincentian Family from entering into an alliance with corrupt individuals, with drug-traffickers, with people who exploit and/or oppress others, with violent and bloodthirsty persons. This prophetic dimension impels members of the Vincentian Family to distance themselves from those individuals who generate more poverty and more injustice. Jesus said, *no one can serve two masters* (Matthew 6:24).

The prophetic dimension of Vincentian spirituality enables the members to live out their commitment, to become diluted, and to penetrate all the vegetables and all the meat “with a special salty flavor,” doing all of this with joy, thus proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and thus generating hope and justice and peace.

Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that some grains of salt in this great salt-shaker of the Vincentian Family, grains of salt with that “special salty taste,” are so happy to be together that they do not want to separate themselves from one another. They are not willing to be dissolved into any food. They do not want the “Great Chef” to take them and add them to the soup. They refuse to separate themselves and dilute themselves. They prefer to stay together for a long time, not allowing themselves to be what they were meant to be. They have a wonderful time together and they enjoy seeing themselves and boasting about being those grains “with that special salty flavor.” They feel very important and are filled with an insatiable pride (they are content with offering palliatives, seeking to calm symptoms, rather than cure diseases).



Those grains of salt take care of one another so that they do not become separated from one another, so that they do not get mixed into the soup and diluted, so that they do not give flavor to the vegetables and the meat, all of which are part of the soup. They avoid the fire and flee from their prophetic dimension. It seems as though those grains of salt believe that their vocation is to have a good time together rather than to be separated and, therefore, become part of a wonderful soup. They have not discovered that by being diluted into a soup they actually become more united. They become one body, one body that is called “flavor” and then they can never be separated (cf., John 12:24-25).

As time passes, those grains of salt that refused to give flavor to the soup, to the various foods; those grains of salt that remained together taking care of themselves and not allowing themselves to mix with the water, not allowing themselves to be heated by the fire; those grains of salt ultimately become tasteless and they lose their “special salty flavor” and even lose their shape as grains of salt. Without realizing it they will have lost their essence. They have stopped being salt and became a pile of insipid grains; they are useless; they are simply a pile of grains that occupy space.

When the “Great Chef” discovers those useless, tasteless grains, he has no other alternative than to throw them into the garbage. They are thrown away because they ceased to be what they were called to be and they became worthless. Those poor grains of salt, which, at one time, had “a special salty flavor,” came to believe that their reason for existence was to remain together and prevent themselves from being diluted into some food and, as a result, lost their flavor and just occupied space. What a sad ending for those foolish grains of salt that denied their reason for existence in the kitchen: to give flavor to food. They believed they were good, the best of the best; they believed they had gained entrance into heaven and yet they never accepted reality. They never allowed themselves to love impoverished people and they never gave permission to impoverished people to love them in return (cf., Matthew 25:31-46).

In the Vincentian Family, we have sought fame at times and we also have protected our reputation as salt that has a special flavor. We have been careful not to mix with anything that is not salt. Perhaps it is for that reason that we might view ourselves as “tasteless” and worthless, as something to be thrown into the garbage. It is possible that we can give the impression that we are nothing and that we have lost our flavor.

In the gospel of Matthew, immediately after the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us: *You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot* (Matthew 5:13). That is a very solemn verse and as Jesus would say: *let those who have ears, let them hear!*

As we, members of the Vincentian Family, celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of our charism, we realize that this is an opportunity to recover our identity as grains of salt “with a special salty flavor,” an opportunity to recover our essence. Our theme, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Matthew 25:35), demands that we make a clear and expressed option on behalf of migrants, undocumented persons, persons who are denied their rights, refugees, and homeless persons.

The word “stranger” appears at least 107 times in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Prophets, there are many references to strangers, but the strangers are always mentioned in conjunction with “widows” and “orphans.” Those groups of people are all joined together. Thus, we stand before a very profound concept; namely, that the true God does not abandon strangers, widows, and orphans. Therefore, only a believer in God as liberator of the people will act with respect and justice and thus affirm the dignity of these various groups of people (Deuteronomy 10:18-19, 14:29, 24:14; Psalms 94:6, 146:9; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3).

Men and women who believe in God and who are fully human are recognized by their attitude of solidarity and love; their acceptance and welcome with regard to widows, orphans, and strangers. The Law of God welcomes all those people who are not accepted by the laws of the “world.” The Law of God goes beyond the laws of the documented and native born and extends rights and guarantees to those people who are denied justice and whose dignity is not recognized. Widows, orphans, and strangers are the illegals, those without rights, the unprotected, the displaced, the refugees, and the landless peasants (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Deuteronomy 5:14).

The Law of God, then, is the law that makes people human, the law that reminds them that they are the image and likeness of their Creator. This Law of God always reminds us that all human beings are migrants, are strangers on this earth, and strangers in this life. No one owns the earth more than its Creator. Therefore, because God’s law leaves no one behind, all human beings are gifted with a dignified life, gifted with the fullness of life (Exodus 22:20; Leviticus 25:23; Psalms 39:13).

Strangers, like widows and orphans, are closely protected by God. Indeed, the covenanted people were enslaved and strangers and suffered greatly as a result of war. They were a wandering people and God wandered with them. Yes, God, together with the people, became a stranger, a wanderer, an illegal and an undocumented person. God became the comforter and the judge of the widows and the father of orphans. This God is also the God of the illegal alien, of those without rights, of those who are not recognized, of those who are “invisible,” of those who are awaiting death because no one welcomes them. They are the suffering faces of Christ.

The Law of God is above all the legal norms and statutes of any state. In the New Testament, the Law of God is related directly to the Beatitudes and the Final Judgment. Jesus was very clear when

he said that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Thus, his radical option on behalf of the poor was made because the Spirit of God was upon him and anointed him. That option led him to proclaim that the last would be first because in the eyes of the Father the last are the chosen ones. If those who are last are gifted with the possibility of the fullness of life, then that is a clear sign that the Kingdom of God has come.

Strangers are those persons who have been forced to become economic beggars, forced into legal marginalization and exclusion and psychological oppression. These strangers live as uprooted and exiled men and women. They have experienced and, therefore, know the meaning of uncertainty and fear and instability (and, in fact, they have often experienced those realities in their own countries). Those realities make these strangers feel as though their life is constantly at risk. As a result, they often become people who can be used by others seeking to take advantage of their vulnerable condition. They are often exploited in the workplace, paid miserable salaries, and forced to labor in inhuman conditions. They are the men and women who become “merchandise” in the human-trafficking business.

It must be understood that the group of people that we are referring to as “strangers” does not include those persons who become legalized (documented) citizens, because they have the resources to do so (and, as a result, become subject to the laws and the rights of the country that now protects them).

According to the Law of God, the strangers destroy the boundary lines of nations and open people to broader family dynamics. They invite others to receive them and to welcome them in the same manner that they would receive a member of their own family, one who was their sister or brother (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 23:8). That act of receiving and welcoming the stranger must be done out of love, love of God and love for the “lowliest members of society.” The greatness of God’s love is revealed in the protection of “the little

ones.” Strangers, along with widows and orphans, are those who, by their presence, reveal a clear and direct path that leads to God. Thus, Saint Vincent de Paul invites us to turn the medal over because the crucified Jesus will be discovered in the person of the stranger (cf., Matthew 25:40, 45). Those persons who love undocumented men and women – people who have lost their rights, – those people also love God. That love of the stranger becomes the concrete proof of their love of God. Only from a divine and godly perspective can foreigners be recognized as humans and as brothers and sisters. They are a sign and a sacrament of God. As Saint Vincent de Paul has told us: *God loves the poor and therefore God also loves those who love the poor.*

Thus, our Vincentian spirituality must be tested by fire to prove that it is real. If it does not pass that test, then our spirituality is just smoke that is blown, at will, in every direction.

The words, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me*, imply conversion because they mean that people have the ability to recognize the “stranger” as their brother/sister; it means that the presence of strangers is going to cause inconvenience and is also going to place people in a situation of conflict with the state. To live in accord with these words at the time of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of our charism means also that we do more than simply receive and welcome the stranger; it means that we do more than give them some food and drink and clothing and housing.

Welcoming the stranger involves us in a process in which we affirm their rights and, therefore, we engage in a struggle for their legalization and for their access to dignified work. It means that we recognize their origin and their history and, at the same time, that we denounce those situations of injustice, oppression, and sin that have left these persons with only two options: death or becoming strangers (foreigners), renouncing their rights as citizens of a particular nation and thus becoming “illegal aliens.”

Our Vincentian Spirituality, in harmony with the biblical tradition and the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, should impact the political, economic, cultural, social, and religious realities in such a way that structures are created that guarantee a dignified life to all people, regardless of their race, national origin, sex, age, religion, or any other human condition. It is time to recover the biblical meaning of the human being; namely, that we are citizens of the world, pilgrims, migrant, and wanderers, men and women created in the image and likeness of God, brothers and sisters to the remainder of the species and to everything created.

This is the time when we are invited to live in accord with our prophetic calling that demands that we welcome the strangers in our midst. There are persons who will be opposed to this and will cry out against giving any recognition to the strangers as subjects with rights, as persons who are brothers and sisters to us all.

Wars, racism, and economic oppression are just some of the causes that produce millions of strangers, which, in turn, generate epidemics, suffering, the death of innocent persons, and bloodshed that cries out to heaven (as in the case of the murder of Abel). How can we, as members of the Vincentian Family, counteract those situations?

Vincent de Paul stated that prayer will enable us to do all things and, therefore, we will not be paralyzed by fear, nor will we enter into an alliance with injustice or corruption. Any law that is contrary to the Law of God must be rejected because the Law of God is above any human law. Indeed, the Law of God, which is the law of love, is above any law that prevents us from recognizing and loving others as our brothers and sisters. Saint John the evangelist tells us that God is love and that those who love others are in God and God is in them. If people say they love God, whom they cannot see, but do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they can see, then those persons are liars (cf., 1 John 4:20).

We must remember that salt that has lost its taste is worthless and, therefore, a Vincentian Family that loses its spirituality and does not give any flavor to life, that is indifferent to the causes of injustice and poverty, indifferent to the pain and suffering that afflict those persons who are poor, such a family is worthless. A Vincentian Family that is afraid to give flavor because of the risks that are involved, because the members might lose some privilege or honor or money or status, such a family is condemned to be trampled underfoot.

May God continue to walk with and among the members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, providing us with the special salty flavor and the courage to live our prophetic calling to welcome the stranger!

Blessings on all today and always! Saint Vincent de Paul, pray for the Vincentian Family. Amen.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

## I was a stranger and you welcomed me

Bernard Massarini, CM

The theme of the stranger is not part of Saint Vincent's vocabulary. The biblical revelation introduces strangers as one of the criteria of the final judgment "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."<sup>1</sup> This revelation makes the Christian attentive to migrants, those who move because they are following Abraham, the first who moved due to a call. The people of God will be noted down in the Exodus and only will settle in the time of the Kings, who then will build a house for God, who was a nomad just like them. Having this vivid memory makes men and women believers sensitive to migration problems.

I was asked to translate some colleagues' contributions to this theme. What interested me is the fact that this theme was adopted for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary although it is not a motto of any of the branches of the Vincentian Family. Thus, it can be food for thought for each and every one of us.

This proposal is easily translatable in our Vincentian points of reference by the wording, attention to the poorest. We hope that this theme might lead us to renew our approach to the charism left by Saint Vincent. A charism we often water down in the prevailing cultural speech marked with fears of invasion because many of our countries allow themselves to be won over by fear of the stranger coming to take resources that are already scarce. This risks making us collapse under their number, erasing the points of reference of our believing tradition to the benefit of Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25:35c.



If it is true that Saint Vincent's text does not talk about strangers, it means that it is not a contemporary term of his. In his works, we can notice 50 times the word "Turk," 26 times the word "refugee," four times the word "indigenous" and twice the word "barbary," referring to the pirates. Saint Vincent also cites the bible in the Vulgate translation, thus in Latin.

However, when he talks of Barbary, he invites missionaries to train indigenous priests so that they can continue the mission among the people of Barbary. Therefore, it is not a disparaging term, but a descriptive one.

When he talks of refugees, we know he is describing the situation of many people due to the consequences of war: the poor, peasants, nobles, religious, who will be one of his great concerns between 1639 and 1659. He will make sure that all those who had to reach Paris in order to flee the dangers in their regions are worthily welcomed; this implies lodging, food, and spiritual food in order for them not to lose hope. To those who could not move, he will send economic and material support as well seedlings for them to restart life after the period of trouble. He will encourage the stores in Paris (huge charity shops that collect clothes and materials to help those made fragile by the disasters).

Everything is organized: even the printing of leaflets called *les Relations [The Links]*, which were published thanks to the stories of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. These described war scenes to sensitize Parisians about miseries so as to make them participate in fund-raising. Informing is a constant of Saint Vincent's experience. He will insist on this for the rest of his life. This is also a concern for Vincentians, who often in France are at the service of peoples from the Islamic culture, asking themselves how to fulfill this part of their mission. [How can we speak of God to those welcomed from a religious tradition different from Christianity?].

We also saw that there is the term “Turk,” which denotes all Muslims, essentially those from northern Africa, as well as the Turks themselves. Although Christian kingdoms suffered from piracy in the Mediterranean and the hegemonic aspirations of Turkish sultans who inherited the Islamic caliphate, Saint Vincent’s only concern was the spiritual support of prisoners. He knew that only priests or religious prisoners would be admitted for these tasks, which is why he would acquire, thanks to the subsidies of the Duchess of Aiguillon, the Consulates of Tunis and Algiers. The first missionaries who went were priests and brothers who were medical doctors, thus showing his concern for the care of whole person by both physical and spiritual care. While exchanging correspondence with Father Julien Guérin in Tunis, he told him of being embarrassed by a Turk when he was trying to reconcile two Christians following a dispute. The latter emphasized to him, “*Father, among us Turks, it is not permitted for us to remain three days at odds with our neighbor, even though he may have killed one of our closest relatives.*”<sup>2</sup> They know how to show what is good in their culture that we must imitate in order to be good Christians.

In the charter for missionaries being sent, despite the ill-treatment that many will undergo, he would remind us, “*regarding religion, about which they will never argue, and will say nothing scornful about it.*”<sup>3</sup> He recalls that “*the example of these fervent and devoted priests, the intimate influence of their charity, could give Muslims a more accurate idea of Christianity*” [Record of the Barbary Mission].

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<sup>2</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume III, p. 227; letter 978, Julien Guérin to Saint Vincent, [Tunis, between 1645 and May 1648]. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD III, 227.

<sup>3</sup> CCD XIIIa, 345; Document 93, Advice to Boniface Nouelly and Jean Barreau before Their Departure for Algiers, (Around May 1646).

In our turn, at the service of these populations living in our country, we will increase our respect and invite them to this same attitude. This concern for the care of the person, which characterized Monsieur Vincent, should mark us all. I am thinking here especially of the latest comers to France. I think of the communal garden in Valfeury where a Sister of Charity helped migrants to grow vegetables to improve their food intake. There is also a welcome center in the former Internal Seminary of the Berceau for migrants from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Afghanistan, which offers lodging. In turn, local associations provide for their care.

Today, the stranger is not only the person from another country, even if the media focus our attention on the important migratory phenomenon coming from Africa. At the heart of our society, many people are strangers not because of the color of their skin, but because they have lost their social links: *the homeless*. The recently established Depaul France team has set up a service to improve their personal hygiene by offering bus-showers. We also can evoke a service invented by the conference members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in the western part of France: confronted by the refusal of the homeless to accept being received in emergency shelters without their dogs, they will develop a kennel for them.

We also know that some of our services use psychologists to help in learning communication codes when people affected by poverty lose some sense of rectitude.

Even though media focus our attention on the important migratory phenomenon coming from Africa, in our society there are *people who are displaced as victims in order to serve in the sex trade*. I have in memory the good intention of an elderly member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, who, when the conferences of his city were solicited to help remove young deaf-mute girls from a prostitution network, offered, together with his wife, to hide them in their house. He was prepared to answer for the risks to which such a situation exposed him if he were discovered.

There is this other work led by a community arising from the conferences and the Ladies of Charity to *accompany the death of the homeless*. They set up a funeral accompaniment service for those who died on the street. Ten years will pass before a representative of Islam joins this action to accompany people of Islamic culture. This service will evolve gradually in response to the demands of municipal funeral services that call on them to accompany more and more people who die in retirement homes or at home and without descendants, and who have no connection with anyone. This gives back to this association the position that Monsieur Vincent would have taken. Today, the stranger is not only the person from another country. They rediscover Saint Vincent's advice to the first ladies in their service to the poor, which ended only when the poor were buried with the honors due to every human being.

I also think of towns where we have Ladies of Charity, Saint Vincent de Paul conferences, schools in children's homes. We should become accustomed to realizing that these are only different versions of service to the poorest, whether through child protection, education, or social and cultural support. I think of the town where the Ladies of Charity teach French in foreign languages and were able to open themselves to persons from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society looking for such a service. In addition, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, having an introduction to computer science course, could make it available to the people received by the Ladies of Charity.

I also think of this vocational high school that collected Christmas gifts for the *youths of the juvenile prison*, and of another vocational high school, which welcome some young people from a children's home, thus associating their efforts to an integral service of the most fragile youths.

I think of the youths of Depaul who, in England, developed a sport-training project for street children and, in France, a hygiene service – by bus-showers – in two big cities.

This other Saint Vincent de Paul Society conference developed a Bible spiritual reading group following the request of one of the Muslims it welcomed. Happy with this sharing, they would play those texts that touched them and had the idea of forming a *theater group* that would be the show part of the national days in France, three years ago.

Finally the success of *tables de Fred* [*Fred's tables*]: Sunday tables against loneliness, a *lending bank for the poor* (without interest) developed by a Ladies of Charity team, which will be refunded to it within the four years following the loan.

I will conclude with three instructions:

- When we meet a poor person, let us not judge him/her on the origins of his/her poverty. This can make us judges instead of helping him/her out of his/her impasse. Let us seek with her/him to help find ways out of her/his concrete situation, which reduces her/him to becoming a “case.” (A quadriplegic youth preferred to relieve himself alone during the night, because his nurse looked down on him). Let us remember that, for Vincent, suffering is only God working to complete his work:

*“So, you see how God allows His servants to suffer. ‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘explain to us why that happens.’ Sisters, it’s the same with us as with a stone from which someone wants to make a lovely statue of Our Lady, Saint John, or some other saint. What does the sculptor have to do to carry out his design? He must take the hammer and chip away all that’s superfluous from the stone. To do this, he strikes it with powerful hammer blows so that, watching him, you’d think he was trying to smash it to pieces. Then, after removing the largest chunks, he takes a smaller hammer,*

*then the chisel, and begins to shape the figure with all its parts; lastly, he uses other, more delicate tools to make the statue as perfect as he wants it to be. You see, Sisters, that's how God acts with us.*"<sup>4</sup>

- If we welcome a poor person, let us bear in mind that it is a human being in a poverty situation, a living being in a transitory situation, listening to his needs. (A beggar to whom I offered a cinema ticket and who cried because no one had given him such a gift in many years said to me "I will first take a shower"). Let us remember the "turn the medal" of Saint Vincent. How do we receive Jesus?

*"I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people."*<sup>5</sup>

- Lastly, when we seek to find a way for the person, let us set ourselves up as partners and not forget to network. If we cannot act alone, certainly other Vincentians in the vicinity will be able to accompany us (I do not have a certain course. I will send them to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, which has one. I do not have a computer science course, whereas the Ladies of Charity have one. I will see how to arrange for their support.).

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<sup>4</sup> CCD X, 148; Conference 74, Love of Physical and Moral Sufferings (Common Rules, Article 6), 23 July 1656.

<sup>5</sup> CCD XI, 26; Conference 19, The Spirit of Faith.

*“It would be hard to find there six poor persons unable to earn their own living. We felt it our duty to provide these people with the means of doing so by giving them axes, billhooks, and spinning wheels to put the men and women to work. In this way, they will no longer be dependent on anyone.”<sup>6</sup>*

Translated: William Oben Obi-Tambe, CM

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<sup>6</sup> CCD IV, 138; Letter 1305, Some Priests of the Mission to Saint Vincent, [1650 or January 1651].

## **Education Communication for Mobilization**

Alessandro Ginotta

### **What is our point of departure?**

Allow me to break the ice with a story: A few months ago, I found myself in a church, not far from here, to present my book. When I had finished speaking a religious approached me and he handed me a box that he had under his arm. It was a gift for me. "It is very precious," he told me. With some emotion, I opened it. Raising the lid, I saw only a blue cloud. I came to see that it was a small lacy pillow all puffed up, that ought to be there to protect something that was truly special. I raised my eyes to scrutinize the face of the person who was offering me this small chest; he nodded and reaffirmed, "It is one of the most precious things that I have in my possession." Why in the world are you giving me such a gift? I took a deep breath and shuddered for surprise and, with curiosity, carefully removed the cloth. What I saw really surprised me: I gazed upon the Face of Christ, lying on another blue pillow. It was a fragment of a Crucifix about twenty centimeters in size. The bust, the face, the arms, without hands and without legs. "This Crucifix has a story – the man finally told me – it was found in the garbage, all broken; I have cleaned it, repaired it and have conserved it as a treasure. And now I have the pleasure that you have it." It was, and it still is, gleaming, it seems new, if it were not for the missing parts. At the foot of the pillow, I found an envelope that contained a note. The donor encouraged me to read it. It was written: "With the wish that you can become the legs and the arms of Jesus." I was extremely struck and honored by this gift, but I also felt the heavy weight of the responsibility in accepting it.



There you have it. That is the Vincentian Family. This is our way: we have the responsibility to be “the legs and arms of Jesus.” Saint Vincent de Paul knew this well. He had the habit of repeating, “*Let us love God [and the poor] ..., but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.*”<sup>1</sup> And again, when he motivated the Daughters of Charity, “*A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there.*”<sup>2</sup> Yes, because this is the meeting with God: an interchange of love: Jesus whispers to our heart and encourages us to go to the poor, and to go to witness to his love of them. But then, when we encounter the needy and we really look at them, in their eyes we can make out those of Jesus. He is there, hidden behind the skin wrinkled by suffering; sometimes he looks at us through a tear; but often he speaks to us behind a smile. That smile which, when we can open a breach in the exterior of pain, privation, difficulty, transforms that frowning face into the most beautiful expression that we could ever see: the smile of Jesus!

To bring the love of Christ to the least among us and from them to receive the love of Christ in person. This is our task.

**All of us come from different backgrounds: culture, language, organizations, and generations.** The Vincentian Family is exceptionally heterogeneous: religious, priests, laity, youth, elders, religious congregations and various associations. Today here we find ourselves divided into six language groups. We are present on five continents and in over 150 diverse countries. Tomorrow we will

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<sup>1</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 32; Conference 25, Love of God. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD XI, 32.

<sup>2</sup> CCD IX, 199; Conference 24, Love of Vocation and Assistance to the Poor, 13 February 1646.

go together around the Holy Father and the Reliquary of the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul. This is what unites us: the heritage that we have received. The teaching of Saint Vincent is **our point of departure**:

- serve the poor
- alleviate their misery
- bring the Good News to the poor person; or, as the Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul says: “bear witness to His [Christ’s] compassionate and liberating love” Article 1.2).

The Daughters of Charity, groups of the International Association of Charities, Priests of the Mission, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the other realities that make up the Vincentian Family, how many things unite us! We are so many and we belong to realities so vast that sometimes, as it happens in every family, it makes us afraid. But the fear of the other is overcome by getting to know each other. And events like this in which we are able to share, encounter, know and recognize, serve to cement our unity.

**Altogether, as movement, we are on a new road that transforms.** I want to connect to the experience of two of our founders: Saint Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam. It is beautiful to see how both matured on the go, through their experience. One thing becomes clear to us in reading the biography of Saint Vincent de Paul, or the very beautiful collection of letters of Frédéric Ozanam, *The Heart Thirsts for the Infinite*, edited by the Vincentian historian Maurizio Ceste. It is consoling to know that even they had to work hard, as we do, to rid themselves of their weaknesses. We know that Saint Vincent initially chose the clerical life with the idea to profit from it. On the other hand, Frédéric Ozanam did not hesitate to resort to the support of friends and influential people to better his own status in his work.

As we continue reading their lives, we discover that, little by little, as they journeyed, they matured, coming closer to God. And, as happened to Zacchaeus, the man who “lets himself be met by,” they are transformed, renewed. They abandon the baggage of their own sins and take up the road of a new life. But let us see how this encounter happened. We find ourselves in Châtillon, it is Sunday, 20 August 1617, and Vincent is preparing to celebrate Mass when a woman comes into the sacristy with important news: an entire family has need of help. They lived a kilometer away from the church, were all sick, and there was no food nor medicine. This fact affected Saint Vincent so much that, during the homily, he called the people to practice charity. The response to this call was very strong: all through the day generous people rushed from all over town to bring help to this family. **But that was not enough.** No, because, although so much food was gathered in that day, very soon there would be need for more. Saint Vincent taught us, 400 years ago, that it is not sufficient to put a Band-Aid on the urgency by supplying material aid. Certainly, yes, this is necessary, **but to defeat the demon of poverty much more must be done!**

The **Charity must be organized** in a way that it does not exhaust itself quickly; there is a need to construct a stable structure, always present, that is capable of responding constantly through Charity to the attacks of misery. This is how the first **Confraternity of Charity** was born: “A confraternity of pious persons, engaged in shifts to assist all the needy sick of the parish.” It is the first nucleus from which developed what we are today.

Gannes, Folleville, Châtillon, Vincent traveled throughout the country and everywhere he encountered misery and the abandoned: “the poor are being damned for want of knowing the things necessary for salvation, and for lack of confession.”<sup>3</sup> Thus he began to start missions in the villages. The Confraternities of Charity multiplied

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<sup>3</sup> CCD I, 112; letter 73, to François du Coudray, in Rome, 1631.

rapidly. Other priests quickly joined Vincent, who gave life to the **Congregation of the Mission**.

But, as an old saying goes, “Behind every great man there is always a great woman.” How can we not remember **Saint Louise de Marillac**, the most faithful collaborator of Saint Vincent and the cofoundress of the **Daughters of Charity** (1633)? “The encounter between two souls, between two vocations, between two works or “missions” is never trusted to chance: it is part of the accurate design of God, lovingly prepared from all eternity.”<sup>4</sup> Vincent and Louise brought about an authentic revolution in the service of the poor. It is an expression of that Church in mission so loved by Pope Francis: “*having for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides, for cell a hired room, for chapel the parish church, for cloister the streets of the city, for enclosure obedience, with an obligation to go nowhere but to the homes of the sick or to places necessary for their service, for grille the fear of God, for veil holy modesty.*”<sup>5</sup>

Let us make a leap of 200 years and go to encounter another man: **Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam**, a journalist and writer, university professor. We find him in 1833 when, at the age of only 20 years, he leaves his native Lyon for Paris to study at the Sorbonne. Frédéric did not know the streets of the city well and one day he got lost. Very quickly, he found himself in the neighborhood of workers, who were poor and lived in dilapidated and moldy homes. Dark alleys alternated with sordid squares. Everywhere there was hunger, poverty, and sickness.

But, as I just said, behind every great man there is always a great woman. It happened that Frédéric in those little streets found **Sister**

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<sup>4</sup> Father Antonio Maria Sicari.

<sup>5</sup> CCD X, 530; Conference 111, Rules for the Sisters in Parishes, (Articles 1-2), 24 August 1659.

**Rosalie Rendu**, today Blessed. A Daughter of Charity. Heir to that charism which animated Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. Sister Rosalie was holding up a beggar. The poor man, curved under the weight of age and ailments, moved with difficulty. The Sister asked and obtained the help of Ozanam to accompany the beggar to his own house. Frédéric agreed. And he also agreed to return to the neighborhood soon to engage in the works of charity.

It was Sister Rendu who accompanied Ozanam, Le Taillandier, Lamache, Lallier, Devaux, Clavé and Bailly – the founders of the **Society of Saint Vincent de Paul** – to visit the poor in the attics of Paris. It was she, a Daughter of Charity, who inspired the choice of Saint Vincent de Paul as the Patron Saint of the newborn Society. Connections, coincidences, the thread of love that binds people, even those far away from them in time, to a common destiny.

With this, we have made a bit of a story. Together we have done formation. It is important to know the proper origins in order to discover that, as much as we come from diverse experiences, all together, as a movement, we work to accomplish the same objectives. In the Vincentian Family, there live together Congregations, Movements, Associations, Groups that understand themselves, in a direct or indirect way, as inspired by the Vincentian Charism whose 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrate today. The hands of religious, priests, volunteers have continued for 400 years to bring comfort to the poor. Hands that work for a common objective. Hands that, today, here, we are able to encounter, to recognize, to shake.

In this moment, an image comes to mind: I see **the hand of a volunteer that holds the hand of a poor person**. At his side, on the other side, **a Daughter of Charity supports him**. Behold a representation of what the Vincentian Family is today! The hands that help, meet each other through the one in need. They communicate by means of that Jesus who has taken residence in the person with difficulties. A flow of love that unites us. A goal that joins us.

You have called me here today as a communicator. I would like to continue in this line of communication, which is a little bit innovative. Let us make an effort now to imagine and let us think of two word bubbles, like in a cartoon, that come forth from the lips of two characters.

On the left is the volunteer, to whom we entrust the words of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam: “Help honors ... when it treats the poor person with respect not only as an equal but as a superior, because he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering; because he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and our charity; and to save us by our works.”<sup>6</sup>

On the right a Sister, in her cartoon bubble we write ideally this phrase: “Be very gentle and courteous toward your poor. You know that they are our masters and that we must love them tenderly and respect them deeply.”<sup>7</sup> They seem like words of Saint Vincent de Paul, but in fact, they are words of Saint Louise de Marillac.

**Here it is, our Emmaus: our eyes are opened in the experience of the breaking of the bread.** The sign of recognizing Jesus is his broken Body, life dedicated to nurture life. But the message of Emmaus does not exhaust itself here. There is also the passage through the darkness of discouragement and disillusion to the light of the joy of recognizing the Risen One. Now and again, even for us, “darkness” descends. It can happen that we find ourselves far away from God. To visit a poor person then becomes difficult, heavy, challenging. It costs us fatigue. But when we manage to prepare ourselves well spiritually, when we are well formed, then, as at Emmaus, we pass through the darkness to the light.

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<sup>6</sup> From the article “Of Assistance that Humiliates and of that which Honors” in *l'Ère Nouvelle*, 1848.

<sup>7</sup> *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, Correspondence and Thoughts*, Edited and Translated from the French by Louise Sullivan, DC, New City Press, Brooklyn, New York, 1991, p. 320; Letter 284B, To Sister Cécile Agnès in Angers, 4 May 1650.

This “extra mile,” this capacity – we could say – “to see even in the dark,” is what makes us different from the other associations and from the NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations]. Because, as Saint Vincent de Paul said, “It’s in prayer that we find the strength to be sustained in the service of God and our neighbor.”<sup>8</sup>

**Education and Formation** are indispensable for us to prepare ourselves adequately to encounter people who are poor, to alleviate their difficulties, to assist them with their bureaucratic and legal problems. We ought to prepare ourselves to be capable of providing the most adequate response to every question time and again. It is very useful, then, that the preparation be continual, centered on Vincentian Spirituality, but enabling us to make our way through the very specific set of problems encountered in social work. This is not about forming professionals, or specialists in various areas – but certainly to guarantee to the one with difficulties and to those who approach him, in addition to the availability of the relationship, an adequate basic training.

Today, more than ever, it is helpful that formation also have a multicultural orientation. It must teach volunteers how to present themselves and interact with persons in difficulty who come from every part of the world, often with mannerisms and customs, both civil and religious, that are very diverse from their own.

Especially for those branches of the Family constituted by volunteers, it is necessary **to ensure that the formation is pleasant and appreciated**: the courses ought to be formulated so that experience and experimentation interact, using a method that combines laboratory and participation, instead of the classical lecture lessons. The group encounter, indeed, permits interaction with and evaluation of situations in a way that can only be done by means of everyone’s contribution. It is a good way to develop **collaboration and a spirit of belonging**.

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<sup>8</sup> CCD IX, 322; Conference 37, Mental Prayer, 31 May 1648.

We must always remember that volunteers give a part of their time to the association, but they live in other realities that condition them: work, family problems, sometimes difficulties with health. It is necessary, therefore, that they always feel welcomed and that their role is always valued. If we are capable of recognizing effectively the contribution offered by every single volunteer, we will assure motivation, fidelity, and active participation. I assure you that the volunteers are the principle wealth of the association.

To return to the opening metaphor: **“the arms and the legs of Christ” are really them: the volunteers who work this territory, in direct contact with the poor.**

But the Vincentian Family is not made up of volunteers only. Precisely because it is a composite reality, and for this reason “rich,” it is good to cultivate moments like this in which each group can **share its own experiences** with the others in order to **“grow together.”**

**Grow, share, educate.** I would like to highlight in a particular way that last verb. Saint Vincent not only loved the poor, but he wanted to teach others to love the poor too. For this reason, he was a great educator of the Christian people, because, through the formation of conscience, the faithful would be able to love effectively, sharing this love with those who lived in suffering and distress.

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam also, as a good university professor, dedicated himself to **“educating to Charity.”** We read in a letter of 19 September 1845, addressed to the President and members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul of Mexico, **“Our first purpose has been that of consolidating the faith and reanimating the charity in Catholic youth, reinforcing the ranks with friendship that is edifying and solid, and forming in this way a new generation, capable of repairing, if possible, the evil that impiety has done in our country.”** See? Helping the poor becomes a means to teach



Charity to a generation that has forgotten it. How up-to-date are these words of Ozanam! How they would serve – no, how they serve! – yes, how they serve today to awaken in the new generations’ soul that love of the poor which humankind, at the beginning of the new millennium, seems to have completely erased. “The first way to bring about this vision – continues Ozanam – was to gather each week, **to learn in this way to know each other and to love each other.**” There it is the importance of meeting each other, of interchanging our experiences, of sharing knowledge. “And as a way to make our meetings interesting, we brought them to visit the homes of the poor, bringing them bread, temporary help of various kinds, and, above all, good books and good advice.” **The home visit.** The privileged encounter with Christ who hides himself in the poor, as we have seen previously. I would like to focus our attention for a moment on the conclusion of this phrase: bread, temporary help of various kinds, and, “above all, **good books and good advice.**”

From this emerges clearly that our task is not finished with bringing food to the poor, nor with paying their bills... no, we have two other “imperatives”:

- **Accompany the person in need**, supporting him/her on a path that includes personal growth aimed at escaping from his condition of difficulty.
- **“Educate” to Love.** In our times, we witness the triumph of indifference and individualism. Charity, solidarity, mercy, and compassion, would seem now to be sentiments “in disuse.”

There cannot exist, however, an operative Charity, like ours, separated from that which is intellectual, which, that is to say, includes the commitment to education. From this comes a new invitation to formation and communication not only internally among ourselves, but also externally.

With this we have arrived at the last topic: **communication**.

**Charity is silent. Those who practice it do not like to show off.** “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”<sup>9</sup> is one of the most frequent objections that is raised when I propose a project of communication. I smile because we will debate this topic in a Convocation entitled, “Charity and Media,” that will be held in a few weeks and to which we have invited television, radio, and the directors of the principle Catholic periodicals, but not as participants in the debate.

The message that I would like to bring to you today is this: It is true, we ought not “to flaunt” the gesture, but as we have seen just a short time ago, we have **the duty** to foster the development of a common conscience oriented to Charity! That which we live can never pretend to resolve the diverse forms of poverty, but it ought to support growth. It ought to animate us, the persons we encounter, our community, all of society. Means of communication can become a teaching instrument capable of **“contaminating” the slightly absent society surrounding us, stimulating it with our example.**

Forgive me if I cite another phrase from Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, but we cannot talk about communication without remembering that Ozanam himself was a journalist. He wrote, “In moments that lack unity in which the better part of the people are given to hating themselves, we are very happy for all that which unites: how can we not commit ourselves to love?” It is precisely with this spirit that **we have to make our love become the seed of Charity in the arid hearts of our time.**

This is why we must not let even one opportunity to be present through the media escape us: we must do it in such a way that our experience, our charism, our love of the poor infects, to the highest possible degree, the world.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:3.

But if we want to reach the people, we must use the right instruments. Today communication happens less and less through the traditional channels.

The people read fewer and fewer books: the data of ISTAT [Italy's National Institute for Statistics] tell us that there are about 33 million people over six years of age who have not read even one book during the year 2016, which is 57.6% of the population [of Italy]. Ten percent of families do not even possess a single book in the house. What is even more disturbing is the dizzying rate of decline with respect to the past: today there are four million (4,300,000 to be exact) fewer readers than in 2010.

We can extend this picture to the large part of daily newspapers and magazines. Only radio and television are resisting the impact of the internet.

On the web, the communication comes in an original way, why? Because on the internet there are no broadcasters with their passive and isolated audiences. All is interconnected. In a certain sense, communication on the web is "social": **Anyone can become, virtually, a broadcaster and simultaneously a user of the content.**

This fact is at the same time an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage is that today, by means of the web, it is much easier than at some other time to reach a large number of users of our content. The disadvantage is that, like us, all have the possibility of diffusing their messages. The problem is that in the network a great "noise" is generated where the good news dangerously mixes with the bad news. The good inspiration is presented alongside the trash.

While it is true that communicating on the internet seems easy and within the reach of all, communicating in an "effective" way on the web demands that you master well the technique, study and develop a personalized, ad hoc communication. Sometimes, a little simplistically, one thinks that it is sufficient to open a social profile

and publish a post now and again. No. A post on *Facebook* or a tweet is not sufficient to reach the users. It is necessary to choose with care the words to insert in the space of 140 characters. To grab attention, it is necessary to do it at the right time, mixing with care text, images, and video. And... once you have captured the attention of the contents' users, you must keep it alive, participating in the discussion, paying close attention to messages and comments, moderating them, deleting those too far off topic and offensive in order to maintain constantly the level of communication appropriate to the standards we have set ourselves.

However, we cannot let this opportunity escape! Let us abandon the fear of communicating and cross this threshold courageously: **The internet can offer magnificent opportunities if it is used with competence and with a clear awareness of its strengths and its weaknesses.**

Among the various opportunities at our disposition, we cannot fail to think about social marketing. We have one example from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society with the project, "Donne di Ferro" ["Women of Iron"] of the ACC [Central Council Association] of Cuneo. The project envisages the mentoring and job training of women in difficulty who are guests of the community housing center "Mother House of Hope" of Cuneo, with the goal of opening a shop to press clothes open to all. This is a reality that works, and well represents the theme of our Jubilee: "*I was a stranger and you have welcomed me.*"

One of the sources of financing the project is online fundraising, through social marketing. There you have a good way to put the internet at the service of solidarity.

Social networks, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Google*... all are instruments that we should not be afraid to use, rather, we are called to use them in order that on the web (and therefore in the world) not only "trash" is found but also information that is influential and relevant.

What is important is not to lose the chance to bring our message to everyone's awareness, to the widest audience available. All of us are called, as we read in the title of this talk, to communicate in order to mobilize. To mobilize the hearts, to shake them from the lethargy and apathy of this world of individualism, that sees each one closed up in his/her own shell, in his/her own borders, prisoner of a wall of egoism that separates us from others and from the love of God.

I end with a final quote, from the bible scholar Bruno Maggioni: "*Vieni e vedi*" ["*Come and see*"] (see John 1:39).

"When you come across a beautiful thing, you talk about it. When you come across something true, you say it. If you understood that the story of Jesus has illuminated the path of the world and of humankind, giving it sense, then you talk about it. You cannot do anything less. And if the encounter with Jesus has changed your way of living, giving it strength, direction, sense, then you invite your friends to share it."

## Communication for Mobilization

Mizael Donizetti Poggioli, CM

Let us now reflect on the theme of education from the perspective of communication for mobilization, which is a matter of great importance for the members of the Vincentian Family at this time of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 1. **Education: human formation**

We can start by stating that education provides people with an opportunity to begin their life anew. People's education is revealed in the manner in which men and women develop themselves and become ever more aware of the various situations that surround them.

In this regard, there is no doubt that Vincent de Paul was a great educator. Together Vincent and Louise de Marillac established the *little schools*. In everything, Vincent looked for ways to provide people with competency. He did this with those individuals who collaborated with him in various works of service as well as with those persons who were being served.

Vincent understood that education/formation had to be holistic, that is, a formation that involved every aspect of the human person. Thus, Vincent was concerned about formation that capacitated people for work, concerned about formation as a means for evangelization and as means to enhance human dignity. Furthermore, Vincent was also concerned about formation as a way to promote the human person and as a way for people to attain liberation.

## **2. Demands/responsibilities**

Many of the countries in which we minister can be viewed as societies in which citizens have rights that are constitutionally guaranteed. There are instances, however, when those rights are not respected. One of the ways in which those situations can be changed is through a process that raises people's awareness. In other words, we are referring to a process of education/formation that results in people demanding respect for those rights that are guaranteed in their national constitution.

This act of demanding respect for the rights of citizens is a civic duty, one that places a responsibility on the shoulders of every citizen. The purpose of holding civil authorities accountable for their actions is ultimately to better the life of the various classes or groups in a given country. Therefore, we could say that this action of holding individuals accountable is a process which demands respect for the rights of people, rights that enable people to live in a dignified manner.

Vincent de Paul often utilized this tool. For example, as chaplain of the galley slaves he demanded that the civil authorities change the manner in which these prisoners were treated. In fact, he demanded that they be cared for when they were infirm (hospitals were built), that their cells be clean, and that they be given better food. In a word, he engaged in a struggle to better the lives of those men who were prisoners of the state.

## **3. Mobilization**

Today there are very few individuals (if there are any at all) who alone are able to change the unjust, institutionalized situations in which so many people live. There is a felt need to collaborate with other individuals or with other groups that share similar goals because it is only in such a manner that sustainable social action can be undertaken.

Holding government authorities accountable will only be effective when people are aware of the multiple variables when dealing with social change. Therefore, it becomes necessary to mobilize people in order to achieve those overarching goals that respond to the demands of the disenfranchised groups of a particular nation.

Mobilization means gathering people together, but gathering people together who are aware of and who understand the given problem that they are seeking to resolve. Therefore, it is necessary to meet with people in order to create a common vision and then formulate strategies to resolve a specific problem.

The decision to mobilize people in order to engage in a struggle that is intended to respond to a set of demands is very serious. It is necessary to sensitize people with regard to their rights and, at the same time, it is equally necessary to find people with leadership ability.

There are two important considerations when dealing with mobilization:

- [1] Before beginning such a process, it is important to analyze the available resources that will enable a successful outcome. Resources are something that can be obtained. If today the group does not possess those resources, perhaps tomorrow they will obtain them and then be able to begin their struggle.
- [2] Such an analysis should not be undertaken by one individual or by some small group.

At different times in history, the above elements were not taken into consideration and yet organizing people and bringing people together is the best tool for changing the unjust structures that are found in our society.



### 3.1. **Mobilization on an institutional level**

Relationships among groups that engage in a struggle for the eradication of poverty and who work directly for those persons who are poor are urgently needed. There is no doubt that we need to act together and, in our specific case, the branches of the Vincentian Family need to work together.

We must remember that when speaking about the Vincentian Family we are referring to the multiple congregations, movements, associations, groups, and individuals who (directly or indirectly) prolong the Vincentian charism in history. These are groups that have been founded by Vincent de Paul as well as groups that have been inspired by Vincent as they engaged in ministry on behalf of those persons who are poor.

The Vincentian Family ought to be both a religious movement and a social movement. [A] A religious movement: one of the biographers of Vincent de Paul stated that he had transformed the face of the Church in France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We are all aware of the ministry that Vincent undertook in order to form the leaders of his era and here we will refer to only one of those works, the establishment of seminaries in order to form clergy and the organization of the Tuesday Conferences in order to provide ongoing formation to those persons who had been ordained. Vincent was also a member of the Council of Conscience (what we might call a Department of Religion) and there he was able to influence the appointment of bishops. [B] A social movement: following the example of Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Family should also be a social movement. When Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac organized “the little schools” with the intention of providing people with tools that enabled them to obtain gainful employment, they were at the same time engaging in a process of social transformation. Here we could list numerous activities that were so oriented: works in the area of healthcare (establishing hospitals, forming nurses, caring for the infirm), works that provided services for children and the elderly.

Today the Vincentian Family is a powerful force, but, in my opinion, it is a sleeping giant. Even though the focus of our work as Vincentians in the world is most clear, we have not yet been able to mobilize ourselves in the best possible manner. All the various branches of the Vincentian Family have a unique purpose, namely, to work with and for those persons who are poor. The poor are our focus and are the intrinsic reason for our existence. We live and move and exist for those persons who are poor. Here then we recall a direction that in recent years we have been reminded about constantly, namely, the need for collaboration on different levels.

Collaboration in formation: Throughout the world, we have highly trained people who are able to organize interactive, ongoing Vincentian formation programs. In our Vincentian spirituality, we are aware of elements that enrich our living in accord with the gospel demands. Vincent himself focused his spirituality around the actions and attitudes and praxis of Jesus himself. Thus, we must understand that Vincentian spirituality emerges from contact with those persons who are poor. In other words, we are talking about a spirituality of action, a spirituality of commitment, a spirituality that is oriented toward effective service on behalf of those persons who are poor.

Collaboration in the conception, development, and accomplishment of projects: one of the most effective manners of assisting people who are poor to rise above those situations of poverty is by working together in the accomplishment of projects. In fact, it would be very dangerous to begin a work without being clear about a particular project and the desired outcomes of such a project. It must be stated here, however, that the final result is not as important as the process. Indeed, during the process of developing a project, a sense of community is created, a common vision is formulated, the need to engage in a struggle on behalf of the dignity of people and for their basic human rights is strengthened, and a new vision of the world and humankind evolves.

Despite the difficult situations that Vincent encountered during his lifetime, he was nonetheless very clear about his goal. Furthermore, he often counseled others to analyze carefully the activities that they desired to undertake.

In other words, Vincent sought to identify needs, to define objectives, to study the viability of various works, to analyze the risks and limitations, to mobilize material and human resources for the accomplishment of some project. For example, providing care for children who were abandoned: Vincent mobilized people to become collaborators in this work and looked for the resources that would enable him to sustain this work. Vincent did the same in all of his different activities.

### 3.2. Mobilization on the level of effective ministry

On the level of effective ministry with and for those persons who are poor, the poor themselves must also be mobilized. The poor are the subject of their own liberation and the protagonists of their own history. In the words of Saint Vincent, the poor are our *lords and masters*. Many of the persons who are poor have not received an academic or formal education, but they do possess a great wisdom. Our role is to help these poor men and women become aware of the fact that they are transformative agents of the present reality. We must help them put aside the myth that poverty is inevitable, and we do this by sharing with them the tools that are at our disposal, tools that will enable them to create favorable conditions for social and human development.

In our ministry with and for the poor, we have a great tool at our disposal, namely, the systemic-change approach to ministry. We need to embrace this methodology because this is the most effective manner to engage in ministry with and for the poor. Therefore, we must take the time to study the principles of this approach, which

provides us with greater possibilities for assisting those persons who are poor.

For example, as we continue our celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian charism we are called to provide housing for the homeless and the strangers among us. This work can be undertaken only from a systemic-change perspective and, therefore, like Vincent de Paul, we must believe that it is possible to change the life of those persons who are poor!

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

## **Essential Models of “Education-Communication for Mobilization”**

Yasmine Cajuste

### **Vincentian Brothers and Sisters,**

The different reflections of this day constitute, beyond their particular thematic, a whole that invites us to reconsider the diversity of our Vincentian experiences and to seek the way forward that opens up to us.

My intervention on Vincentian formation and communication in view of sensitizing that formation to the age of information is therefore situated in the scope presented earlier by our brother. Permit me to highlight some points:

- We are called upon to welcome the stranger in this jubilee year and, indeed, even after this celebration time. This in conformity with the spirit of our founder who was always ready to encounter others, especially the less privileged, with an open mind that allows for a change of heart and change of the view of oneself and of the world.
- The Vincentian Family, as a movement, goes beyond the limits imposed by our organizational structures in order to unite us as agents of change with a common objective: the end of poverty, a more just and fraternal world, the construction of societies where each of us has a place, the advent of the kingdom...

From this we shall see how the Vincentian Family is called to rediscover Christ and Saint Vincent as essential models of education and communication. The contemplation of the story of the disciples of Emmaus and the remembrance of the Vincentian tradition therefore become the foundation to a formation and a communication faithful to its origins but attentive to our times. Paying attention to the less privileged, to the stranger in particular, who ought to be welcomed as our brother, the Vincentian movement can therefore become an agent of change which makes of education a permanent way of personal and collective transformation and which uses technology as a means to sensitize people to the kingdom. This approach requires the courageous identification of today's challenges and the putting in place of common, audacious and effective strategies to address them.

### **1) Christ, Messenger and Master**

To reflect on what Vincentian formation and communication must be is to first of all consider the example of the one in whom our lives are enshrined: Christ Himself, the Father's messenger. The coming of Christ on earth may be expressed in many aspects of the gospel but the essence of his mission is to reveal to men the love of God. He is therefore a messenger: he has come to reveal God's nature and his project of love for humanity. This is the sense of Jesus' teachings: the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the interactions with people, all this drawn from the gospel, tell, in a comprehensive language to the men of his time, the greatness and the profoundness of God's love for his creation and for man in particular. But above the world, Jesus, who is God Himself, communicates to us his intimate experience with the Father which he wishes his disciples and all those who believe in him to partake. He has given to men the possibility of being children of God. As Galatians 4:4 states it: in the fullness of time, He came to confer filial adoption on us. Through the Spirit, we can shout "Abba" and indeed we are God's sons and heirs.

To experience this message requires in a particular way two key elements: first, the actions/the gestures that express this God's-love-in-men's-lives today; and second, in line with the mountain on which he preaches, mount Calvary, on which he gives his life for the salvation of man in his entirety and of all mankind. Thus, the one who had climbed up the first mountain to teach the beatitudes and manifested them in the welcoming of the sick and the crowd necessarily had to climb up the second to go to the end of what he had preached.

With Christ, we discover therefore an existential dynamic of communication and formation: it springs from a message to transmit (the gospel, the good news of God's love), is manifested in an interpersonal encounter and the sharing of an experience that stimulate personal transformation and incite to mission, to engagement with others.

Many biblical passages disclose this pedagogical approach of Christ: Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the healing of the man born blind, etc. Today, we shall stop a while on the story of the disciples of Emmaus known by all. The story appears in the gospel of Saint Luke chapter 24 v13-35. A brief version can also be found in Mark 16:12-13. This passage, which constitutes the paradigm of the catechetical path to Christian maturity, was the subject of many studies and time limits do not permit to read this detailed analysis. Let us simply remember the main facts: two discouraged disciples left Jerusalem, where Christ had been crucified, as a result of their despair. They met a stranger on their way and discover at the breaking of the bread that it is the resurrected Christ. Leaving Emmaus, where they were at that time, they returned to the disciples to share their experience.

From this extraordinarily rich passage, I shall only highlight some particularly and important aspects for the theme that concerns us: Vincentian formation and communication. Let us take note of the following:

- It is Jesus who takes the initiative: “Jesus himself went towards them and walked with them” (v 15). He starts by standing in a place on their way, getting interested in their story and seeking to know their hearts. A catharsis therefore arises in them, motivating them to talk about what they have in their hearts.
- Jesus takes advantage of the disillusionment and the confusion of the disciples of Emmaus to explain the scriptures to them, to revamp their heart and to lead them to the Eucharistic table (v 17-31). The encounter goes deeper as they dialogue, allowing the disciples to go as far as recognizing Jesus: listening to the word and the breaking of the bread in community changes the heart.
- Upon recognizing Jesus, the disciples return to Jerusalem: there is a new vision, a new motivation, a gleam on the horizon. They make a choice and, having recognized Jesus, they will recount their own experience on the way and in the house at the table, which will enable them to live the experience of the Christian faith and to integrate themselves fully in this new people of God.

The story of the disciples of Emmaus points out the fact that formation-education does not consist that much in teaching new ideas. Consequently, what is needed is a continuous personal, social and spiritual acculturation. It is a step through which man is strengthened in the direction he wants to give to his life, with the aim of continuing on his way to maturity and to a deeper life in faith and spirituality. This maturity is not only a fruit of human effort, be it a teaching by the master or an approach by the disciple. At the center of this experience is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the initiation. Its action is made possible or is prepared by the welcoming, planned or unexpected, of the master who takes time to walk with the other



to prepare him to welcome and recognize the presence of God. That is why, towards the end of the story, while both disciples finally recognize him, Christ disappears, not to leave them alone, but to set them free by passing through them and by allowing them henceforth to live freely by listening to their inward being.

## **2) Formation and communication in the Vincentian tradition**

The attitude of welcome and openness, this presence that heals, this harmonious correlation between words and actions, this call to sacrifice one's life for God's kingdom are some of the many elements that are continuously present in the Vincentian experience, from the origins until today. From Vincent to our modern educative institutions, from the beginning of the Vincentian charism to the actual dynamism of the Vincentian Family, this approach has inspired the work of Vincentian formation and communication. We do not have time to consider it deeply but it will suffice to mention some aspects of the Vincentian tradition at this level:

- If it is true that neither Vincent nor Louise were professional educators, their educative action has nevertheless been directed generally towards the service of the less privileged. It constitutes a necessary supplement to the efforts to help marginalized persons come out of ignorance and poverty. This thus gave birth to the establishment of the first Vincentian schools and the Congregation of the Mission by Vincent whose principal aim was the sound formation of the clergy.
- The vision of formation is in line with the global perspective of the mission and of the Christian path thanks to Vincent's own spiritual career and to the development of his work. Vincent came to understand an important truth which later became one of his preferred maxims: "the poor are our lords and masters". Passionate in charity, Vincent nourishes his intimate

relationship with God through prayer, which enables him to recognize Christ present in those he meets and to manifest his merciful love in his relationship with others, especially the downtrodden, and in his missionary dynamism.

- Saint Vincent's biographers testify to his talent as a communicator. They stress in admiration that he wrote many letters and gave the Tuesday conferences, which he chaired with a remarkable pedagogy. Each of his initiatives was aimed at consolidating and extending the mission that he had been given. Starting from the preoccupations, the questionings and the doubts of his speakers and his receivers, Saint Vincent was able to deliver to them his own experience, to make known and to support the Vincentian work, to incite them to a deep understanding of the gospel for the service of the poor.
- Throughout the centuries, this work of education and communication, centered on the service of the poor, has taken diverse forms in Saint Vincent's disciples: Marguerite Naseau (autodidact and willing to share her knowledge), Ozanam (teacher, defender of the faith and learner together with Rosalie), Catherine (passionate and discrete messenger of the Virgin), Rosalie (a multifaceted sister), Elizabeth Seton (founder of the American Catholic school system), just to name a few of them. Each of them perpetuated in his or her own way this wealth, by welcoming and spreading the life of God and by transforming it into works and actions for the brothers and sisters, helping them to move from their status of marginalized to that of persons with dignity.
- We will stop here for a while to highlight some methodological aspects of our work. On the one hand, talking of Vincentian education and formation means to consider a wide variety of experiences including different practices and various contexts.

Education refers primarily to the formal place of teaching and education: schools, universities, Vincentian formation courses, seminaries and novitiates. It also extends to less structured spaces where the teaching takes place explicitly or not: the regular meetings of our groups, sessions/camps/missions, encounters and any good occasion to teach. By taking into account this diversity, we will avoid limiting ourselves on this or the other aspect, and instead direct our focus, if possible, on one’s educational step, beyond all these peculiarities. On the other hand, to talk of communication in order to mobilize is to start from communication as a means of transmitting information, a message that touches, transforms and engages. From Christ until today, the essence of this message is found in the Gospel, lived and interpreted within the Church, welcomed and incarnated in a variety of cultures, languages, organizations, generations, etc. Some common elements have characterized the Vincentian work throughout the centuries:

- a) The continuous and attentive listening to the Gospel, celebrated and lived in the Church, but welcomed in our everyday life where God is manifested through events and people. This listening implies various steps such as meditation, examination of life and the common sharing of our personal experience.
- b) The capacity to meet the other person, or better still, Christ in the other person and to welcome him where he is (physical space, personal circumstances, culture, language, etc) while allowing ourselves to be transformed by that encounter.
- c) The continuous urge to spread the Gospel, in words and in actions, to extend the kingdom of God through concrete actions that manifest the presence of God’s salvation in men’s lives.

- d) Action in collaboration with others, especially with those we serve, in order to have a greater effect. This common effort is understood not just as an accessory, but as an essential aspect for the credibility and the success of the mission.

These are therefore some elements of the formation and communication that we, Vincentians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are called to live and show forth so that our charism, which is 400 years old, does not lose its freshness and its power to transform the world.

### **3) The present world's challenges**

A historical journey through the Vincentian works since the days of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise would easily reveal that each of them was born at the initiative of one or many persons who were able to recognize a call from the Lord at that time and who acted in response to a need. The works in which we are engaged today are in line with this dynamic of an open view on the present times, of hearts and hands that are engaged with others at the service of the less privileged. The needs and the way of answering are meanwhile very different from those of our Vincentian predecessors. That is why I would like to offer a brief overview of the challenges of the world in which we live. I am conscious of the audacity of this approach, which may be incomplete, but which is important for the continuation of our reflection.

The present historical context is characterized by great technological, political and economic changes. Globalization has imposed itself with its contradictory effects and its requiring of permanent interconnection. In this entirely renewed global context, one may seek to know the ultimate sense of our existence and that of the world, with a rejection of the traditional forms of faith and spirituality. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, from numbers 52 to 75, the Pope emphasizes some of these challenges:

- An economy of exclusion and of social disparity which is accompanied by a "globalized indifference" and which generates violence.
- A new worship of money, which governs instead of being at the service of man.
- A dominant culture which gives privilege to appearance and neglects what is real.
- A secularization process which tends to relegate faith and the Church to a private and intimate domain and makes it difficult to inculturate faith.
- Urban cultures plagued by the struggle for survival, the birth of new cultures leading to new life orientations, the coexistence of a wide range of cultural forms and different forms of corruption and criminality.

In this context, what can be the particular challenges for Vincentian formation and communication? It seems to me that they are organized around elements of our Christian and Vincentian tradition apparently questioned by the post-modern society:

- Integral education/formation that takes into account the person in his entirety.
- Formation rooted in the culture and in the social, economic and political realities, enlightened by the rich social and doctrinal teaching of the Church.
- Formation and communication that take into consideration the time constraints.
- Formation and communication that open and prepare for actions in communion with others, promoting encounter.

- Questioning our individual and institutional practices (the links with the resources we have, the use of information in our actions, a common vision, etc) that give room to the effectiveness of a Vincentian movement.

#### **4) Some strategies in favour of formation and communication for mobilization**

Faced with these challenges, it would be important for the entire Vincentian Family to ponder the strategies that will enable it to continue spreading the Good News of the Gospel in today's world. To be effective, these strategies must promote what has been developed over the years. These strategies must be inspired by the experiences of these 400 years and pave the way to greater efficiency and relevance.

As far as we are concerned, we would like to group these strategies under five (5) categories: A pedagogy of active contemplation, an attitude of openness, the sharing of resources, a reform of our communication efforts and long-term strategic planning.

##### **a) A pedagogy of active contemplation**

As we have seen it, prayer - intimate relationship with God, listening to his word, acknowledgement of his will - must be found at the heart of the Vincentian approach. To insist on it does not mean that it is absent, but that it must actually constitute the first and main step. Thus, Vincentian prayer - with its rich methodology and its forms, meditation and examination of the day and life, interpretation of events in particular - must take back its unifying trait and serve as an anchor for Vincentian formation and action. This is how it can promote cohesion in life and prepare us to acknowledge and serve Christ in the person of the poor. Furthermore, the formation must be integral and it must take into account the different dimensions of the person (knowledge, behavior, manners and interpersonal skills).

**b) An attitude of openness**

To be alive fully as a movement, the Vincentian Family is called upon to develop a welcoming culture, to open its doors and windows, to allow itself to be questioned and challenged by the other, by the others. In this exchange, that renews and enriches, it will be able to discover new forms and opportunities for service. Two important elements that come from this are: the sharing of collaborative experiences to encourage a better practice and the active research of partnerships and opportunities to work together in and beyond the Vincentian Family. The Vincentian revolution will take a new course when we are ready for this opening that transforms and engages, which takes into account the plight of the less privileged and calls us to have a real impact on the unjust structures that generate and nourish to poverty.

**c) The sharing of resources**

Whether in the area of formation or communication, the Vincentian Family does not lack in resources. There again, community life ought to be real, effective and centered on common advantages and challenges. Some forms of this sharing may be the efficient joining of human resources, the development of common, well-structured digital spaces that promote giving and receiving or collaboration among the various Vincentian educative institutions at various levels. For instance, one of the present challenges faced by the Vincentian Family is the continuous need for translators and interpreters for materials and encounters. Would it not be great to see the various branches of the Vincentian Family united in a creative way as an answer to this common poverty found in working for the kingdom? This unified action through specialization of resources would help much in strengthening our small groups and making them more capable of acting.

**d) A reform of our communication efforts**

The digital presence of the Vincentian Family is undoubtable. However, how effective is it? Does it help to start up and to nourish

a concrete action on some specific problems? How do we make our communication credible, serious, in a world that increasingly lives in a 'low-cost media', with channels of continuous information? Despite our prominent digital presence, we face many difficulties in transmitting information at various levels of our associations/groups/congregations and among various institutions. The absence of a well-structured system of information hinders us from encouraging and coordinating mobilization and lobbying on realities that we are called to transform: the poor treatment of human beings, the ecological problem or global migration for example. Digital presence, yes, but it must be expressed according to new modalities and contribute to establishing a network, a more productive, powerful and enriching community.

#### **d) Long-term strategic planning**

In such a big world, the Vincentian Family can no longer afford the luxury of acting by fits and starts, launching or modifying its initiatives according to events and circumstances events and circumstances. It needs a common vision and a plan into the future, a strategic planning based on research and forecasting, a common choice of priorities that will focus time, resources and efforts in the same direction. This is partly what the Vincentian Family Executive Committee with the Famvin Homeless Alliance proposes to launch tomorrow. We want to gather around a serious problem and plan common actions, not necessarily identical, that will help to face the present emergency but also to solve it beginning from what we are doing already. It will also be interesting to explore the collective impact method which helps organize groups to face a crucial challenge by developing and working together for the realization of a common programme, seeking to bring about significant changes at the level of the population in the way they live together. Collective impact requires a shared and multi-sectorial understanding of the problem to solve, a common vision among the parties and a plan of action that rests on diverse measures and integrated activities. If



the Vincentian Family is capable of defining two or three priorities for the next 10-20-30 years, it will be more efficient in its efforts and, better still, able to propose a definite contribution to some of the challenges of our time. Of course, all of this does not exclude obedience to the Holy Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

The strategies suggested here are not aimed at exhausting the question. Closely linked to the Christian and Vincentian tradition of education and communication, they instead incite you to reflect as Vincentians on the question. It may be obvious that the writer's point of view is that of an educator. In fact, education and communication are two dimensions closely linked and it is but logical that they were put together under the same theme. For the Vincentian Family to continue to give life to and to form for the charism that we inherited 400 years ago, it would be important that our approach on formation and communication take into account the present challenges. In the context of a global world, it must admit spontaneous expressions of the charism under the guidance of the Spirit, but it cannot avoid the imperative need to be organized around some programs that allow a real and efficient impact on the life of the less privileged, especially those who seem no longer to have a place. That said, we give the floor to your personal reflection and to discussions that will help us to grow.

Translated: William Oben OBI-TAMBE, CM

## **“Immigration: Restoring a Place to the Other”**

Msgr. Beniamino Depalma, CM

### **Introduction. Updating the charism: Saint Vincent was no ideologue of poverty**

The new frontier of immigration, “new” today because of its size and ubiquity, finds us Vincentians in the forefront of understanding and encountering a phenomenon that continues to grow. For us it is not just about expressing Gospel arguments about welcoming immigrants: we also are called to update our Founder’s charism, because he had already set foot in his own time into these “real marginal outskirts,” recalling the thoughts of Pope Francis. In fact, during the Thirty Years’ War, Vincent de Paul found himself faced with a poverty that was new for the time; besides receiving orphans and the dispossessed he also took charge of providing hospitality to the waves of migrants seeking shelter and assistance due to war raids. Therefore, Vincentians are called today to get close to this new poverty, without excluding other kinds. It is to take seriously that Jesus’ warning “I was a stranger” is today’s Gospel incarnation, identifying in works of mercy, the contemplative form in action of our being Christ’s disciples. This commitment for us is not about doing a sociological analysis of migration; Saint Vincent was not an “ideologue of poverty”: he was interested in the poor person. For this reason, as his sons and daughters, we are called upon to assure – even if it means facing fears of being unpopular – the security of persons before the cultural and social security of nations. This new apostolic frontier urgently calls for welcoming people. We are in a historic moment when racism and xenophobia are often masked

by subtle arguments about the concern not to lose “our Christian values.” Not uncommonly, in order to delay the welcome, one would like to take advantage of a supposed conflict of religions. By affirming that, we would be forgetting – as Benedict XVI stated in the introduction of the encyclical *Deus caritas est* – that Christianity is not a culture, nor a religion, but the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ teaching us a style and a method of welcome. How can we not think about the Master’s encounter with the migrants of the Decapolis? Another example, the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman shows that meeting with people goes beyond geographical and cultural boundaries.

It helps to reflect on the teaching of Vatican Council II, which, in *Gaudium et spes*, by invoking the value of sharing, allows us to take on an effective way to receive others, one that is real and consistent. That would mean “networking” with local institutions, dioceses, parishes, voluntary associations all thinking and theorizing directed towards one end: To evangelize the human person through welcoming others as Jesus did and to humanize the Gospel, to bring it about in new apostolate outreaches in line with Saint Vincent’s teaching.

This duty to welcome others, as I have said, has an essentially pastoral character. But we cannot forget the role that theological study and reflection provide, enhancing it and recalling the need for concrete action.

Therefore, I intend to offer some initial reflections.

### **1. With the gospel grasped tightly in your hands**

Are we facing the greatest migration of human beings in history? It is hard to say. The history of humanity is in fact a story of continuous migrations. Human history is also the story of the continuing difficulty in managing and drawing good from migrations and blending. What we are living through today is not new. We are

not the first nor will we be the last. What is happening, good and bad, we already have seen in history books; indeed, with even more dramatic traits.

What is peculiar today is that migration is sliding toward a phase of global pessimism, a reduction in Western welfare expectations, and the very slow fulfillment of promises that globalization has made. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were enthusiastic about a new world order that would reduce inequalities and redistribute resources for peace. Instead, a chaotic, contradictory, and violent transition has begun.

In the face of all this, we find ourselves with a nationalistic right-wing class, with an unprepared European and global ruling class, cultures being questioned, and, above all, we are frightened by the collapse of consensus. Rulers' motives have blended the people's rational and irrational fears in creating that explosive blend of populism, demagoguery, and racism that drives debate today in the parliament, in political spheres, and in virtual spaces.

At the same time, the loss of roots in our western countries, the loss of scientific causality, make us feel more fragile and weaker faced with new arrivals to Italy. Therefore, the response becomes rejection. Politicians renounce those who govern with rationality and follow these dynamics, while from the point of view of local politics little is done: little integration, few demographic policies, little social justice for Italians and foreigners, little work. It is clear that we feel every day that we are on the edge of a volcano ready to explode. Still, there is statistical evidence calling for greater calmness: today, without many foreign workers, many older people would be without retirement; tomorrow, without the families of migrants, schools would close forever due to the absence of children.

The Church, fortunately, has taken the side of the Gospel and common sense, even if regressive fears and motivations are not lacking. Both the Gospel and common sense can be found in the

Pope, who preaches mercy and warmth but never forgets to tell the rulers that processes are to be managed and that such an influx cannot be recklessly dropped on citizens and communities.

It is therefore a huge challenge for all of us to grasp the gospel tightly in our hands, without transforming it into some feel-good utopia, but by living it out as a radical incarnation.

## **2. From Narcissus to Abraham: from making reference to self that shuts out, to relationship that opens**

In our cultural context, we must recognize it; “Narcissus” has become the “host” par excellence common in our interior homes. We have little reserved for human relationship, made up of ties of waiting, humble listening to a word that is restoring closeness: we are in the era of the *selfie*. It might help to reread the ancient myths to reinterpret our present culture, so marked by deep ambiguity and lacking relationships, which still, ultimately, are also desired. We think of the myth of Orpheus who does not hesitate to descend into the underworld, a dark region of ignorance and forgetfulness, to regenerate an indissoluble bond of love. However, he also is seized by the lack of hope; he finds himself alone with his silence without either questions or answers. Turning back, in search of the beloved face, is the typical quest for security and hospitality, but it must first recognize that the future and the pursuit of the other are married to uncertainty, otherwise which research should be cited? The face of others, Levinas would say, reveals itself to us as an incomprehensible and yet domestic objective truthfulness and, nevertheless, it is only by accepting it that we can find what our being seeks. *Quaesivi et invien*: I searched but I did not find it, says Orpheus. A conscious approach might be that of Telemachus who moves in search of his father, Odysseus, about whom he cultivates only educated fantasies, maintaining his fierce desire. Telemachus, perhaps more than other mythical character, can make us understand one of the characteristics of our time, a time when children seek their fathers; they throw themselves at vestiges of an image; they

swim through seas of confusion. Even Ascanio (Iulus), the son of Aeneas, gives his father his hand, who meanwhile has taken on the weight of another father, the founder of his race. In the crazed pain of a burning city, he follows him confidently, without keeping an eye on the footpaths, in the dense smoke of the high flames. Seeing his father run, the boy runs with him to salvation. Here is another great picture of our time: a fast and cooperative race toward an unknown but real presence. Finally, Icarus, the gentle young son of the restless Daedalus, can enlighten us. As an unwitting heir to the madness of the labyrinth, the place of unresolvable enigma of a refined search for self, he agrees to fly. This is interpreted that he, like so many young people today, from a blue horizon of meaning and, without having any tools, generously launches himself toward them.

Starting from the evocation of these ancient myths, I would like to emphasize how the pursuit of the other is something that, although difficult, is part of our human DNA. But how can we move from an auto-referential dimension to the search for others, to conscious and generous hospitality? We need the right tools, because without well-groomed wings, supporting the burden of fatigue, we risk crashing against each other, rather than growing with each other. You have to accept the challenge of getting out of yourself and your own pretensions to look for the other in truth and truly find him/her. The Gospels are full of people looking for another. Who can forget Mary's hastening to the house of Elizabeth; the desire of the owner who digs to unearth treasure; the night Jesus knows just how to speak of the experience of thirst to re-inspire Nicodemus; Zacchaeus' rapid climb up the tree; the centurion's rush to beg Jesus, without any forethought, for his daughter's life; John's and Peter's race to the tomb where they still believe the body of their master lies.

This kind of research, therefore, seeks a "way out" as Pope Francis reminds us in numerous talks. Therefore, it seems necessary to return to the figure of Abraham as a fundamental paradigm of hospitality. Abraham welcomes the three men at the Great Oak Trees

of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15), meets them outside his tent, leaves his protected space, rereads his story – made of failures and infertility – at that encounter. Unlike Narcissus, he does not have his own face to contemplate, but rather he carefully scrutinizes the faces of those three strangers, trying to understand them, to recognize them. He rereads his past history from that of the newness of the meeting. He takes care of those three strangers’ objective needs, nourishes them, and receives a promise of the future in the anticipation of Isaac. By giving hospitality, he receives fertility. Through the gift of his son, he will not see his own face more narcissistically, but rather, in the son’s “smile,” he will contemplate a future of fruitful joy (see Genesis 22:17). From that moment of hospitality, an existential journey has begun for him; it is an exodus from one other to an-other.

### **3. To accommodate: to inhabit spaces like travelers**

Z. Bauman, in describing the busy desert that today distinguishes our communities, develops a profound analogy between two metaphorical figures of tourist and vagabond, and our itinerancy in the anonymous spaces of the city.<sup>1</sup> His keen reasoning can help us understand which are the areas for education today and the spaces that they educate in their own right. On the one hand, the tourist is moved only by his curiosity; lives in spaces based on his needs; is not involved in the ordinary life of those spaces, although occasionally he might be. His role is that of a man consuming exotic pleasure. On the other hand, the vagabond is like a nomad; he leaves no trace. His goals are constantly temporary. Both have no real interest in the places they cross and, for us, this means that they develop no real bond with those places. There is a further figure to which we should pay attention. It is the traveler. The traveler is the one who gets involved. The purpose of his journey is to express the meaning of life. Abraham travels in order to fashion physically a place for welcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Bauman, *Le sfide dell’etica* [*The Challenges of Ethics*], Milano 1996, 244-247.

The same promised journey shows us how to build anchor points that will help others craft identifiable elements that can make a space a home. The weaver's curtain is one of the symbols of hospitality. It can be rolled up and carried with him, like Leopardi's wandering shepherd who seeks the sense of things in the pale and mute mirror of the moon (another symbolic place of the beyond). It can be planted and chosen as a space of the revelation of a prophecy of fertility. Finally, it can be thrown away, far away, by a gusting wind, and then reserves inconsolable tears to those who cannot interpret the dramatic effects of human existence. Living in a place, the stranger will never look like a threat. But, living in a place such as ours, strangers will be perceived as enemies, among whom we feel lost. That is why our places are no longer welcoming because they are inhabited no longer. They are only traversed and are characterized as trenches, adversarial facades, separate spaces, watched squares. We note daily that the space for reception today is limited to the confines of school, gymnasiums, and churches, but has lost, for the most part, links to the ordinary life of the community. Confinement sounds like an intolerable separation, like a crystal prison, which is just hiding in the ordinariness of a life of consumption. You go to the places mentioned because there is something to be done there. There is a program to follow. There is someone to whom to listen. You never go to these places because it is there that a thought arises, ideas are developed in which, gradually but perennially, a sprout of novelty is cultivated (cultivate-culture). There are also spaces that only look aesthetically pleasing. Think of Shopping Malls: How many young people tell me that these have become an indispensable Sunday habit? Jesus Christ went through arid places of welcome and tried to make them bloom: the deserts of power temptations; the gardens with centuries-old olive trees, which at night heard his lamentations of blood; the stables of the birth of unexpected little splendor; houses of celebrations and joy; the temples of scourging and blasphemy; and even squares and peripheries; the theater of stoning and crucifixion, used today, to teach civic behavior. Welcoming, however, is another



matter. It is loaded with the difficult task of rebuilding cities that have the courage to not glory in their 77 wonders but rather to open themselves to the greatest wonder: the face of the Other to be accommodated.

#### **4. Welcoming: Allowing yourself to be visited by a foreigner**

Returning to the Mamre Oak Trees story, I would like to emphasize the importance of visiting a foreigner, especially in our multiethnic cities. As Cardinal Sepe reminded us: “Our Catholic community, together with the Christian brothers of different denominations and other religions of ancient and recent presence, while offering the image of a multiethnic and multi-religious city express together the will to make Naples a cozy town, choosing the way of respectful and peaceful dialogue as a method of being together, without taking anything away from the specificity and identity of each.”<sup>2</sup>

Meeting the other is one of the most significant paradigms of hospitality. We cannot help but think that meeting often takes the form of a visit. Man is made to meet the other, because this is the only way he has to recognize him/her. For this reason, every truly welcoming relationship is always awaited by the other. So, to visit the other person by him/herself becomes a privileged moment for oneself, just as it is for others. There is no possibility of hospitality without there being any encounter of lives, stories, cultures, but more simply words, gestures, feelings, and emotions that convey not only content and information, but hypothesis of explanation of self and of the full reality. The real tragedy for man is to believe he suffices unto himself, to content himself with easy explanations, to feel that continuing the journey is too tiring, for it forces us to change our opinions or habits. That is why the encounter is a visit: move around to go looking for and enjoy the discovery. The Jewish-

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<sup>2</sup> From Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe’s speech for the opening of Port’Alba, 3 October 2011.

French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995), proposes Abraham as the ethical model of hospitality (which, for Levinas, does not consist in assuming an attitude of good education nor of almsgiving): “The other, as stranger, is the guest to whom I have to exercise the first ethical duty, hospitality. His status as a stateless, homeless person, which makes him alien in every country wherever he is, universalizes the need for hospitality.”

Unlike the Greek man who searches for the infinite, the Christian is one who searches and finds someone entering his home and is prepared to hear a word of forgiveness, a word never heard (unheard), unknown, one that shakes the fragile certainty of our reason. When the father in the parable of the recovered son searches the horizon and recognizes his son from afar, he is getting ready to receive elements yet unknown, dangers that might disorient him, the unexpected. Yet he runs out toward his son, waiting for his dramatic encounter, but suddenly he puts himself in the shoes of those who must be visited. The visit of the other, the foreigner, is not an organized journey in which everything has been thought out already. Today it seems impossible to think of an adventurous dimension outside of predefined and controlled contexts, outside of conditions denying discovery. What kind of encounters can happen on a cruise ship where everyone is dressed in the same way, showing off the same label, for whom entertainment and worldly ceremonies are all the same? Pleasure, in this case, does not reside in the unknown, but in the recognition of stereotyped images, seen and seen again a thousand times from the brochures: the pleasure of traveling is to repeat a pattern. If, however, we analyzed Jesus’ visits, we would realize that they lay the foundations for a different culture of the encounter: from that of Matthew Levi, to that of bringing Lazarus back to life, to that of the woman caught in flagrant adultery. In them, we see an embarrassing reversal, almost as if the visitor let the master of the house enter and reveal, through his known spaces, his own intimate self. Each visit is thus a revelation, the exploration of an inner geography, a profound crossing of one’s own regions of the soul. The culture of hospitality

as a visit reveals the conditions for building one’s own reasons for living. The reason for life is a process of acceptance of the will of God, lived as one’s own, free, and courageous choice, which no longer is derived from the planning of others, but from the search for a reason of heart, which we legitimize as value and ideal. The sincere welcome, therefore, needs to accept the challenge of letting it be visited by diversity, learning the anthropological grammar of listening and waiting. For example, in the face of the proliferation of cultures other than ours, we are called first to question the quality of our Christian witness so that it interrogates these cultures. As a second example, in the face of the foreign presence we are called to accept as a gift, and not as a condemnation, the possibility of unifying, even without confusing, our symbolic experiences and our anthropological and interpretative categories. We cannot help thinking of the constant need for dialogue that characterized Paul’s Christian life, his unwavering desire to come into contact with other worlds and experiences, and even the fact that he presented himself as a multifaceted cultural and ethical person, who forms a model for us Christians of this time. Paul of Tarsus, everybody’s teacher, even the non-Christian, draws us to the search for territories where salvation is not a series of endless projects, but where respect for the dignity of everyone comes as a gift to those who can be educated to freedom and experience in their existence. Fundamentalisms, our century’s risk and threat, deny that every religion carries a message of peace and a plan of liberation.

##### **5. Welcoming by means of a common project: restoring attention**

Today we all are called to work for the present and the future of our people and of our land. This means designing, studying concrete needs in detail, interpreting them, thinking through a wide range of possible answers, testing the quality of what is proposed. It means designing or gathering all the details that represent the community’s human, social, cultural, and material resources; of calling other well

known, righteous, and competent faces to co-responsibility, all to enhance the talents of individuals and groups by putting them to the service of one end. It means redesigning or avoiding generic formulations, entering into the specific, translating the project into a concrete program, not only with dates, but especially with concrete people to meet and charm, with clear and measurable goals. First of all: meet the Other and the other. But there is a premise to our project, and it is essential to put your hand really to meet these faces, not just in intentions, but in the street, in homes, in the classroom, and in workplaces. How wonderful it would be for every believer in our Church to be animated by a single absolute priority: to cross paths with the path of the other, not for mere religious proselytism, nor for humanitarian aid, but to communicate the immense joy that personal encounter with God has brought in our lives. Let us rehearse hospitality using practical exercises. Meet people, or walk in the neighborhood and in the city. Stop to look at the faces, interrupt your walk to listen, to speak. Meet or take to heart the other's specific problem and, above all, the most ordinary, savor the joy of everyday living, not only for oneself, but also for the other. Meet, that is, to make the first step in the direction of the other, with a concrete purpose: to establish not only a contact but to establish a relationship, a relationship that has taken time, space, uses words, and gestures. Restore attention in order to renew the other, this is the assumption of acceptance. True intelligence today is learning a new – and true – way of seeing and watching others. The Scriptures help us when they propose that we look within/loving (*em-blepein*), which restores, reinvents, and rediscovers the other. If our gaze communicates love, we will refer to the original love of God the Father. But the observer/lover is also the one who does not bend the neighbor to his own desires, does not undermine freedom, but rather is capable of taking on the unpredictability of the heart's movements. Our gaze is free and not overwhelming, but it could help others to rediscover their own ability to look to the world and to their brothers and sisters with joy and responsibility. Renewing one's gaze or ceasing to speak and think badly of others, abandoning any

prejudice, recognizing any person as the Father’s favorite creature; renewing one’s gaze, or aiming directly at the human heart, where there is purity, good nature, beauty; renewing one’s gaze, that is, cultivating a desire that the other know how to take to the open sea with his/her own strength, but certain that a community is always close to him/her.

I like to remember the quotation of a text referring to your personal digging deep and that helped me in drafting my own reflections: C. Di Sante, *Lo straniero nella Bibbia. Ospitalità e dono* [*The Stranger in the Bible. Hospitality and Gift*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2012. The author thus summarizes the traits of the “hospitable person”: “Keeping the door of your room open”; “Offering a welcome”; “Noticing the other who suffers and who is in need”; “Making room for the other”; “Giving from what you have.” These are four ways, updated and adapted to our Family and parochial contexts, to be the exodus-like way from ourselves to others.

## **6. Pastoral suggestions**

“Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tryed wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid.... Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man. But if thought is to become the possession of many, not the privilege of the few, we must have done with fear. It is fear that holds men back fear lest their cherished beliefs should prove delusions, fear lest the institutions by Which they live should prove harmful, fear lest they themselves should prove less worthy of respect than they have supposed themselves to be.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, London, 1996, 165-166.

**a. The strength of reason and the power of the Gospel: antidotes against fear**

From my point of view, a few pastoral suggestions emerge, which I offer briefly. The first suggestions concern the style of the Christian community in front of the guest who comes to visit us. Always keeping fixed on the polar star of relationships and the encounter with the other, we come across a very concrete and dramatic problem: fear. The greatest work our communities have to do is develop antidotes to fearing the guest, the visitor, the stranger. These antidotes are in the Gospel. But they are also in reason. There is no alternative to encounter and relationship. We cannot escape this great phenomenon of migrations. Rationally, as well as evangelically, we are obliged to challenge a new relationship. What would be the alternative? Violence? Closing them out? Ghettos? Not only evangelically, but also rationally these ways are far worse than any that can arise from dialogue and tedious meetings. You have to work on fears and try to dismantle them with good reasoning. So many raw opinions circulate about the “work” that these people would take away, about “privileges” that the state would give them, about terrorist danger, about religious submission. These views take hold of frightened people, but culturally we must dare a more complex truth in order to downsize fears that go beyond lawfulness. I see this work on “fears” within our Christian communities to be almost preparatory to every other initiative.

Indeed, work should be able to exert force on the positive dynamics of acceptance and this from the internal relations to the communities themselves, “a kingdom divided against itself...” This should mean a retraining within the community that should start from the reception of the other as a gift of diversity: different charisms, different ways for sanctification, and different journeys of faith. Only a community that can gather as a chorus of voices ready for the symphony and not a rigid experience where there is only one door to access the hall can make a Church credible as a

place of integration and plurality, the Temple of the Spirit because it is a house of diversity. The choice is inclusion – as Pope Francis suggests –, rather than giving life to exclusion.

**b) Not only pasta dishes, but also true integration: the meeting point of parishes, groups, and commonsense networks**

A profound cultural work on our people’s fears can then pave the way for a broad, solid, and creative operation. I believe that material assistance, which government takes on sometimes in a contradictory way and charitable organizations in a generous way, is highly inadequate. The real challenge is an integration that first goes through personal encounters and prejudices, and then, after subsequent analysis, involves real alliances involving parishes, schools, associations, and institutions. This phenomenon is complex and articulated; no one can carry it alone. One form of narcissism, on the one hand, is just to think of dealing alone with matters that surpass our abilities. A form of human and Christian maturity, on the other hand, is to work for alliances and networks in which each one takes his/her part.

I refer in particular to certain forms of presence that do not show the face of the community, but rather the single person who is identified for his irrefutable availability, but who does not show the presence of a believing family behind him. For this, we need to grow pastoral workers – priests, deacons, men and women religious, and laity – with that dimension of feeling like the “sacrament” of the community. In this sense, it would be ever more significant that operators could show themselves together in an integration of vocations, which in themselves already would be a sign of a new style of being Church.

A starting point could be to promote the integration of new families into the community, establishing a sort of monitoring unit of the new presences in the neighborhood so as to draw the attention of host teams, who then can visit, offering them a parish connection.

We must place ourselves in the perspective of having to look for our brothers and sisters, coming out of the dynamic of the eternal waiting in which the missionary spirit has ceased, which is nothing other than the living experience of God that comes to you, searching through the face of the other.

### **Educational Challenges for the Vincentian Family**

#### **EDUCATION FOR COMPASSION**

This is a real process. It is not education about emotions. Emotion is not a necessary and sufficient condition for compassion. Becoming compassionate is a real-life, stage-by-stage journey. First step: educate yourself to see the good that is in the other as God's son. Educate yourself to seek out the truth in each person's life story, starting from his or her own life. Educate yourself to feel physically and emotionally the other's problem as your own problem. Educate yourself to a lifestyle in which solidarity is not a sacrifice, but a benefit, or rather, is a sublime benefit through sacrifice.

#### **EDUCATION TO CURIOSITY**

Without curiosity, we cannot draw closer to the other. If we do not understand that the other is a mine of knowledge and experience, we will always have a closed approach. The other can enrich our lives, but not by idle chatter. Ideas and philosophies of life. Traditions. Food. Relationship with money and goods. Everything in our lives can be challenged in the encounter with another culture. Integration starts with curiosity.

#### **EDUCATION TO FREEDOM**

Today, things in pairs are fashionable. Freedom means security. True, terrorism is scary and we want a security that allows us to listen to a concert without losing our lives. However, we must say, freedom is not armed, freedom is at risk, freedom is lived in border



areas. With security, we develop a form of particular, individualized freedom, which we can call Western. Let us not forget that Christ was free on the cross, not when Peter swept his sword to defend him. Let us educate ourselves to the freedom of sharing relationships with the other.

### **EVERYTHING ALWAYS ORIGINATES FROM THE FAMILY**

Prejudices come from mom and dad, from grandparents. They do not start from the little children. The best integration experiences come with other children, at school. We have to work at the pull of the little ones. If our son is in class and has no problems with a foreign boy, we adults must complete the work, living without problems with his dad and his mom. The work of integration does not arise from large megaprojects that often waste public money, but from the small interactions, day-to-day efforts.

### **A CHURCH THAT IS REAL, NOT INGENUOUS**

In the great work of integration, the Church’s importance as a mystery and as a community emerges. As a mystery, because only as a mystery can we open ourselves to the mystery of a life we do not know. As a community, because only as a community can we apply that discernment about the truth of the person and his/her story. Often the stranger, as well as the weak, the poor, is a mixture of anger, truth, desire, even shrewdness. Only a community can help in truth, without falling into an end of innocence and excessive goodness in itself.

*Translated: Dan Paul Borlik, CM*

## **Let God Be God; Let Love Be Love**

Margaret Ann O'Neill, SC

We have come to Rome: to remember; to recommit; to rejoice. And of course, we are here, to celebrate our spiritual DNA: TOWARD BOUNDLESS LOVING. What a joy to be with Family. Gracias. All of you are now even more a part of my world!

Let me start by focusing just a little bit on Vincent's gift to the Church and the world. The saints, those friends of God, who left a profound impression on humankind and the Church, did so because they discovered a new dimension to Christianity: a new way of living, a new way of reading the Gospel.

In the midst of the hostile environment of Jansenism, where Original Sin and human depravity were afflicting everyone in the Church and in society, Vincent reacted strongly, searched his own heart and, gradually, affirmed that grace, God's loving presence, is not merited, but rather it is freely given; it is pure gift, freely given to everyone.

Fired up with this belief, Vincent, through prayer and action, comes to know that there is no way to stop this wave of love. The love of God is unstoppable. So Vincent boldly loves with the awareness that God is love and the human person is able to love with the divine love that has been poured out freely into human hearts. Yes, for Vincent human holiness is an encounter of human love with divine love, especially in the person of the poor.

Vincent did not see the road to holiness as some direct path that led to God, but rather as a path that moved in one direction, then another, and still another. It was more like the wisdom of God that mystics possess, not the result of knowing but of savoring, not so much mindfulness but heart-fullness. It was more the result of a deep encounter, by seeing the within-ness of the other, the within-ness of everything, the within of himself.

Vincent believed and lived paradoxes: humility and audacity; action and mysticism; firmness and gentleness; perseverance and flexibility; intelligent activity and trusting surrender (always both and).

It gives me joy to mention this here, here in Rome. Vincent truly believed in **partnership in the Church** and that is why he listened, learned, and trusted the instincts and wisdom of Louise. Together they imagined and gave birth to a movement that has inspired us all.

They started a revolution of tenderness, a revolution to humanize and put a face on the stranger and the vulnerable. Our Founders knew the need to look eyes and to join hearts with those to whom human dignity and human rights were denied.

With zeal, with a passion, Vincent and Louise responded to human needs and organized institutions to keep charity alive, keep love expressed. Yes, we are witnesses to, and partners with them in that long evolution of service, service given in both humility and simplicity.

Vincent and Louise instructed all of us, the Vincentian Family, to ask forgiveness of those receiving our help, receiving our love. How well they knew that the “giver is the getter and the getter is the giver”! It really was, it truly is love touching love.

Imagine, we were told, our chapels, our shrine places were the city streets. We were told to leave God for God. Not that prayer

was unimportant; but oh, how overwhelming to both Vincent and Louise was the deep awareness, the deep realization, that Presence, grace freely given, is everywhere. Everything, everyone is sacred. (Imagine this is long before Vatican II).

Vincent and Louise were fully awake to their troubled times and they risked responding to it in new ways. They challenged Church, society, and each other, when necessary, with hope and deep confidence that their project, their ministry were of God.

Clearly, we have come to this holy city to recommit ourselves to boundless loving so, I ask each of us, “How do we stay awake? How do we stay faithful in our own times, in our context? Four hundred years later what is the spiritual revolution needed to transform us and our world? What and how should we teach by our actions and our words a world so broken, a world so far from the dream of God?

I want to invite – no, I want to challenge – all Vincentians to look deeply inside the mystery of the TRINITY; yes, to ponder this displaced, this forgotten doctrine. For too long this doctrine has been THE STRANGER, waiting to be welcomed, waiting to show us how to live. **Actually, I want to suggest we need a Trinitarian Revolution, nothing less.**

Like you, I thought **little** about the Trinity because I was told, “It is a mystery. You cannot understand it. Just believe it.” Richard Rohr<sup>1</sup> says, and I quote, “**Mystery is not something you cannot understand, but rather, Mystery is something you can understand endlessly.**” True there is no point at which you can say, “Ah, I’ve got it.” Rather, my friends, always and forever **Mystery gets you. Mystery holds you/us.** You experience Mystery. You experience love. You savor it.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr. *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your Transformation.*

This unearthing of the Trinity cannot come a moment too soon! Our world is so broken, so disconnected, so afraid, so longing to be healed, a world so in need of love. Are we ready to admit that we have trespassed on the **fullness** of God, the **fullness** of Mystery, by trying to lock God in a religion, a book, a person, a gender? Can we only think in nouns? Is it too late to re-verb? Can we finally confront Aristotle who puts forth the theory that SUBSTANCE is always over RELATIONSHIP?

A more refreshing current theology of Trinity can enliven faith in a way that is not just rooted in our own tradition but in all wisdom, experience, and love. I ask us, “Will we LET GOD BE GOD? Will we let Love be Love?”

Catherine Mowry LaCugna,<sup>2</sup> in her classic, *GOD FOR US*, proposes that Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about God, but rather a teaching about personhood. She insists that God is absolute relatedness and the foundational good news is that creation and humanity have been drawn into this flow of loving relationship, this gift of relating lovingly. In fact, she tells us that the life of God does not just belong to God alone. Everything is holy; everything is connected. God is the life force of everything, of everyone. **There are no strangers.**

This must become our mantra, the Vincentian mantra: **there are no strangers.** What was budding in the hearts of Vincent and Louise is beginning to flower. Everything, everyone is invited to be a part of this three-part HARMONY, this holy communion, this radical relationship. Humanity is created in the image of community, in the image of Trinity.

Today scientists confirm for us that everything is interrelated. They tell us that everything that exists is never stable and is nothing

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life.*

but a jump from one interaction to another. The Italian scientist, Carlo Rovelli,<sup>3</sup> suggests that we should no longer talk about the big bang, but maybe rather about the BIG BOUNCE, things moving, emerging, relating.

Marinate on this. Trinity is not just a teaching about the life of God but about the life of personhood. Let me suggest that this is the spiritual paradigm shift our world needs. God is not a Being, but an INTER-BEING, Absolute Relatedness. I want to suggest, we do not look at the Trinity as spectators, as outsiders. Rather, we are all invited into this dance of love, into this wave of love that is unstoppable. God is not the Dancer but the Dance. Start thinking movement. Start thinking verbs, not just nouns. Start thinking relationships, not just substances. God is the Dance, not the Dancer and we are part of that very dance.

La Cugna<sup>4</sup> also tells us that we praise God by building right relationships and sin is destroying right relationships. Stop thinking and speaking about Bombs; start thinking and speaking about BONDS. Start speaking about Bondings! Atomic Bombings, NO; Atomic Bondings, YES! (Quite Vincentian, no?). Will we try to midwife new metaphors for this creative energy and power that continues to invite us to renew the face of the earth? Will we try to use our creativity to find new ways to nourish and sustain our spirits?

Will we swim, and dance, in a spirituality birthed out of the awareness that we truly praise God when we build right relationships with people and all other species on this planet and that sin is in destroying relationships? Will we let this sink into our souls and have it shape the way we touch our planet, our borders, the way we use and share all natural resources?

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<sup>3</sup> Carlo Rovelli. *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.

<sup>4</sup> La Cugna, *op. cit.*

Who is our neighbor? The Good Samaritan, yes; the Syrian refugees, yes, the children sold for sex, yes; AND the sea turtles, the bees, the butterflies, YES. Oh, how we have come to see the vastness of creation and its real connectedness, its real relatedness. We must reread all faith stories in this context and see and feel them emerging, being liberated with new meanings, see them evolving.

I am so happy I have lived long enough to see the radical doctrine of the Trinity emerging, opening up like a beautiful flower. All that is birthed and connected by this loving movement, this incessant **VERB**. Yes, I stand in awe at how the early Cappadocian Fathers speak about Mystery, speak about God, after Jesus. They express this as Love flaring forth, love expressed, received, returning, transforming, connecting, expanding, invading, inviting. What insight! And they tell us we are made in the image and likeness of God, of this Mystery.

Let me mention here that there is a new book by Carla Sunberg,<sup>5</sup> *The Cappadocian Mother*. Sunberg explores the way in which the holy lives of seven Cappadocian women bring greater clarification and understanding to the theology the fathers are struggling to express. These women give life to the language of the Cappadocian fathers. It becomes impossible to separate these women from their theology or their theology from these women. While the women did not preach or publish, they shaped the character of their close male relatives. They were exemplars of holiness, generously giving in compassionate caring and for these theologians they truly reflected the image of God. In fact, these women embodied what they were struggling to write about. They saw these women as living examples of *deification, theosis*.

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<sup>5</sup> Carla Sunberg. *The Cappadocian Mothers: Deification Exemplified in the Writings of Basil, Gregory, and Gregory*.

Our radical understanding of God is that God is not an isolated monad, but a living communion in relationship with the world. In effect, we say that God is what God does, **love**. God is not a BEING, but inter-being, Absolute Relatedness, the life force of everything, the life force of everyone. We do not just look at Trinity as spectators, marveling and imitating. Rather, Mystery invites us to live within the flow of love expressed, to be part of this harmony.

Listen to the poet, Emily Dickenson: In the name of the birds, the butterflies and the breeze, Amen. Can we not say, “In the name of Vincent, Nelson Mandela, and Gandhi,” Amen? In the name of, “peacemakers, caregivers, and Vincentians,” Amen. So let us say, In the name of Vincentian Baptists, Vincentian Buddhists, and Vincentian Catholics, Amen.

We belong to each other and the Creative Force you and I call God is responsible for that. That Force, that Energy is what connects everything, everyone. Ivone Gebara,<sup>6</sup> calls God, the SAP of life, the life force of everything. Will we let this disturb us, call us to see a real responsibility to treat everyone with tenderness, live in real solidarity? Will we wake up from our isolation, from our inhumanity?

According to Ilia Delio,<sup>7</sup> to be Catholic, to be human, is to live in conscious evolution, to be actively engaged in this unfinished universe, as co-creators of justice, peace, mercy, and compassion. Catholicity is a virtue of relatedness, a dynamic energy of whole-making, of solidarity.

Meghan Clarke<sup>8</sup> reminds us that solidarity is an attitude, a virtue, a duty. It is not a **vague** feeling of compassion or a shallow stress at the misfortune of people. It is waking up to the scandals that

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<sup>6</sup> Ivone Gebara. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*.

<sup>7</sup> Ilia Delio. *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness*.

<sup>8</sup> Meghan J. Clarke. *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights*.



surround us, staring at them, weeping over them. Solidarity is the virtue by which we strive to be more fully the Trinity. It is feeling the pain, the love, the loneliness of the other.

To be human is to have open arms, to embrace, to build, to heal, to let the life force pass through us and meet the very life force of the other. But to be human is also to make fists in the face of those structures that rob people of their humanity, that indicate they are not wanted, or do not deserve rights, dignity, a safe place to live and grow. (Most natural disasters are not NATURAL.)

The heart of the message of Pope Francis is the radical, uncompromising nature of solidarity. He reminds us by words and actions that we have fallen into the globalization of indifference, an attitude that oh, it does not concern us, it is none of our business. He warns us that we cannot embrace our own humanity if we do not embrace the humanity of the other.

Until exclusion and inequality in society are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. Without equal opportunities, the different forms of aggression will find fertile terrain and eventually will explode. Violence will keep recurring no matter how much military might we use to suppress it.

May I stress, in this moment of time, we all need to shout by words and actions to everyone we serve: Get a life. Get a real life. Get a life not measured by stock portfolios or the manic pursuit of material consumption. Rather, get a life where together we envision and build a circle of COMPASSION with no one standing outside of it. Let us give each other hope that a humane civilization can and will be made concrete by considering first the community rather than the individual.

When we leave this symposium, when we head back home with all the positive, shared energies from this gathering, I ask you to remember that, despite so much in common among us, there is one

thing you have, that no one else has. Yes, you are and will be the only person alive who has the sole custody of your own heart, your own deepest center.

You can google for an answer, you can google for a mate, for a career. But you cannot google to find out what is in your own heart, the passion that lifts you upward. You have to listen to what is inside of you and discover your own fire. Not only do you need your own fire, but so does the whole world.

More than ever, the world needs economic structures, economic systems that are built on solidarity, on the tenderness between pueblos. More than ever, the world needs to rethink borders, welcome the OTHER, as KIN, not as STRANGER. More than ever, we need to build bridges not walls. (We built walls in the 14<sup>th</sup> century!) We cannot amputate our creativity. We must risk, peek around corners, travel to places where there are palpable longings for justice and peace. Yes, I repeat we must stare at how inhumane humanity is.

More than ever, we must be awakened by the scandals we see, the scandal of hunger, of the corruption and impunity of so many of our institutions, the scandal of excessive greed! If we do not perceive the scandals, we will never act. We must see and feel the pain of the world to be a part of this new birthing.

Let us gather here these days with a genuine attitude of gratitude knowing that God still has faith in us and knowing that we still have faith in each other. Let us promise to touch each other and our world with a **tenderness** that **transforms** and with a **truth** that **challenges**.

Ours is an age of something radically new. It is more than a reformation. It is to be an EVOLUTION in love, an EVOLUTION in solidarity, “**a Love Inventive to Infinity.**”



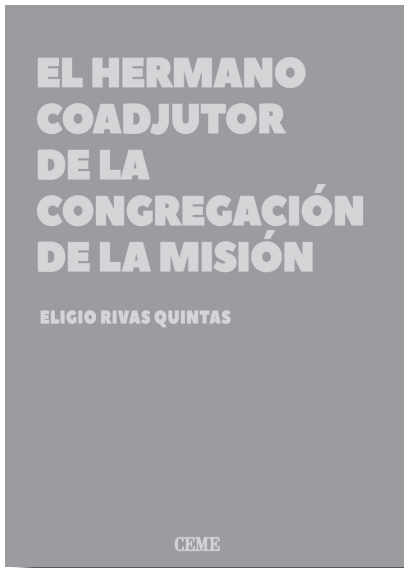
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## El Hermano Coadjutor de la Congregación de la Misión

*Eligio Rivas Quintas*

Publisher: CEME

The first reference to the Coadjutor Brothers is found in a text dating back to 1628, approximately one year after the admittance of the first Brother into the Congregation. In the petition for approval of



the Congregation, a document that was directed to Pope Urban VIII, Vincent alluded to the Brothers when he stated: *May it please your Holiness to approve and confirm this Congregation. And, insofar as necessary, may you be pleased to establish it anew, to extend your blessing upon it, and to appoint the above-mentioned Vincent founder and Superior General of these priests, and also of any others who wish to join their society, as well as of those who are necessary*

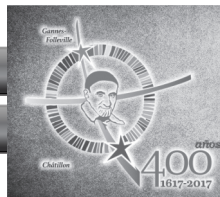
*for the domestic employments of this Congregation called of the Mission, who might wish to live together devoutly in the society and offer and give service to the Most High in a spirit of humility and in the pursuit of a holy life. Their first and foremost purpose shall be to strive for their own perfection and to devote themselves entirely to the salvation of the country people. They shall go from village to village, preaching [and] catechizing (CCD:I:49-50).*



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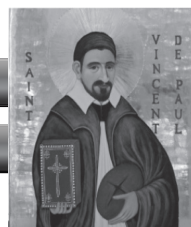
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