

Homily Erection of the Province of Vietnam

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Superior General**

Today is a day of immense joy and celebration for the Congregation of the Mission as we formally erect the Province of Vietnam. Beyond the immediate preparations for this event, there were some very remote ones, as the first missionaries to Southeast Asia laid the groundwork for this day.

Almost a century ago, in 1928, French missionaries from China often came to this country to minister to the Daughters of Charity and to preach short-term pastoral missions. Initially they were limited to serving the Daughters and the French-speaking population. However, in 1955, the first canonical house was established. In 1970, the initial group of aspirants joined the confreres. This was the starting point for strong development. The confreres formed a Region of the Paris Province until its formal erection as a Vice-Province in February 2012. Since then, the Congregation in this country has seen growth in personnel and activities. God willing, the number of confreres should reach triple digits within a couple of years. It is, therefore, time to move to the next level.

The new province can count on two very significant strong points. The first is that it is based in a vocation-rich country. The province really is blessed in that regard, for it receives a considerable number of young men, who feel called to follow Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor. Its seminaries are filled with enthusiastic seminarians:

76 major seminarians and 99 aspirants. No other province in the Congregation has such an encouraging number of seminarians in formation.

However, that large number of young men in formation requires three basic components for providing quality formation: infrastructure, formation personnel, and a formation program. Fortunately, the infrastructure is in place with special formation houses for all stages. Initiatives are underway to train confreres to address the formation needs, for a considerable number of confreres is studying in different universities throughout the world. Given the large number of young vocations, the new province will need quantity as well as quality.

The second strong point is Vincentian content and visibility in its ministry. The confreres are noted for their interest in and outreach to the poor, particularly their willingness to work for and with the ethnic minority (Tribal) people, the neediest segment of society. That spirit is to be encouraged and continued.

Allow me now to take this opportunity to review the four initiatives chosen by the Executive Committee of the International Vincentian Family to celebrate the jubilee year for the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, which just concluded. They are: the pilgrimage of the heart of Saint Vincent, the International Vincentian Family Symposium, the Global Initiative on Homelessness, and the Vincentian Film Festival.

Just over a year ago, on 25 January 2017, some of the Daughters of Charity and confreres from our Motherhouses in Paris made a pilgrimage with the Heart of Saint Vincent to Folleville, where it all began. Since that time, Vincent's heart has traveled throughout France and even to Rome during the Symposium. Everywhere it was received with great veneration and was surely a source of abundant grace for many people.

Mid-October brought us the great event of our International Vincentian Family Symposium, as we welcomed to Rome some 12,000 people from all branches and 99 countries all over the world during the course of the three days. It was an extraordinary experience, in which some of you perhaps were fortunate to participate, while others may have joined us virtually, thanks to the mass media. We launched the other two initiatives that day: the Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness and the Vincentian Film Festival.

The official announcement of the Famvin Homeless Alliance was held at the European Parliament on 28 June 2017. This initiative of the Worldwide Vincentian Family aims to reduce and, wherever possible, eliminate homelessness in its multiple forms.

The Vincentian Film Festival, entitled, Finding Vince 400 (FV400), is a competition and festival for people of all voices. Its aim is to champion 21st-century storytellers and challenge audiences with films that change our perspective on poverty in our communities. We hope to spark imaginations by sharing our charism through creative works inspired by the Vincentian mission to globalize charity. Thus far, we have had a wonderful response to this competition, which will be held at Castel Gandolfo from 18-21 October 2018.

We are challenged constantly to renew our lives, to respond more generously, to reconsider and revive our first fervor in the spiritual life and in the Vincentian Charism. To help you address these challenges, allow me to look toward the future by suggesting some points for your reflection and some actions to undertake in 2018 and beyond.

Going to the Peripheries

On 25 January, we officially concluded the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism and we began the Fifth Century of the Charism. This gives us encouragement, fire, strength, and an invitation to be inventive. It offers us a wonderful opportunity for

action among ourselves and with others. Can we consider going to the peripheries, asking ourselves where we are present in the world? Can we pay attention to those parts of the world in which we are not present, as well as those areas of society in which we are present and those in which we are not? How can we move to those peripheries? I already mentioned that you willingly reach out to the Tribal people, who are the neediest in your society. I urge you to continue this outreach to them.

Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of our Vincentian Family

To mark the beginning of the Fifth Century, I would like to encourage intensifying the involvement of the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family in our daily life. This can be done by taking concrete steps, first on the local level, to renew their intercessory role. They are known better on the local level, the area from which they come. Encourage one another to turn to them in your different needs, to ask for their intercession before God. From the local level, it will be easy to spread or renew, on the national and international levels, the trust in one or another of them who perhaps has been somewhat forgotten or put aside. We also hope to encourage or restart the process of beatification or canonization of our Servants of God and Blessed, if those processes have stopped and can be restarted. Let us put forth all our efforts as individual branches, as well as the entire Vincentian Family, to bring those many ongoing processes to conclusion. We also might consider starting new ones, if there are potential candidates in the different branches of the Vincentian Family whom we believe lived a saintly life and can be wonderful examples for us today.

Culture of Vocations

Once again, I want to encourage the renewal of our efforts in promoting a culture of vocations. Beginning from your Baptismal call, discover the personal appeal in your own life and then encourage

others to participate actively as a lay member in one of the many branches of the Vincentian Family or by becoming part of one of the congregations of consecrated life within the Vincentian Family. Renewing the culture of vocations also means doing our best to make it normal and totally acceptable in today's society to enter consecrated life, and not the other way around. We want to cultivate this type of atmosphere. What are we doing and what can we do in that sense? Even though you are blessed with vocations, I encourage you to continue promoting them, so that even more young men and women will respond generously to Jesus's call.

I would be remiss, if I did not offer some words of thanks to all those who made this day possible. Obviously, this includes the Vietnamese confreres themselves, who not only planned the activities for this day, but also ministered with great fidelity to reach this goal. We must express deep gratitude to the French confreres too, who helped get the mission here underway and guided their brothers in this country for some 60 years. The pioneer French missionaries worked in difficult situations. The Daughters of Charity also have been a wonderful support to our confreres for the past 90 years and we are grateful for that and for their prayers.

In addition, let me extend my sincere appreciation to the diocesan bishops, especially those in whose dioceses our confreres minister and those here present, particularly to the Bishop of Da Lat. Our confreres are very fortunate to have cordial relations with diocesan authorities and diocesan clergy and we recognize that the bishops are very helpful toward us Vincentians.

I know that the Vice-Province has counted on a strong group of benefactors, who have contributed in various ways, even to the construction of formation houses. The confreres would not have arrived at this point without your significant support and material assistance. For that, I am extremely grateful, as I know they are too.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the backing and assistance that the province has received from government authorities, particularly on the local level. We recognize that, without them, this new province would not be where it is today.

Saint Vincent, in his conference to the first Daughters of Charity on 13 February 1646, after recounting the origins of their Company, concluded, “And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn’t then what it is now, there’s reason to believe that it’s still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it.”¹

The beginning of this new province and of the Fifth Century of the Vincentian Charism are God-given opportunities to reflect, decide, and act. They provide you with the occasions to continue your efforts at making yourselves and the new province what God wants you and it to be.

¹ *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 IX, p. 194; Conference 24, “Love of Vocation and Assistance to the Poor,” 13 February 1646.