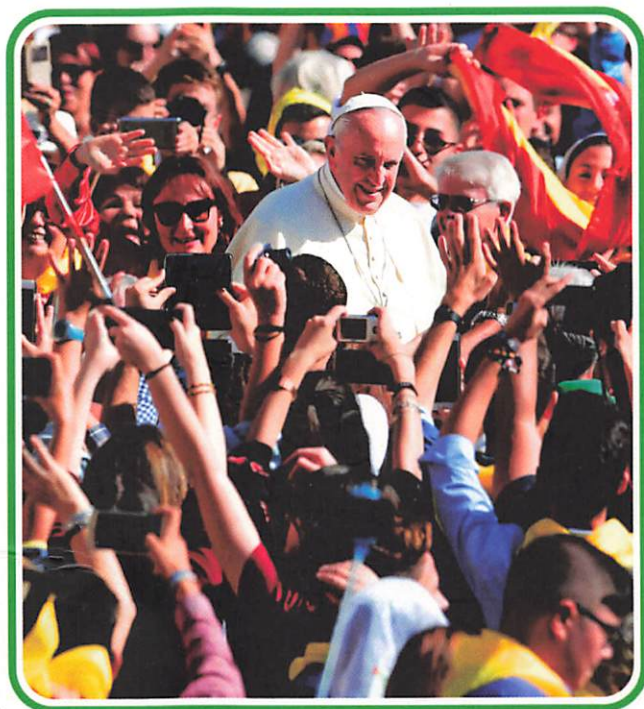


VINCENTIANA



62nd YEAR N°1
January-March 2018

**Symposium of the Vincentian Charism...
Perspective for Tomorrow**



Congregation of the Mission
General Curia

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Introduction

Editor's Note

This issue of *Vincentiana* is a continuation of the previous issue (61st Year, October-December 2017, No. 4) in which we presented some of the documents from the Vincentian Symposium that was held in Rome (October 2017). It attempts to reflect on the Symposium from the perspective of the future, therefore, each document that is presented in the fourth part of this publication is a response to the question: *From Here to Where?* The reflections that were shared during the time of the Symposium are very numerous and very rich and require various issues in order to gather and present all of this material.

This issue begins with a presentation of official documents *from the General Curia*: the Decree of the Erection of the Province of Vietnam and the homily of the Superior General in which he explained the significance of this juridical change. In this section, one will also find the 2017 Statistics of the Congregation: the Community is present in 83 countries, distributed among 38 Provinces and five Vice-Provinces, with 504 juridical houses. The Congregation is composed of 31 bishops, 2888 priests, 60 transitional deacons, three permanent deacons, 129 brothers, and 32 incorporated members. The last document in this section is the letter of the Superior General explaining the Solidarity Plan.

The section *from the Superior General* contains the letters that were sent to the confreres: on the occasion of the closing of the Jubilee Year; the request for each province to update its information about the branches of the Vincentian Family that are ministering in each country and contact information for each branch; the Lenten circular with a reflection on Mary as one who points out the path to Jesus; and the circular about the March *Tempo Forte* Meeting.

In the third section, we present some biographical information about our confrere-bishop from Brazil, José Carlos Melo, and his missionary, priestly, and episcopal ministry, which provides us with the witness of one who loved the Church.

In the fourth section, we continue the reflection that was initiated in the previous issue: *Vincentian Family Symposium for the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism*. We present four reflections from distinct members of the Vincentian Family. Father Dennis Holtschneider, CM, begins with the question: *From Here to Where?* His reflection focuses on the urgency to continue to provide for the needs of those who are poor. The second reflection was presented by Tjeu van Knippenberg, CM, and Mr. Peter Reijers and is entitled: *Common House?* From the Vincent de Paul Center in The Netherlands, they note that the arrival of refugees in many different countries throughout the world solicits various responses. A third reflection is that of a Daughter of Charity, Sister Françoise Petit, who responded to the question: *Toward What Future?* She begins her reflection with biblical and Vincentian texts in order to provide us with some possibilities for the future as we accompany the poor on their journey. Sister highlights a fundamental conviction: the poor are at the center of our lives; a fundamental call: to overcome obstacles; a fundamental gospel attitude: reciprocal welcoming. This section concludes with the reflections of Father Matteo Tagliaferri, CM, and his response to the question, *From Here to Where? Only the person who understands himself as being poor can receive the other in his poverty. It is difficult to accept the poor without the same heart ... It is good fortune to feel loved, but it is a misfortune not to have learned to love!*

We include in this issue a review of the book entitled, *Federico Ozanam, professor en la Sorbona: su vida y obra* (originally entitled, *Frederic Ozanam, Professor At the Sorbonne, His Life And Works*, written by Kathleen O'Meara in 1876).

Alvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM
Director of *Vincentiana*

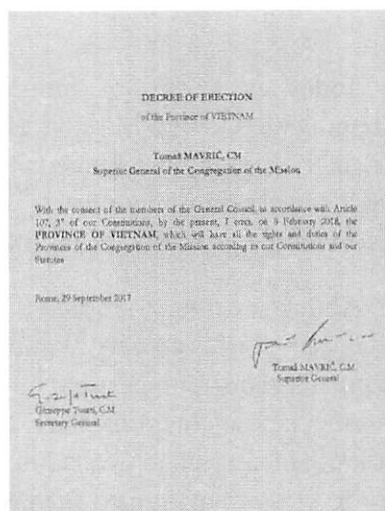
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From the General Curia

Decree of Erection of the Province of Vietnam

With the consent of the members of the General Council, in accordance with Article 107, 3° of our Constitutions, by the present,

I erect, on 8 February 2018, the PROVINCE OF VIETNAM, which will have all the rights and duties of the Provinces of the Congregation of the Mission according to our Constitutions and our Statutes



Rome, 29 September 2017

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Giuseppe Turati, CM
Secretary General

Homily Erection of the Province of Vietnam

**Tomaž Mavrič, CM
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.

MINISTRIES

Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is counted only once, considered under his principal ministry, as of 31 December 2017

MINISTRIES	BISHOPS	PRIESTS	DEACONS	BROTHERS	STUDENTS
01. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful	2	125	4	4	
02. Parishes	3	939	15	16	2
03. Pilgrimage sanctuaries		67		5	
04. Seminaries and clerical formation		225	29	6	14
05. Missions Ad Gentes	2	221	2	2	
06. Missions for long term	1	31	1	1	
07. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)		87			
08. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)		164	2	9	
09. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)		31		2	
10. Special studies		78		2	3
11. Chaplains (military, immigrants, hospital, associations)		113		1	
12. Chaplains (Vincentian Lay Groups)		73		2	
13. Direct Service of the Poor		37	2	9	
14. Manual work				28	
15. Administration	5	124		12	
16. Retired, ill, convalescing	10	309	1	25	
17. Other	8	99	2	3	11
18. Absence from the Congregation		165	5	2	2
TOTAL	31	2888	63	129	32

2017 Annual Statistics of the Congregation of the Mission

From the General Curia

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS								ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS									
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with vows	TOTAL MEMBERS	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*		
General Curia	12	0	29	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AFRICA	59	5	378	14	0	19	1	417	142	1	0	0	21	0	0	0	166	158
Cameroon	5		38			4		42	12								12	35
Congo	13		51	3		2		56	9				1				10	15
Ethiopia	6	3	49			3		55	2								2	
Madagascar	10	1	79	3		8		91	42	2			9				53	25
Mozambique	7	1	19	1		2		23	3				2				5	24
Nigeria	11		99	7			1	107	68				10				78	16
St. Justin de Jacobis - Eritrea	7		43					43	6								6	43
AMERICA	183	10	913	28	1	51	13	1016	73	0	0	0	30	1	0	0	103	210
Argentina	8	1	34	1				36	6								6	8
Brazil - Curitiba	7	1	72	1		2		76	2				1				3	16
Brazil - Fortaleza	5	1	39	1				41	3								3	9
Brazil - Rio de Janeiro	7		48	1		7	3	59	2				2				4	
Central America	11	2	43	2		2	1	50	5				3				8	14
Chile	7		23	1		2	1	27	2								2	2
Colombia	32		167	6		12	2	187	24				4				28	54
Costa Rica	3		11			1		12	2				3				5	6
Cuba	4		5				1	6	2								2	6
Ecuador	7		30	1			1	32	1				5				6	8
Mexico	18		84	2		2	1	89					5				5	31
Peru	12	1	49	1		1		52	6				3				9	3

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS								ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS									
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with vows	TOTAL	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*		
Puerto Rico	15	1	59	5		1	1	67	8							8	23	
USA - Eastern	20	2	104			5		111	6				3			9	13	
USA - New England	6		18			1		19								0		
USA - Western	21	1	127	6	1	15	2	152	4				1			5	17	
ASIA	78	7	587	12	0	12	13	631	174	0	0	0	49	0	0	0	223	221
China	3		32					32					2			2	2	
Indonesia	12		99			1	7	107	23				10			33	9	
North India	15	3	98			2		103	58				8			66	65	
South India	16	1	146	3		2		152	29				6			35	52	
Orient	7	1	30			2	4	37	3							3	1	
Philippines	14	2	110			3		115	5				2			7	11	
Vietnam	11		72	9		2	2	85	56				21			77	81	
EUROPE	166	9	945	5	2	44	5	1010	39	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	51	21
Austria - Germany	7		29			2		31	1							1		
France	19		96			10	1	107	1							1	3	
Hungary	3		8					8								0		
Ireland	8		43					43	1							1	1	
Italy	28	3	134		2	2	1	142	1							1		
Poland	27	1	251	2		2	1	257	20				11			31		
Portugal	9	1	33					34	1							1	3	
Slovakia	7		32	2		4		38	3							3		
Slovenia	8	2	35			2		39	1							1		

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS								ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS									
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with vows	TOTAL	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*		
Spain - St. Vincent de Paul	28		168	1		20		190	5				1				6	7
Spain - Zaragoza	15		89			2	2	93	4								4	7
SS. Cyril and Methodius	7	1	27					28	1								1	
OCEANIA	6	0	36	1	0	3	0	40	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	6
Australia	6		36	1		3		40	4				1				5	6
TOTAL	504	31	2888	60	3	129	32	3143	432	2	0	0	113	1	0	0	548	616

CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; P*/PD* = Priests/Permanent Deacons coming from a diocese or another Institute

Solidarity Project Mandated by GA 2016

Rome, 28 March 2018

Dear Father Visitor,

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

For some time now the General Council has been at work drafting a project to implement the approved postulatum from the General Assembly of 2016 to “make solidarity among the provinces effective.” This letter introduces to you and your council the document that is the second draft of this project, which you will receive in a separate email.

You will note that there are two parts to this document. The first part, “*The General Objective*,” presents the project itself. The second part, starting on page 2, “*ADDENDUM – more detailed plans*,” presents plans that are more detailed for certain sections of page 1.

We ask that you and your council critique this plan. Please send your comments to segreteria@cmcuria.org by 1 November 2018. The General Council will reformulate the plan in light of the suggestions and will send it back to you after the *Tempo Forte* in March of 2019.

At the Visitors' Meeting of 2019, the Visitors' Conferences will have an opportunity to give their final input. The General Council will then produce a final version of the plan for publication by the end of 2019, with implementation to begin in 2020.

I give you thanks in advance for your work on this project mandated by the 2016 General Assembly. May the Holy Spirit guide your discussions on this matter and may your ideas and comments truly illumine the path forward to deepening solidarity among us!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Solidarity Plan

The General Objective

To create a circular flow of communication in order to deepen our relationship as brothers in service of a progressive growth in solidarity across provincial boundaries.

- I. The Treasurer General will:
 - A. Centralize in the Curia knowledge of the financial collaboration among provinces.
 - B. Appropriately report on the mission fund and patrimony funds held by the Curia.
 - C. Discover and work to change any lack of fiscal transparency.

- II. The Curia will:
 - A. Help provinces and vice-provinces plan to become economically self-sustaining.
 - B. Create a plan to organize collaboration among the provinces in regard to preaching appeals for funds.
 - C. Establish an international office whose purpose is to create in the CM a culture of inviting other people to participate financially with us in our vision and mission.
 - D. Increase the size of the Mission Fund.
 - E. Work to increase the size and number of Patrimony Funds, where needed.

III. The Provinces and Vice-Provinces on the Mission Distribution List will:

- A. Commit themselves, where necessary, to install a culture of financial transparency, especially by cooperating with the plan of the Treasurer General.
- B. Cooperate fully with the planning process initiated by the Curia for moving toward economical self-sustainability.

IV. The resourced and self-sustaining provinces will:

- A. Plan to keep their patrimony “productive in a way that is most profitable for the promotion of the poor”¹ in the context of our international Congregation.

V. The VSO, from 2019 to 2022, will train confreres from developing regions (in three different language groups) to help approximately 20 provinces, vice-provinces, regions and missions to more effectively plan, fund, implement, manage, and sustain their projects.

In the addendum you will find more detailed planning

ADDENDUM – more detailed plans

I. Discover and work to change any lack of fiscal transparency.

A. ASSUMPTIONS

- 1. Fiscal management is a science
- 2. The Curia will play a key role in implementation at the level of the Treasurer General’s Office

¹ INTERPRETATION of the FUNDAMENTAL STATUTE on POVERTY [1980], (B) EXPLANATION OF THE STATUTE, 4. g).

3. Treasurers will receive two years of education and afterwards will remain in office for eight years if all evaluations are positive.
4. Visitors or Vice Visitors will also need training.

B. PHASE I *1-2 years of preparation*

1. The Treasurer General chairs a team of seven people including both confreres and lay professionals. This team:
 - a. Identifies the target provinces or vice provinces who need help in this area.
 - b. Develops a model chart of accounts
 - c. Identifies competent external auditors in the appropriate regions.
 - d. Identifies education centers and programs for the education of treasurers and Visitors.
 - e. Develops the instrument and process that the Treasurer General will use to monitor this effort.

C. Phase II *Initial Year of Implementation*

1. Begin on the first day of the new fiscal year of the province.
2. Begin using the new chart of accounts.
3. Begin keeping paper records for accounts payable. The paper records must be of such a quality that they can be audited.
4. Produce monthly financial reports for review.
5. Have at least two financial visitations organized by the Treasurer General to review progress.

6. Help them overcome any inadequacies in performance.
7. Have an end-of-the-year review by an external audit firm.

D. Phase III *Ongoing Review*

1. After the first year, there will be quarterly reports reviewed by the Treasurer General.
2. After the first year, the Treasurer General will organize an annual financial visitation for at least the next four years.
3. The annual review organized by the Treasurer General also will follow a change in Visitor or Treasurer.
4. An external audit firm will perform annual reviews which the Assistant General and Treasurer General will evaluate.

Year	design	training per province per year	Set up per province	Initial year 2 visits per province	review per province per year	number of provinces	total
1	30000	6000				10	90000
2		6000	3000			10	90000
3				4000		10	40000
<i>The following years will occur after the end of mandate of the current General Council.</i>							
4					2000	10	20000
5					2000	10	20000
6					2000	10	20000
7					2000	10	20000

COST:

- II. A. Help provinces and vice-provinces plan to become economically self-sufficient.
 - A. The General Council, following the model for developing our approach to systemic change, assembles a team to gather principles from the stories of how our own CM resourced provinces became sustainable.

- B. The General Council assembles a committee of confreres and laity to design the planning process that uses the guiding principles as a base to produce a plan.
- C. The committee will accompany three planning sessions a year until the 2022 General Assembly.
- D. The General Assembly of 2022 will evaluate this process.

COST:

year	design	3 sessions per year	evaluation	Total
1	30000	30000		60000
2		30000		30000
3		30000		30000

II. B. Create a plan to organize collaboration among the provinces in regards to preaching appeals for funds.

- A. The General Curia will assemble a team from those provinces who have experience in preaching appeals in order to design a draft of a plan for implementing this collaboration.
- B. The General Curia will send the draft of the plan to each province and vice-province for comments and suggestions.
- C. The team will revise the plan in light of the comments and suggestions.
- D. The General Curia will send the plan to the provinces and vice-provinces for implementation.
- E. The General Curia will evaluate each year the experience had in 2020 and 2021 with the participating provinces.

Solidarity Plan

- F. Thereafter the General Assembly will be the forum of evaluation.

COST – 30,000

II. C. Establish an International Office whose purpose is to create in the CM a culture of inviting other people to participate financially with us in our vision and mission.

- A. **This office will work in close collaboration with the VSO.**
- B. **A qualified confrere has been identified for this position, is willing to serve and has the approval of his Visitor to do so.**
- C. **The program will be developed in dialogue with our resourced provinces.**

Year	Start up	Staff salary	Staff benefits	Admin	Total
1	25000	44220	11650	42000	122,870
2		69010	12349	42000	123,359
3		71,080	13,090	42000	126,170
4		73,213	13,875	42000	129,088

COST:

III. Plan to keep their patrimony “productive in a way that is most profitable for the promotion of the poor” in the context of our international Congregation.

A. Possible scenarios for donations:

1. The investment portfolio is reviewed for a possible donation of a portion of the portfolio.
 - a. The donation creates or enhances (a) fund(s) governed by a spending rule and directed to purposes that are jointly agreed upon.
 - b. Income from the donation would fulfill already pledged commitments to VSO.
2. Or the investment portfolio is reviewed for flexibility in disbursement during positive years.
 - a. One possible scenario is to designate the increase in value of a certain amount of the portfolio as the donation.
 - b. Another possibility for a donation is 3% to 5% of the difference, in a given fiscal year, between 1. the increase in the value of the holdings in the portfolio, minus new deposits, and 2. the disbursements from the portfolio.
 - c. Either donation would subtract already present commitments, such as to VSO.
3. In addition to a donation from the investment portfolio, another possibility for a donation is 5% of any inheritance that the province receives, given that the restrictions placed on the inheritance allow this gift to happen.
4. The Superior General with the General Council will allocate donations from 2. and 3. above to the Mission Distribution Fund, Patrimony Funds for provinces, the Patrimony Fund for use at the discretion of the Superior General with the General Council, the budgets for the plans in this Addendum, and for VSO.

Solidarity Plan

- B. Underused buildings are reviewed in light of finding a new purpose for the building that would generate income or, at least, would pay for the maintenance of the building.
- C. The Treasurer General will, from time to time, present investment possibilities that benefit developing provinces.
- D. The pool of professional people who have a relationship to the Province is reviewed continually for possible collaboration on the international level.
 - 1. A recent example of the possibility is the workshop done in Kenya sponsored by the Vincentian Centre for Church and Society of St. John's University in New York and co-sponsored by DePaul Centre for Leadership and Management of DePaul University in Chicago.
 - 2. Other examples are the laypersons who participate in the International Finance Commission; or the laypersons who participate in the investment commission of the Western Province, which helps to guide the investments held by the General Curia.

IV. The VSO

- A. The VSO, in order to help provinces, vice-provinces, regions and missions to more effectively plan, fund, implement, manage and sustain their projects, will hold four "train the trainer" programs (tentatively 1 in English, 1 in French, and 2 in Spanish), from 2019 through 2022, for confreres from CM provinces, vice-provinces, and missions in developing regions. A tentative program for the workshops, still under development, includes these items:
 - 1. Each program, approximately one month in duration, will be held at the VSO in Philadelphia.

2. Each program will serve approximately five confreres, so that from 2019 through 2022, the VSO will train representatives from 20 different provinces, vice-provinces, and/or missions.
3. Each program will include the following elements:
 - a. Participants will attend seminars conducted by VSO staff and guest presenters. The seminars will address topics such as project planning, research for grant application, writing the grant application and reporting on the grant, general fundraising strategies, and development of income-generating projects and ministries.
 - b. Under guidance from VSO staff, program participants will collaborate on writing grant proposals for actual projects and drafting strategies for prioritizing implementation of projects in their own province, vice-province, or mission and on supporting their pastoral plans and plans for sustainability. The program participants will be expected to train their local confreres and to serve as project coordinators with the VSO on behalf of their province, vice-province, or mission.
 - c. The VSO will remain in contact with program participants for several years and will offer them ongoing support and ongoing guidance.

COST: Already included in VSO budget

2 From the Superior General

Letter for the Closing of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism

Rome, 25 January 2018

“ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE FIFTH CENTURY
OF THE VINCENTIAN CHARISM”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Ephesians 1:3).

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear sisters and brothers in Saint Vincent,

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

As we officially end, on this 25 January 2018, the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, with exuberant hearts we can repeat Saint Paul’s words written at the beginning of his letter to the Ephesians. Heaven has given us blessings on many different levels: on the personal level, on the level of each branch, and on the level of the Vincentian Family as a whole. May this experience remain for us a source to keep deepening, developing, and extending the Vincentian Charism to produce ever more new fruits.

During the Jubilee year, the Vincentian Family organized so many wonderful initiatives, projects, and celebrations on the local, national, and international levels. On the international level of the whole Vincentian Family, we organized:

- a) The International Vincentian Family Symposium in Rome from 12-15 October 2017.

The day after the closing of the Symposium, the synthesis committee gathered to review the input of the participants from the six language groups. The reflections, suggestions, ideas, and plans will be shared soon with the worldwide Vincentian Family with the goal to keep building, sharing, watering, and growing the seeds sown during the Symposium.

- b) The Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness (Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance).

This project of the worldwide Vincentian Family, officially launched during the Symposium in Rome on 14 October 2017, will help us deepen our collaboration in order to respond more effectively to persons without a place to live.

- c) The Vincentian Film Festival, called “Finding Vince 400,” also officially launched during the Symposium in Rome on 14 October 2017, will be held from 18-21 October 2018 in Castel Gandolfo.

The preparatory committee soon will provide more details through the different media: webpages, social media, YouTube, printed media, news agencies, and other media. The Film Festival hopes to be an instrument to help “Globalize Charity.” Participation in the Festival is open to anyone, belonging or not to the Vincentian Family, from any country. The Festival will have three competitions: 1) for persons up

to 18 years of age who will participate by submitting poems, drawings, writings; 2) for those who will submit screenplays for possible future films; 3) for those who will submit short films. The unifying theme is the life and charism of Saint Vincent de Paul.

- d) The Pilgrimage of the relic of the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The pilgrimage of other relics will continue throughout Europe and, God willing, later on to other continents.

As we now begin the fifth century of the Vincentian Charism, I would like to suggest as first steps on this path the following two initiatives:

- a. To renew and deepen our relationship with the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family around the world as models of the Vincentian charism and spirituality by taking the following steps:
1. Reviving the veneration and invocation of the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God by starting from their place of origin, where they were born, lived, served, died, where they are buried or their relics are kept, through different initiatives to deepen our relationship with them. Renewing that closeness with them on a local level will encourage and help to spread veneration and prayer through their intercession with renewed strength to other parts of the world.
 2. Organizing meetings to make them known to those who do not know them, or do not know them well; organizing pilgrimages; developing prayer services for children, youth, and adults; printing new booklets; preparing PowerPoint presentations; using different media.

3. Praying incessantly to ask Jesus for the grace that all the Blessed and Servants of God or possible new candidates for sainthood be canonized by the Church. Engaging on the level of the specific branch of the Vincentian Family to which she or he belonged, as well as on the level of the whole Vincentian Family, to put all our efforts into the process of getting official recognition on the part of the Church.

It is about linking our lives, efforts, service, projects, initiatives, plans, and common dreams as closely as possible to those who have gone before us and are now in heaven interceding for us. They will respond if we ask for their intercession before God. They are our role models for how to live the Vincentian charism and Vincentian spirituality. It may be easier to present to the people those Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of recent history. Nonetheless, all of them speak or can speak to children, youth, adults, all people of today, at this time in history as role models of holiness. They are also one of the resources for new vocations to consecrated life or active lay involvement in the different branches of the Vincentian Family, in the mission of Jesus, in the mission of the Church.

- b. To renew and deepen the “Culture of Vocations.”

When we look for reasons for the decline in vocations to the consecrated life, in active participation of youth and adults in the life of the Church, and in faith in some parts of the world, we often hear the following reasons: consumerism, materialism, individualism, egoism, systematic laicization of society, etc. We can call this an “Anti-Culture of Vocations.”

I would like to invite us to unite all our efforts at showing the children, youth, and adults of today, who are caught in this “Anti-Culture of Vocations,” the beauty, attractiveness, and life-giving meaning of responding with a resounding “Yes” to Jesus’s call! I call us to demonstrate to the children, youth, and adults that it is normal to respond affirmatively, with a loud “Yes,” to Jesus’s invitation and not abnormal. We must strive together for a renewed Culture of Vocations.

Our call in life goes back to the source of our existence, for God had us in mind even before the foundation of the world, before our conception.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you” (Jeremiah 1:5).

“He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

“I will make you a light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6).

The Culture of Vocations means an environment in which all people can discover and rediscover their reason for being on this earth, the meaning of life, the mission they are called to fulfill, the call they are invited to answer. The Culture of Vocations puts Jesus in first place, no matter if it is as a layperson or a consecrated person.

We carry in our hearts a deep desire to pass on to future generations the charism and spirituality we have been given. Prayers for new vocations are brought incessantly before God, along with so many initiatives and efforts. The beginning of the fifth century of the Vincentian Charism gives us another opportunity to make renewed efforts toward

a Culture of Vocations. This is also very much in tune with the theme of this year's Synod of Bishops, which will take place in October in Rome, "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment."

Putting all in the hands of Providence, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family, we repeat the encouraging word to each other, the word Saint Vincent de Paul used when he was asked what else could he do in life, and he responded "more."

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Lenten Letter 2018

Rome, 9 February 2018

Mary, a preeminent model who shows us the road to Jesus

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

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

With the Advent letter in 2016, we began reflecting on the pillars of our Founder's spirituality: the Incarnation, the Holy Trinity, and the Eucharist. In this Lenten letter, we will reflect on the fourth pillar, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In chapter IV, number 49 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, we read:

1. *"We should also show special devotion to Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church. According to the words of St. Vincent, she, more than all other believers, penetrated the meaning and lived out the teaching of the gospel."*
2. *"We should express our love for the Immaculate Virgin Mary in many different ways, celebrating her feasts with devotion and praying to her frequently, especially through the rosary. We should make widely known the special message expressed through her maternal care by the Miraculous Medal."*

In chapter X, number 4 of the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, Saint Vincent de Paul writes:

“Because this Bull also expressly recommends it, and for other reasons as well, we should likewise have special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Confreres, therefore, both individually and collectively, should, with God’s help, try to carry this out perfectly:

- 1. by specially honoring every day this preeminent Mother of Christ, who is also our Mother;*
- 2. by putting into practice, as far as possible, the same virtues as she did, particularly humility and chastity;*
- 3. by enthusiastically encouraging others, whenever opportunity and means permit, to show her the greatest reverence and always to serve her loyally.”*

As we start Lent, 40 days with Jesus in the desert, I would like to invite all of us to fill our hearts with the warmth, trust, availability, and all the love a son or daughter can have toward his or her mother. May we also make our own, renew, or deepen a lifelong commitment to her by following three steps, which will help us be closer to Mary, our Mother in Heaven, who is a preeminent model, showing us the best and shortest road to bring us to Jesus, our life’s goal and our all!

A) Praying the rosary daily

Together with Mary, we reflect on the different stages of Jesus’s life. Mary walks with us, Mary accompanies us, Mary encourages us, Mary inspires us! Let us always carry a rosary with us wherever we go. Let us bring it with us in our pocket or purse, as a ring or a bracelet to be available at different times of the day. We can pray it in the chapel; walking on the street; waiting for the bus, metro, or train; driving a car; going for a walk; waiting in long lines. Let us keep the rosary always with us.

Saint Vincent assures us of his deep belief in Mary's protection:

God always kept alive in me the conviction that I would be freed because of my unceasing prayers to Him and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, through whose sole intercession I firmly believe I was delivered.¹

Everyone is well in the four places where missions are being given and here also, so it seems that Our Lord will take pity on this Little Company through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. With that end in view, we have sent M. Boudet to pay a visit to her at Chartres.²

B) Making Mary's virtues of humility and chastity ever more our own

Saint Vincent de Paul gives Mary as the example of all virtues, but he highlights two of them in particular: humility and chastity.

Humility:

Among all those created in heaven and on earth, there is no one better known, more venerated, more often set before us as a role model. There is no other person in whom God, through Jesus, placed more trust. Mary does not think, even for a single moment, that this is to her merit, but considers all she is and all she has as grace, as gift, as a sign of mercy coming from Jesus. The mother puts herself below her son and not above him. Mary gave birth to Jesus, nurtured

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 I, p. 6; Letter 1 to Monsieur de Comet in Dax. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD I, 6.

² CCD I, 350; Letter 249, To Robert de Sergis in Amiens, November 1636.

Him from the manger, changed His diapers, breastfed Him, and raised Him to adulthood. Mary, by all she did and does today, points us always toward Jesus.

... run to the Blessed Virgin, asking her to obtain for you from her Son the grace to share in her humility, which caused her to be called the servant of the Lord when she was chosen to be His mother. What made God consider the Blessed Virgin? She tells us herself, 'It's my humility.' I don't need to tell you that, if our Sisters have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, who loved this virtue so much, she'll obtain from God the grace for them to practice it.³

Chastity:

Jesus gives us the key for how to walk in purity of thought, word, and action. Jesus tells us to pay attention: "It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one" (Matthew 15:11). Everything has its beginning in our heart and our mind.

Let us ask Jesus to be there from the beginning of our thoughts, feelings, and ideas, to help us filter them through His thoughts, His attitudes, and His actions. What flows from our thoughts will appear then in words and actions that will reflect Jesus's behavior, Jesus's feelings, and Jesus's thoughts. Purity will be present and lived in our lives.

Have a particular devotion to the way the Blessed Virgin guided Our Lord, and all will go well.⁴

³ CCD X, 431; Conference 98, Humility, Charity, Obedience, and Patience (Common Rules, Article 42), 14 July 1658.

⁴ CCD II, 140; Letter 488, To Jacques Chiroye in Luçon, 6 October 1640.

However, thoughts, feelings, and ideas that are not filtered through Jesus will lead us in the opposite direction. We become vulnerable to the influence of the “evil one,” who has a clear goal: to destroy in us all that comes from God, to destroy our relationship with Jesus. Satan wants to put himself in the place of Jesus, to influence the thoughts from which our words and actions flow so that we, by opposing chastity and purity, deform our beautiful self, our beautiful heart created in the image of God.

... the secret of your heart, which I truly wish may belong entirely to Our Lord. I beg the Blessed Virgin to take it from you so as to carry it off to heaven to place it in her own and in that of her dear Son.⁵

C) Spreading the message of and devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal with renewed zeal

After the cross, the Miraculous Medal is the most widespread Christian symbol around the world. However, many still have not had the opportunity to hear about it, to learn Mary’s message, to receive and wear the Miraculous Medal. They do not receive graces from Jesus by asking for them as Mary instructed Saint Catherine Labouré, a Daughter of Charity, during the apparitions of 1830 in their Motherhouse chapel on the Rue du Bac in Paris.

Come to the foot of this altar. Here, graces will be spread over all who ask for them with confidence and fervor.

These rays are a symbol of the graces that I pour out on those who ask them of me.

⁵ CCD I, 62; Letter 36, To Saint Louise, [Around 1629].

This Lent, I would like to propose reflection, prayer, and planning in all the places where we serve: parishes, hospitals, dispensaries, schools, universities, missions, parish missions, etc. Then, where the Miraculous Medal is not known, where people have yet to receive it, put into practice the following:

- a) give Miraculous Medals to the people;
- b) share with the people, together with the medals, a small brochure with a short explanation of the history and message of the Miraculous Medal;
- c) organize a local group of the Miraculous Medal Association, which would become part of the International Miraculous Medal Association, one of the branches of the Vincentian Family present in many countries of the world.

Encourage the foundation of a new group of the Miraculous Medal Association in your local parish with the permission of the parish priest; in hospitals, dispensaries, schools, and universities with staff, teachers, professors, students; during parish missions where different branches of the Vincentian Family take part in organizing and coordinating them; missions, etc. Invite people to register to become members of the group.

In many countries where the Miraculous Medal Association is present, a National Council, uniting all the different local groups of the Association present in that country, coordinates it. The National Miraculous Medal Associations are linked to the International Miraculous Medal Association, coordinated by the Sub-Director, Father Carl Pieber, CM. By becoming part of the Miraculous Medal Association, the members support each other through prayer, engage in spreading the Miraculous Medal, and perform works of charity.

To make this a reality, the International Secretariat of the Miraculous Medal Association will be very happy to help those who may need assistance, information, or suggestions on starting a local group. If the country where you wish to establish a new group of the Miraculous Medal Association already has other groups or a national structure of the Association, the International Secretariat will connect you with them. If the country does not have a national structure or any local groups, the International Secretariat will help with all the information needed to start a new group.

The International Miraculous Medal Association has a website in six languages, where you can find much information, including how to start a new group. The website address is www.amminter.org. If you need further assistance of any kind, please write to the following email address: mmainfo@famvin.org

As we reflect on organizing new groups of the Miraculous Medal Association in any given country of the world, let us keep in mind that it is Mary's deep desire to spread the Miraculous Medal to the farthest corners of the world. Our Lady assures us that, if we ask for graces from Jesus, we will receive them! Let us engage in this wonderful adventure by being Mary's voice expressing Jesus's unconditional love for every single person, in word and action.

Have a medal made according to this model. For those who wear it with confidence, there will be abundant graces.

May the 40 days with Jesus in the desert bring abundant fruit. May the 40 days with Jesus in the desert renew and deepen our relationship with Mary, our Mother in Heaven, and bring us even closer to her by:

- a) praying the rosary daily,
- b) making Mary's virtues of humility and chastity ever more our own,
- c) spreading the message of and devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal with renewed zeal.

May the 40 days with Jesus in the desert renew our hearts, making us open to daily "resurrections," passing from death to life in preparation for our ultimate Resurrection!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Letter Asking for the List of Branches of the Vincentian Family

Rome, 12 February 2018

To all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

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

You recently received a letter from me requesting your assistance in the development of Vincentian Family National Councils or in the support of existing Councils. With this letter, I am asking you to help us complete our current files regarding the make-up of the Vincentian Family in your region.

Please send to Father Joseph Agostino, CM, (vfo@famvin.org) and copy to me the list of branches of the Vincentian Family in all the countries that fall under your jurisdiction. Kindly include in this list:

- the names of the branches,
- the name of the national leader of the branch, and
- the contact information (email address, street address, telephone number, mobile phone number, website of the national branch, *Facebook* listing, etc.) for the branch leader.

I recognize that you will have to speak with the branch leaders, requesting their permission to send us their contact information. However, this information will go a long way in helping us to solidify our data on the reality of the Vincentian Family around the world.

Please send this information to Father Agostino and me by 23 March 2018. Thank you for your support of these efforts and your continued collaboration.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Circular Letter - Tempo Forte

(26 February - 2 March 2018)

Rome, 23 March 2018

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission:

It is good to be firm in attaining your goals, but use appropriate, attractive and agreeable means (CCD:IV:80)

My dear confreres, may the Risen Lord fill us with his light and his strength so that we might fulfill the mission that has been entrusted to us!

This *Tempo Forte* took place during the Lenten season and by the time this report is given to you we will most probably be in the midst of the Easter season. One season follows another, and then another. Thus, it is also important to be mindful of the fact that each individual stage of our life prepares us to live the following stage. Each of those stages, however, is characterized by our vocation because Mission and Charity are never indifferent and/or inconsequential realities.

We offer here a summary of our deliberations during the recent *Tempo Forte*.

Decisions of the General Council with regard to the Congregation

[1] Presentation of strategies: in light of the only Postulatum that was approved by the 2016 General Assembly, a postulatum dealing with effective solidarity among the Provinces of the Congregation, Father Miles Heinen presented the General Council with a financial solidarity plan. Once the General Council approves this plan, Father Heinen will present this plan to the Conferences of Visitors. Given the fact, however, that the members of CLAPVI will not meet until the end of this year, Father Heinen will present this plan to each Visitor or to small groups of Visitors from Latin America.

The members of each Provincial Council are asked to study this plan and comment on it so that, at the end of 2018 or at the *Tempo Forte* meeting of March 2019, the General Council can evaluate all these ideas. We then will engage all the Visitors engage all the Visitors in a dialogue on this matter during the 2019 Meeting of Visitors that will take place in the Philippines.

[2] Evaluation of the New Visitors' Meeting (January 2018): according to the evaluation of the 22 Visitors, the meeting was a very positive experience. There was good content and methodology, a simple fraternal environment, intense but respectful dialogue between the participants. Some elements need further consideration at the next such meeting: more attention to the liturgy, better balance between small group work and plenary sessions, a free day or at least a free afternoon for touring and/or shopping.

[3] *Practical Guide for the Visitor and the Local Superior:* a third edition of *A Practical Guide for the Visitor* will be prepared (there was an edition in 1998 and in 2005). Since there are only a few copies of the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* (first edition was done in 2003), it was decided to revise the current edition

before printing any further copies. This work has been given to a commission composed of Manuel Ginete (Philippines), Dominique Iyolo (Congo), Corpus Delgado (Saragossa), Fernando Macías (Chile). The Vicar General, Javier Álvarez, will coordinate it.

[4] Vocation Promotion of the Brothers in the Congregation: Brother Martial Tatchim (Vice-Province of the Congo and presently archivist and librarian at the General Curia) presented a document about the vocation of the Brother in the Congregation. At the same time, he has invited the members of the Congregation to promote this form of being a missionary in the Congregation. Four other Brothers helped prepare this document.

The members of the General Council reacted positively to this document which highlighted certain elements. Brother Martial has been requested to rewrite the document but to do so from the perspective of developing a culture of vocations. The General Council has also established a commission to continue this reflection and to present some concrete proposals. The commission is composed of Brother Adriano Ferreira Silva (Rio de Janeiro), Brother Francisco Berbegal Vázquez (San Vicente de Paúl - Spain), Brother Martial Tatchim (Vice-Province of Cameroon), Father Guénolé Feugang (Vice-Province of Cameroon), and Miles Heinen (Assistant General).

[5] Association of Vincentian Permanent Deacons: a commission is developing International Statutes with regard to the future of the Association of Vincentian Permanent Deacons. This commission is composed of Roger Dubois (permanent deacon in Montreal), Father Paul Golden (Western Province, USA) and Father Christian Mauvais (France). A draft of this document was presented to General Council, suggestions were offered and it is hoped that this Association will be established formally very soon.

[6] Province of Cuba: the members of the General Council are in communication with the members of this province in order to reflect on the future of the Congregation in that part of the world. The projects that Father Jesús María Lusarreta (deceased) initiated continue to operate thanks to his niece, Yolanda, and the financial support of many people living in Spain and a group of Cubans who are managing these projects. We are going to attempt to set up a Father Lusarreta Foundation that will encompass three projects: Casa de los Abuelos (Grandparents' House), Taller Down (Down Workshop), and La Sopa de San Vicente (Saint Vincent's Soup). Father Leonidas Giraldo, a confrere from Colombia who is ministering in Cuba will coordinate the above-mentioned projects and will do so from the Miraculous Medal Parish in Havana.

At the request of the Archbishop of Santiago, Bishop Dionisio García Ibáñez, the community has given back to the diocese the parish (church, rectory, etc.) of San Francisco. The Episcopal Conference in Cuba is planning to establish a minor seminary, a formation center, and a worship center on that property and, in reality, the property and all the buildings do belong to the Archdiocese and not to the Congregation.

[7] Piacenza (Italy) – Collegio Alberoni: the Collegio Alberoni is a major seminary that is administered by the Congregation (Province of Italy). At the present time, there are 31 seminarians studying there (20 diocesan seminarians and 11 seminarians for the Congregation). Their studies are taken in this seminary that is equipped with everything that is necessary for the preparation of seminarians. Twenty-three professors teach philosophy and theology. A formation team is entrusted with the formation of the Vincentian seminarians. It is possible that the Alberoni Foundation will allow us to increase the number of seminarians for the Congregation, which, in turn, would allow us to make this formation center more international.

Offices dependent on the General Curia

- Father Jorge Rodríguez (Director of the Communication Office) presented a report on the work that was done during 2017 and a plan for the work for this current year. He also requested that a second person (a graphic designer) be hired part time. The Council approved that request.
- The archives-library: Brother Martial Tatchim, together with Ms. Giulia D'Angelo, has submitted a report to the Council, a report that outlines the present situation of our archives and library. They have made some recommendations with regard to the physical space and the organization of all this material in accord with more technical guidelines for libraries and archives. The General Council will take up this matter at its next meeting.
- It is most probable that Brother Martial will begin some studies next semester and will not be able to continue his work in the Archives and the Library. Now, however, that we have a professional working in these areas there will no need to request the services of a confrere. The Secretary General will be the supervisor.
- CIF: Father Emmanuel Typamm (Vice-Province of Cameroon) has been appointed as the Assistant Director of CIF. He will function there on a part-time basis; that is, he will be in Paris at the time of the different encounters. The rest of the time he will minister in the Vice-Province of Cameroon.
- SIEV: given the difficulty in finding Vincentian professors to participate in the Master's Program, SIEV has to rethink and organize this program in a different manner. The General Council encourages the members of SIEV to do this at their next meeting, which will be held in June.

- VSO: the plan to construct a building with 30 rooms at the Interprovincial Seminary in Enugu (Nigeria) is moving forward. The funds have been obtained, a commission has been appointed to supervise the work, a contractor has been chosen, and the work will begin very soon. It is hoped that this building will be ready for occupancy in September 2019.

Financial Matters

The Financial Commission of the Congregation met on the Saturday before the *Tempo Forte* meeting (24 February). This Commission is composed of Mr. Thomas Beck and Mr. Eric Cleland (laymen from the United States), Father Philippe Lamblin (treasurer for the French Province), Father Rafael Eloriaga (Philippines), Father George Shitsukane Busieka (Kenya) and Father Paul Parackal (Treasurer General). The members examined the financial status of the Congregation and on Monday, 26 February, had a dialogue with the members of the General Council. Mr. Eric Cleland will no longer serve on this commission and Sister Teresa George, DC, will become a member of the commission. We also considered adding another treasurer from one of the provinces of the Congregation.

The Missionary Funds for 2018 were distributed. These funds provide financial assistance to some of our provinces and international missions that are in need. The number of vocations was one of the elements that guided our distribution of these funds.

International Missions

At this time we do not have much to report and so we simply highlight the following:

- During the month of March, Father Tomaž Mavrič and Father Aarón Gutiérrez will visit the missions in El Alto, Cochabamba, and Beni (Bolivia) and Punta Arenas (Chile).

- At the end of March, Father Francisco Javier Álvarez will visit the mission in Tefe (Brazil). At that time Bishop Fernando Barbosa, CM (bishop of this area) will entrust the missionary territory of Caiambé to the Congregation.
- Angola – at the present time, Father Jason Soto is ministering alone and we are doing everything possible to find one or two other missionaries who are willing to serve in this mission.

The Vincentian Family

The Superior General reported to the council some of the matters that were discussed by the members of the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family during their meeting which was held in Philadelphia (USA) during the month of January. A more complete report will be given at the June *Tempo Forte* meeting.

The Latin American Council of the Vincentian Family (FAVILA) has organized a meeting that will take place in Cochabamba (Bolivia). All branches of the Family in Latin America have been invited to participate in this gathering. This meeting is held every three years and Father Tomaž Mavrič and Father Aarón Gutiérrez will represent the Curia at this gathering.

Father Giuseppe Turati (Coordinator of the Systemic Change Commission) reported on some recent workshops that were offered, as well as future plans for the Commission.

A group of approximately 1000 young men and women is expected to participate in World Youth Day (2019) which will be held in the Republic of Panama.

Conferences of Visitors

In the coming months, all the Conferences will be meeting: Asia (APVC) will be in Taiwan during the month of April, the members of COVIAM will meet in Kinshasa from 18-21 April, and the members of CLAPVI will meet during the month of October.

The members of CEVIM will meet in Beirut (9-14 April) and are preparing an encounter of European Seminarians that will be held in Villebon, France (24-31 August). This gathering is intended to provide the young men with an opportunity to reflect together on the Vincentian charism.

The members of NVC will meet during the month of April and will continue to reflect on ways in which the guidelines of the 2016 General Assembly can become more rooted in the confreres: the solidarity plan, the intercultural reality, protection of minors in our parishes and schools, etc.

Happy Easter to all!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

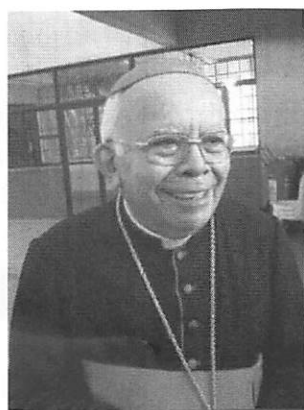
3

Special Interview

A Life of Daily Fidelity

Bishop José Carlos Melo, CM

Vinícius Augusto Teixeira, CM



On 30 May 2017, shortly before his 87th birthday, our confrere and Archbishop Emeritus of Maceió, in northeastern Brazil, José Carlos Melo, died. It was not a great surprise because we already had news of his delicate state of health.

José Carlos Melo was born on 4 June 1930 in the small city of Codo (Maranhao). He began his studies in the archdiocesan seminary of São Luis, directed at that time by the Vincentians. Much taken by the virtues of his formators, he asked to be received into the Congregation

of the Mission. He was then sent to the apostolic school in Fortaleza (Ceara) to finish his basic formation. Immediately afterwards he left for Petropolis (Rio de Janeiro) where he was admitted to the Internal Seminary. There he also did his studies in philosophy and theology, preparing himself for his priestly ordination, which took place on 31 July 1955.

During the early years of his ministry, Father José Carlos worked in the formation of the diocesan clergy filling various posts in the seminaries of São Luis, Brasilia, and Assis. He was at different times professor, spiritual director, and disciplinarian. For a while, he was involved in the formation of our own seminarians in the Apostolic School at Fortaleza where he himself had been formed. In 1969, after the post-conciliar turbulence which brought about so many ruptures in the structure of the province, he participated in a course for theological and pastoral updating in Rio de Janeiro, a far reaching ecclesial initiative, coordinated by his ordination classmate, Father Hugo Paiva (+2008). Gifted with great pastoral zeal, he was designated by the Visitor as pastor of Campina Verde (Minas Gerais). Some years later, he became pastor at the Saint Vincent de Paul Sanctuary in São Paulo. In both assignments, he distinguished himself for his pastoral charity and exemplary dedication to his ministry. He left behind him wonderful memories among the faithful. In 1981, the Superior General, Richard McCullen, named him Director of the Daughters of Charity in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) and he proved to be outstanding for his wisdom, prudence, and good sense in the accompaniment of the Sisters. After finishing his term as Director, he was allowed to respond to the petition of the new Archbishop of São Luis who wanted him to be a formator in his seminary. In 1990, he was named Director of the Daughters of Charity in Recife (Pernambuco). He thus filled two roles: formator in the seminary and Director of the Sisters.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II named him Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Salvador (Bahia), where he remained for nine straight years and was widely recognized for his tireless availability and care in the face of any kind of need in that local church. There he was much appreciated for his minute dedication to his work, always complemented with his joy, his simplicity, and his gentle discretion in his dealings with the people; qualities which won for him the esteem and respect of all, including the clergy. His pastoral concern was perfectly in line with the motto on his episcopal coat of arms, an expression of his identification with Christ, the Good Shepherd: "He came to serve." In 1999, with the transfer of the Metropolitan Archbishop of Salvador, Bishop José Carlos was designated as Archdiocesan Administrator and, shortly afterward, he received the unusual title of Auxiliary Archbishop. In the Jubilee year of 2000, the Holy Father named him Coadjutor Archbishop of Maceió. A short time later, he took possession as titular archbishop. He tenaciously dedicated himself to the restructuring of the formation of the seminary, provisionally taking upon himself the function of rector. He erected some parishes, especially in the peripheral areas. He managed to bring the Congregation to the archdiocese, confiding to the confreres a vast mission area that was later elevated to the level of parish. In 2006, when the Holy Father accepted his resignation, he became Archbishop Emeritus, preferring to remain in Maceió. There, fragile and reserved, the Lord took him as mature fruit for eternity, granting him the consolation and the vigor of a happy resurrection.

Very appropriately, *Vincentiana* wants to honor the figure of this Vincentian bishop, recalling his example of rectitude and generosity. As the one in charge of this task, I have asked a confrere, with whom I have the joy to live and work and who knew Bishop José Carlos well, to relate to us some of his recollections. Here we have them:

“I met Bishop José Carlos Melo when I arrived at Petropolis to begin the Internal Seminary. He was “Brother” José Carlos who was already in his second year at the seminary. At that time, I could not imagine that I would be giving this testimony about the life of our dear Archbishop Emeritus of Maceió. For me, knowing Brother José Carlos, then Father José Carlos, and Bishop José Carlos Melo was a grace from God. We enjoyed living in the same house in 1969, 70, and 71 in Campina Verde, where he was pastor. Together we initiated different pastoral works in the city, which remain up to the present. I met him again when, in 1981, the province sent me to substitute for him as pastor in the Shrine of Saint Vincent in São Paulo. We remained together a few months. Before coming to Belo Horizonte as Director of the Daughters of Charity, he remained in São Paulo until the feast of the fourth centenary of the birth of Saint Vincent (1960). How well Father José Carlos organized that celebration! There his qualities and virtues as a future bishop were manifest. I also could see his valuable work as pastor, carrying forward his initiatives especially with families and the branches of the Vincentian Family. I accompanied, although at a distance, his work and pastoral zeal as a Bishop in Salvador as well as in Maceió. It makes me very happy to be able to affirm today, when he is already in heaven, that it was truly a grace and a blessing from God to know and live with him and admire his human, Vincentian, and priestly virtues. Bishop José Carlos was a humble pastor, very valuable in the eyes of the Good Shepherd” (Father Luiz de Oliveira Campos, CM).

The second testimony I have asked for is from a bishop who was a priest in Maceió in Bishop José Carlos’ time.

“I formed part of the presbytery of Maceió during the short time that was left in the episcopal ministry of Bishop José Carlos in the archdiocese. The bishop was a simple man, with whom it was easy to get along. He had a good sense of humor and was very courteous. He

did not have an active social life; he was rather modest, completely dedicated to the activities of his episcopal ministry. As a Vincentian, he had a great love for the seminary, always very concerned about vocations. When he arrived at Maceió as coadjutor archbishop, he humbly took on the job of rector of the seminary with a great zeal for vocations. Sometimes I saw him weep because of the economic difficulties of the seminary. At times, to overcome them, he made use of the savings he had in reserve for his old age. As archbishop emeritus, he humbly withdrew, never interfering in the pastoral work of his successor for whom he always had great respect. Memories of his presence remain in the history of the church of Maceió: the priests he ordained and, above all, what he loved, what he welcomed, what, with deep faith, he tried to carry out in his daily life to make the church grow in the love of God and neighbor. May Christ the Lord grant to Bishop José Carlos the reward of good and faithful servants” (Henrique Soares da Costa, Bishop of Palmares (Pernambuco)).

To remember the person of Bishop José Carlos with gratitude and appreciation is the least those of us who received so much encouragement from him in the discernment of God’s call can do. Personally, I had the satisfaction of knowing him in Salvador in the beginning of the decade of the 90s, in his status as auxiliary bishop. Once a month he would come to our parish to celebrate the 7:30 a.m. Sunday Mass, at which I was an altar server. His goodness attracted us, as well as the attention he gave to everyone who approached him. It was no different when our pastor presented me, telling him of my liking for Saint Vincent de Paul. He promised me a book and he asked me to visit him in his residence next to the seminary. I did so with an adolescent’s enthusiasm for new things. From that first visit, he spoke to me many times of the veneration he had for our Founder and of his happiness in belonging to the Congregation of the Mission. In this way, the bishop became the privileged mediator

of what the Lord had in store for me. I know wherever he went as priest or bishop, his jovial personality and his spiritual fatherliness always encouraged countless others in the following of Christ.

In 2010, I, together with another confrere, received diaconate ordination at the hands of Bishop José Carlos; the celebration required great effort from him, most of all because of the limits imposed by old age. That occasion was also his last encounter with the confreres of the province and he greeted with fraternal affection his companions from his early years: Father Getulio Grossi, for the help he gave him in his studies in Petropolis; Father João Saraiva (+2011) for the example of a holy life; Father Luiz Campos for their good times together in Campina Verde and São Paulo; Brother Miguel Generoso for many shared joys, etc. When he became archbishop emeritus, he was invited by our Visitors to return to the province so he could receive all the necessary care for his health, but he wished to remain in Maceió until the end.

In this moment of saying farewell to Bishop José Carlos, we can do nothing better than manifest our gratitude for what was perhaps his “trademark”: everyday fidelity. He certainly was not the most eloquent preacher, the most skillful writer, the most innovative bishop, the ablest manager. He was much more. He was the good and faithful servant who did his best to do everything well: to be upright in all the tasks that were part of his ministry, to be always present in what he was supposed to carry out, to be understanding without failing to be wise, always moved by his deep love for Christ and the Church. He demonstrated that he had learned from Saint Vincent “not only to do good, but to do it well (...) in the Spirit of Our Lord, in the way Our Lord did it on earth, and purely for the glory of God” (CCD XI, 389; Conference 177, Repetition of Prayer, 25 November 1657). On the day his eyes closed upon this world,

we heard in the liturgy this forceful affirmation of the Apostle Paul, so well etched in the life and pastoral work of Bishop José: “Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24). I thank our Lord for the opportunity of knowing Bishop José Carlos Melo and for having the seed of the Vincentian vocation tended by his hands as father, pastor, and confrere. To these words of thanks doubtlessly are united those of everyone who recognized his modest and persevering everyday fidelity.

Translated: Joseph V. Cummins, CM

4

Theme: Symposium of the Vincentian Charism Perspective for Tomorrow

From Here to Where?

Dennis Holtschneider, CM

From Here to Where? Dennis H. Holtschneider, CM, of the Eastern Province offered the following suggestions to participants at the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism in Rome, 13 October 2017.

I have been given a title today called “From Here to Where?” As I understand it, the idea is to provoke some thinking about what is next as we begin our fifth century attending to the needs of the poor. So let us start with the obvious.

Our work has been changing almost since Saint Vincent started it.

- In my Congregation, Vincent loved his Tuesday afternoon conferences for the clergy, but he had no interest in seminaries whatsoever. That was, until the bishops started asking him and then assigning the Congregation the smaller and more rural seminaries, which he saw as a chance to educate priests for the poor and rural populations.

- Vincent was against ever taking charge of parishes. He wanted his priests to be free for the missions they were giving across France. But again, bishops insisted and the priests in the Congregation began to age. Vincent realized he needed a place for the older priests who could not travel easily to work, and so parish ministry was begun in his lifetime.
- Vincent thought that the mission to Madagascar was the “crown in the jewel.” Soon after his death, however, Father Alméras, his successor as Superior General, pulled the Vincentians out.
- That same generation after Vincent was also presented with a request from Queen Anne of Austria herself to staff Fontainebleau Palace, which then led to the same at Versailles, which led to Vincentians being named bishops. Suddenly, the Vincentians were enmeshed in circles of royalty and power rather than the work Vincent had started. Was that a misstep? It was a wrenching question at the time. History suggests that it strengthened the finances and political connections of the Vincentians after Saint Vincent was no longer there to do it himself, ensuring the work for the poor would continue.
- The Daughters were founded to serve the Ladies of Charity, but they eventually took on their own works.
- The Ladies of Charity were designed to be localized without a central governing body, but as soon as they were reestablished after the French Revolution, they developed a strong central governing body, which has made them the largest women’s organization in the Church. They also focused with a new intentionality on poor women, which gave Ozanam room to reclaim the original parish-based idea to serve poor families.

At every turn – and from nearly the very beginnings of all of our Vincentian families – we have changed. Whether the world around us forced it, or whether we discovered new needs and better ways to serve those needs, we have changed. Constantly. For 400 years. It should be no surprise then if this gathering – 400 years later – is focused on what is next.

I am not here to predict things. But I would like to suggest that the world still needs us to change, and perhaps even to suggest some larger changes we might adopt as we find our way from “Here to Where.”

Thankfully, according to the World Bank’s best estimates, the world has cut “extreme poverty” within the world’s population in the last 50 years from 40% to under 10%. There are one billion less poor people today than in the 1970s, by that definition.¹ Eighteen point six percent of the population was undernourished in 1991; by 2015, it dropped to 10.8%.² Admittedly, “extreme poverty” is an extreme measure. It equals about \$1.90 a day, barely the minimum to feed and clothe oneself in the poorest countries. Few, if anyone, in the U.S. or Europe are poor enough to fall under that definition. Happily, though, the trend is consistent even under more expansive measures of poverty. The percentage of the world living in poverty is going down, and that is very good news.³

But localized poverty in every nation still exists. Africa, as a continent, is particularly challenged when it comes to making progress similar to that of Asia. Numerous regions of the world are

¹ “Fewer, But Still with Us: The world has made great progress in eradicating extreme poverty.” *The Economist*, 30 March 2017.

² World Bank, World Development Indicators: Prevalence of Undernourishment (% of Population), 1991-2015.

³ Qui, Linda. “Did we really reduce extreme poverty by half in 30 years?” *PolitiFact Global News Service*, 23 March 2017.

still held back by war, government corruption, economic greed, and now the effects of global climate change wreaking havoc on farming and landmasses on which the poor traditionally build their homes. We have made progress, but by any measure, human misery abounds and still requires the world's care and attention. Saint Vincent's heart for the poor remains dearly needed.

The long-term solutions, of course, are still rule of law, rudimentary healthcare, effective farming, cheap energy, basic education (especially of women), government safety net programs, and yes, strong economies lifting all boats, including those of the poor. And while governments and NGOs are often better suited to address largescale initiatives over time, the needs of the poor right now, today, require today's attention and assistance. Traditionally, that is where we have been attentive and helpful.

There will always be a need to assist the elderly women down the street who did not eat yesterday, or the young man forced to join a gang in order to survive on the street. Charity has its place and its good effects. Like the gospel story, we must always be attentive to the poor at our gates. I am convinced, however, that in the midst of serving the individual needs of the poor at our gates, the Vincentian Family can do MORE, and we can do it MORE EFFECTIVELY. For that is my answer to the question, "From Here to Where?" My answer is simply "More, and more effectively."

How? Allow me to suggest five ways:

We need to work together as a Vincentian Family. Seven years ago, Father Gregory Gay, our former Superior General, invited Mark McGreevy from London and others to address the General Assembly of Vincentian priests and brothers because he wanted to expose us to what he thought were particularly creative examples

of the Vincentian tradition growing in our midst. I do not know anyone else's reaction that day, but it grabbed my imagination and I asked Mark if we could talk. That talk cost me dearly. He roped me into the project in ways I could not have imagined. Mark is good at that. He is good at roping people the way that cowboys rope cows. In the United States, the Daughters of Charity are deeply involved in Depaul International's works. Vincentian priests have been roped onto his board, and then asked to join him to train his staff worldwide in the life and spirituality of Saint Vincent. Mark is successful because he is Mark. He is successful because of the many people he has recruited to work with him from all walks of life in seven countries, and soon many more. He is also successful, because he successfully roped the Daughters of Charity, a few of us priests and brothers, and tons of lay Vincentians to join him.

That is the model we should employ all the time. The AIC has extraordinary reach, but the Daughters have deep knowledge of social services, healthcare and education, and extraordinary connections to institutions. The Vincentian priests and brothers have a wonderful spirituality born of their work with the poor and their considerable training. They too have extraordinary resources through their universities. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has our deepest day-to-day knowledge of the poor across the world. They know the poor firsthand as well as any of us, and can mine and distribute that knowledge if they so choose for all of our benefit. Few of our members know the young exceptionally well, but the members of the Vincentian Marian Youth do.

Who knows what we could do together! I only know that Depaul International would not be the institution it became if Mark had not met a Daughter of Charity in London at the very outset. We need to work together as a Vincentian Family.

We also need to work with others. It is a mistake to ask, “What can we do with our current resources?” We should ask the big question: “What do the poor need?” and then start thinking creatively about with whom we should partner.

Eighteen years ago, the Daughters of Charity and Sisters of Saint Joseph in the United States did an incredibly brave and selfless thing. They literally handed over all of their healthcare works – everything – the hospitals, the nursing homes, the clinics, the doctors’ practices. Everything. For free. They did not get a dollar for all that land. All those buildings. All those valuable health systems. The next year, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet joined them and did the same. The Alexian Brothers followed suit. The Marian Sisters. The Wheaton Franciscans. More Catholic hospitals and religious congregations followed. Why did they do it? They knew they could serve more people, more effectively, and more sustainably if they created a new organization of everyone, instead of holding tightly to what they had built themselves.

Today, Ascension is the largest health system in the United States, and the world’s largest Catholic health system. It continues to grow and to transform and to seek partnerships with anyone who believes in the work of continuing the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. All of that because the sisters chose to let go of individual control, and to work together.

Back in 2011, John Kania and Mark Kramer published a seminal article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* called “Collective Impact.”⁴ In it, they spoke of partnerships as not being enough. What is needed for true social impact, they discovered, was partnerships (1) where everyone who needed to be at the table was at the table;

⁴ Kania, John and Kramer, Mark. “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011.

(2) where a common agenda was forged; (3) where individual organizations were willing to let go of control, adjust their own work so that the whole project could be successful, and even accept very specific assignments from the whole; (4) where people were willing to measure not only accomplishment, but all the key components that would eventually contribute to or hinder that success; (5) where everyone involved was in constant communication so that activity could remain aligned and coordinated; (6) where a very strong and smart “backbone” organization drove all the activity; and (7) where everyone agrees that they will learn along the way and adapt the work based on what they learn.

That article is changing philanthropy in the United States, and encouraging broad coalitions in cities and elsewhere to come together to undertake large, complicated social goals. No single group ever had a prayer of addressing school reform, or environmental change, or poverty. But together, collective impact is showing promise.⁵ Collective Impact is far more than simply partnering. It is a new way of working together to achieve very big goals, and I believe it holds great promise for organizations like ours as we take stock at 400 years and ask “From Here to Where?” Imagine if the Vincentian Family worked closely with Caritas. Imagine if we took on projects for and with the United Nations, the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, and more. They all have great resources and sophisticated knowledge, but we have something they do not: Reach. We know the poor personally. The poor trust us. We can bring firsthand knowledge to the design of largescale reform, and we can create conduits for delivery of that reform. We need to work with others more extensively and more effectively outside of our Vincentian Family if we are to achieve our goals and the Collective Impact literature offers us a path and encouragement.

⁵ “Collective Insights on Collective Impact.” <http://collectiveinsights.ssireview.org/>.

Which leads me to my third point:

We need to work smarter. I have spent my life working in universities. I loved speaking with faculty. It made my day when I would ask faculty members about their field of study or research and then watch their faces light up when they realized I was genuinely interested. They LOVED what they were learning. They LOVED seeing old knowledge give way to new ideas that just worked better than the old ones. They LOVED being part of an intellectual enterprise that focused on how to improve the world – whether it was science, or child development, or international finance, or human rights law, or the arts. The faculty learned constantly – whether on online blogs, or journals, or books. If you scratched past the intellectual mien, you could find the child inside that delighted in books when he/she was young.

But my new job in healthcare makes university faculty seem tame by comparison. In healthcare, most every conversation is about how we could change based on something that was announced the day before. A treatment protocol; a new way of cleaning facilities; a more efficient use of computers in our work; a change in legal regulations. People read twice a day in healthcare, if not more often.

That should be true of us too. The Vincentian Family should be reading the social impact literature; the amazing research on poverty; on homelessness; on creative ideas being deployed in countries other than our own. You get the idea. There is so much there from which to learn and from which to think more creatively. If I have conversations about what people are learning and reading in higher education and healthcare, I rarely have conversations like that among ourselves. I am not sure we are always up-to-speed on what has been written and learned about the best ways to address poverty.

Make no mistake, I am edified and inspired by everyone I have met in the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the AIC, the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, and the Congregation of the Mission. But few of us are experts in poverty-relief. Perhaps we need to become so, or perhaps hire world-class experts for our organizations, either as full-time employees, consultants, or members of advisory boards. I just know that it is time to incorporate the best and latest research that has been done. We know the poor – that is true. And that is unbelievably valuable. But there is more to learn, and my hope for the Family is that we will work even smarter going forward. The poor deserve more than good-hearted amateurs. They deserve experts.

On that note, let me suggest one very specific contribution we can make to the world if we decide to, and this one is easy:

We need to inspire others' hearts to care about the poor. Most all of us know poor people, and by name. We know their struggles. We know how those struggles have changed over time. We know how so many things get in the way of them raising their lives. We need to tell those stories. To everyone we know. However and wherever we can.

Part of what holds the poor back is that ordinary people have absolutely no idea about the poor's lives. They do not know that the primary factor putting women and children in poverty in the United States is divorce. They do not know how bad the inner-city schools are. They do not know that the government-prescribed minimum wage in the United States does not let people buy food, shelter, and healthcare, so people have to choose among them any given month.

We know these stories and these struggles, and people listen to us. We have nothing to gain and therefore our voice is credible. We **MUST** speak. Silence dooms the poor to more of the same treatment

by society. We **MUST** speak. And we must use the new tools at our disposal. It is so much easier on social media to tell our stories. We do not have to use names. **WE** can protect the confidentiality of the poor and still tell their stories, so that the rest of society becomes more sympathetic, and therefore more helpful.

We **MUST** speak what we know. The world presently does not know us. The Vincentian Family is **NOT** a collective voice in the world's consciousness. We **MUST** figure out how to make what we know known. We need to inspire others' hearts to care about the poor.

Finally, we need to make sure our tradition is passed on. We need to be communities of invitation, inviting the young to visit the poor with us, to see our commitments. My experience, though, is that, when we recruit, we only recruit for ourselves. Each branch recruiting for its own branch. We need to start recruiting for each other, not just for our individual organizations. A Vincentian Family recruiting for the entire Vincentian Family. Such was Father Mavrič's call to us in these past weeks.

Even more, we need to make sure the Vincentian charism itself is passed on. All of us have our ways of teaching the "new ones" about Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and our other Founders. That story telling has been made possible all these years by actual historians. Men and women – predominantly priests and sisters – who learned the original languages, read all that has been written by those who came before us, and earned graduate degrees in history so they understood the context of the time and thereby understood the Vincentian contribution. Those historians have been a magnificent gift to us, and whether or not any of us ever had the honor of hearing them speak, those who **DID** tell us our history relied on **THEIR** writings, **THEIR** translations, **THEIR** mentoring and training, **THEIR** tours

of Paris. Those historians have not been many, but they have been a critical link for us. We must make certain that there are historians for the future, and those historians will not likely be priests or sisters. For the next hundred years, it becomes the responsibility of the Vincentian lay organizations to train, hire, and fund historians. We do not need many at any given time, but we need a few at all times, and hopefully able to speak the various languages that our members use.

The exact same thing is true for experts in Vincentian Spirituality. Who will inspire us and form our spirits in the century ahead? These could be priests, brothers, and sisters. They could also be laity. What matters is that they are trained, and trained well. We need a plan there too. Perhaps like the story of “The Last Jedi” in Star Wars, new Jedi – Vincentian experts – will just appear, but we cannot count on it. We need a plan.

I began by showing that we have always been changing. One key factor, however, has always been constant: We are privileged to bear and continue the love that Jesus Christ had for the poor. His heart for them was our founders’ heart for them and, for these years, it is our turn to bear this heart for the poor. I am proud and grateful to have been introduced and brought into this 400-year project for the world’s poor. If I am worried at 400, it is because I worry that we are so busy doing the activity we have been assigned, that we are not very creative at this moment and even somewhat isolated from the rest of the world’s work for the poor.

Most people in the Vincentian Family pick up the work where others left it, and continue it. They adjust things in small ways as needed, of course but, by and large, they provide continuity of service for people badly in need of our service. Somewhere along the way, of course, someone “invented” these paths most of us follow.

There was a first person in our jobs and a founder of our works. God bless those individuals because there is lots of uncertainty and risk in starting something new – and no small amount of work. That is what is being asked of us today. We are being asked to break open a new path so that the Vincentians who follow us can continue to work in a new way.

From Here to Where? I cannot predict our future. But I know our future needs us to work together as a Family, to work with others outside the Family, to work smarter, to inspire hearts for the poor, to make certain we know who we are in our Vincentian history and our Vincentian spirituality. If we can rise to those, and be unafraid of change, I know our fifth century is going to be a true blessing for the poor.

Thank you for everything you do for the poor and for each other. God bless you for your good hearts, and God bless our Vincentian Family.

Common House?

Tjeu van Knippenberg, CM, and Peter Reijers

Tjeu: Good morning! Thank you so much for being invited here. For Peter and me it is an honour to make a contribution to the theme of this Vincentian Symposium on *Welcoming the Stranger*. Both of us are involved in the Vincent de Paul Center, The Netherlands, center for social spirituality.

My fellow speaker is Peter Reijers, a business consultant and coach, mainly active in the field of communication skills, often in building companies, in the field of construction. He knows about buildings and houses. The title of our contribution is “common house?”— question mark.

Peter: Tjeu van Knippenberg is a priest of the Congregation of the Mission and professor emeritus of practical theology at Tilburg University. Nowadays he works in the field of spiritual guidance; he leads retreats and lectures all over the world. He will approach our theme from a biblical, Vincentian, and experiential perspective.

I never realised that, being a layman, I am your main target group, as I learned recently. I was surprised and honoured! My approach will be from the angle of the present corporate world, more specifically: the Dutch corporate world. Vincent would have been quite popular there, no doubt.

Tjeu: In our presentation, we want to contribute to understanding the theme *Welcoming the Stranger*. In today’s world, it can be observed that the arrival of refugees raises different responses.

In our country, The Netherlands, there are various positive, as well as negative, responses to Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in August 2017. He calls us to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate refugees.

For Pope Francis this attitude and behaviour are in accordance with the overreaching goal of his encyclical, *Laudato si'*. This goal is: "to build an integrative and sustainable common house for everyone."

Peter: If that is the goal, it poses this question: how do we build an integrative and sustainable common house for everyone? Is it possible in our global, multicultural world?

A common house presupposes a certain degree of familiarity and mutual agreement. How do strangers fit in such a home? Because, in our understanding "strange" can be foreign, alien, odd, funny, peculiar, curious, weird, quaint, or singular.

All these possible meanings of "strange" are an indication that the stranger belongs to a different order. He does not belong to the world we have built up in our familiar environment.

How can the Pope's dream come true: old and new people integrating in a common house?

Tjeu: Let us investigate this question, first of all by looking at the Bible. We see that the relation to the stranger, even in the Bible, is an ambivalent one. A common house?

On the one hand, the LORD God is only there for Israel, the chosen people with its own land, language, and rituals. On the other hand, how can other peoples be saved? The attitude towards the stranger is an ambivalent one. In this ambivalence, God calls the people to keep alive the memory that they themselves were foreigners and strangers in Egypt.

Leviticus 19:33-34: "When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God." Exodus is a call to go to our destination. With the same urge, the spiritual sings, *When Israel was in Egypt's land: let my people go.*

Because the people wanted to be free – no more slaves, no more fleshpots, but from slavery to freedom, from unconsciousness to consciousness, from selfishness to love, from ruling to serving. Return as a people and as an individual to your own history. Remember, Israel. Go back to your innermost self and see how it is to be a stranger and to be welcomed in a common house.

Peter: Now, please allow me to share some thoughts connecting the dots between this, and my country and my working field. You all may know our image: "in matters of money, the fault of the Dutch is giving too little and asking too much." I hope it does not apply to all of my countrymen all the time, but still... Platitudes sometimes have a reason for being there.

The Dutch moved on, from exploiting slaves (we also invented apartheid, not something of which to be proud) to being a country that has a solid place in the ranking of the happiest countries in the world. Year after year, we are in the top ten. Consider this: Holland is the only country in the world without stray dogs. We are, let us say, organized. Our building has a solid foundation. Maybe as strong as the foundation of the Vincentian Charism? Let others be the judge of that.

But will all this welcome strangers? Will it solve the problem of poverty? We have no stray dogs, but we certainly have poverty. How can original residents and strangers get a shared house? Dealing with

strangers is not easy, not only in The Netherlands. Look at political negotiations on quotas; the fear of being under the foot of Muslims. Beneath the surface of acting, it is a matter of courage and fear, of trust and mistrust.

Tjeu: Yes, it is all ambivalent. Ambivalence is the simultaneous presence of opposite feelings.

As an example, I would like to invite you to look at the story of Vincent de Paul when he was a young man in 17th-century French society. He had been a guardian of pigs and sheep. As a young man, he went from the countryside to school in the city of Dax. He experienced what it is to be alien, odd, curious. Look at a story he later told. "My father came to visit me. I was ashamed of my badly dressed father."

Vincent and his father: a common house? Through this experience, he was pulled back and forth between feelings of shame and love. His family, the first poor in his life. He felt ashamed as well as responsible for them.

He experienced in himself the ambivalence of feelings of reserve and approach to people who live on the periphery of society. It was not without struggle that he was able to handle his different feelings. He learned to hold up the ambivalence as a part of his existence.

Peter: In a special way, we can see this ambivalence in the Folleville church. As you know, it is the church where Vincent preached his famous sermon, on 25 January 400 years ago, to invite people to liberate themselves from the burden of fear and anxiety by a general confession. When I, being a builder, look at the picture of the Folleville church, I immediately see some remarkable features in the architecture of the building.

From the outside, there is a higher part with bigger windows and a lower part with smaller windows. From the inside there is a rich part and a modest one. The choir is richly and beautifully ornamented. The nave of the church with its wooden ceiling is simple.

I learned that the rich part of the church was added around 1513 with the arrival of the “Seigneurs,” the nobles. The little village church, for ordinary people, is from an earlier date. Both parts of the church have different names: the modest part is named Saint Jacques le Majeur [Saint James the Greater] and the rich part is called Saint Jean Baptiste [Saint John the Baptist].

Tjeu: The architecture of this Folleville church was very symbolic for Vincent. Looking at the images of the poor and the rich part of this church, you can hardly believe that these two parts belong together.

Vincent had the ability of dealing with this ambivalence. He had competence for uniting what is separated. He connected rich and poor, high and low, city and countryside, religion and society.

It is this “two-sided church” that plays such an important role in the start of his charismatic work. In this, we recognise the remarkable ability of linking, of connecting what should be together. In this church, he learned once more to see people as fundamentally equal creatures.

Later on, his charism of mission developed into prophetic courage. Throughout his life, he saw the countless refugees who came to Paris as strangers from areas of war and he proceeded to act. He received the charism of charity: becoming an icon of social commitment in receiving them and developing conditions for living.

Peter: The corporate world would admire Vincent's advice: "Make no small plans!" as I learned in a course on Vincentian leadership. No need here to explain Vincent's conviction of the values of the Christian tradition. You are probably very much aware of that, as you are of his practical ambitions, I would think.

Maybe we should reconsider helping in the way we want – and always wanted – to help. Maybe we should consider helping in the way "the stranger" would like to be helped. Of course, we all know that people do not always think what we think they think. Let us think about that. Let us not speculate about things that we can be certain of by simply asking and then by really listening to the answers to our questions. Not by listening to be understood, but by listening to understand. A lack of flexibility, of willingness to change when needed, of true interest in others, of motivation to do good in the eyes of others can be seen as a persistent kind of poverty, with unintended consequences, maybe even with the disappointment of a lack of gratitude.

Some months ago, I fell and my ankle was injured. I had to walk with crutches. Being a "real man," I looked forward to stretching my time of "suffering" as long as I possibly could. You know men.

I asked advice from my doctor. Not from anybody else. But I got a lot of unsolicited advice. And I mean a lot... And all the advice contradicted all the other advice... I did not feel helped at all. I felt like a temporary stranger.

Tjeu: Once again, dealing with strangers is not easy. This concerns the stranger in ourselves, as well as the stranger from outside.

We know it and we experience it in closed hearts and borders. What is the challenge of the inner connection of mission/charity today towards refugees and strangers? It is the challenge to work with the opposite feelings of staying away from and being attracted by the stranger.

We can learn it from the meaning of the Greek word “xenos.” It means both stranger and guest. Stranger refers to being different, guest refers to looking for commonality. The one side stands for keeping to yourself, constructing a sheltered world. The other side refers to openness, learning something new.

This tension is at work wherever people live. The answer is in the virtue of hospitality, already known by Abraham. Without hospitality towards the three young men visiting him, he would have missed the voice of God calling him.

Peter: How can we contribute to building up the contact between strange and familiar, understanding each other in our pluralism?

We see signs of it in today’s world, parables that can address the challenge of the difference and that can inspire to live in harmony.

Which confronts us, looking for solutions, once again with the question: Is it possible? So far, not always so good... Maybe we should reconsider our points of view; maybe we should keep the value of our traditions, but start handing over the flame, instead of the ashes.

Can we truly accept the idea that “the stranger” may know things that we do not know, the idea that the stranger may be right? Can the stranger teach us – or does he already teach and help us by moving and challenging our steady habits?

Tjeu: An important example is the answer Pope Francis gives to serious problems of our time. His spirit is similar to Vincentian spirituality.

You can see this when you look at mission and charity. The Vincentian Charism of mission is expressed in *Evangelii gaudium*. The Vincentian Charism of charity is expressed in *Laudato si’*. Two encyclicals, two sides of the same building. In that sense, we learn about the opportunity of a common house.

Peter: If we decide that it is our responsibility to act upon all that, wherever we can, and to inspire others, we may well be on our way to a Vincentian method.

Maybe we will never fully solve the problem of poverty, fully and effectively face the challenge of welcoming the stranger. Maybe we will learn from the poor, and the stranger, how to be better at it. Maybe Vincent would be seen as a stranger by some. What a wonderful opportunity to reconsider how we look at strangers.

Let us investigate, not judge. After all, only then will he inspire us all to make no small plans, to be pragmatic and effective, to be a movement, and not an institution. An institution, if it wants to stay alive, must be moved from within.

Every house has an outside and an inside. This also applies to a common house. As Vincentian Family in The Netherlands we want, in cooperation with others, to contribute to the Pope's policy. We want to do this in the way of the famous Vincentian Charism.

Tjeu: This charism is the way of mission and charity together. Charity without mission is like a body without a soul. In The Netherlands, and in the whole Western world, we have to emphasize mission, that is the inside of the common house. The basis for doing so comes up in remembering the exodus history of Israel and the son-father story of Vincent de Paul.

These events teach us that a conversion to the stranger takes place by being conscious of the stranger in ourselves. This consciousness may lead us on the way of prophetic courage and social commitment.

In the Western world, we have to remember the challenge of Folleville as the basis of charity, the inside of a common house. For Vincent mission was a three-sided operation. The advice to his missionaries when they went to preach a mission was: 1. bring

knowledge to the people; 2. let them make a general confession; 3. organise charities. Three elements, three dimensions belonging together: evangelizing – liberating – serving. In the middle is liberating. Vincent experienced this in the confession of an anguished man. We can do nothing if there is not a new spirit of liberty in us. This new spirit and the quality of the inside are emphasised by Jesus when he says to his disciple Peter, “once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32). One condition for helping: when you have come to yourself...

Peter: In the corporate world, the companies that survive are quite often the companies that focus on the needs and wishes of their clients and act upon that focus in a way that their clients value.

Maybe our “added value” has little meaning, if it is not perceived as “recognized value” by others. If we add only the value that we consider valuable, without verification of the values of the other, are we really helping?

Maybe we should consider verification before deciding which value should be added. Dialogue can lead to surprising insights. Ask, listen, choose together, and let us not forget to act. Do.

A Dutch marketer claims that vision without action is hallucination. The reverse is also true! Let us become more and more conscious of the fact that the interior of a house is as important as the exterior. Charity without mission may be seen as an added value, but not always as a recognized one.

Therefore, after 400 Vincentian years, our idea for the next 400 years is:

Let us think, ask, listen, learn, and act on our way to welcoming the stranger whenever and wherever we can!

Toward What Future?

Sister Françoise Petit, DC

"In the days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many people shall come and say: 'come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways and we may walk in his paths.' For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:1-5).

Can we imagine any better future for Jerusalem? As members of the Vincentian Family, what is our place in this future that is in the process of being born?

The Bible often refers to the future: the future world, the future century, the future salvation, eternal life, etc. When speaking about the future this is not a reference to "tomorrow." The future begins now and as such questions us.

Pierre Ganne, a Jesuit, writes, *"The future depends on the decision to love, with all that it implies and all that it requires"* (*Le pauvre et le prophète [The Poor and the Prophet]*, p. 32).

Saint Vincent made a decision to love and to serve. Together, following Vincent's example, let us decide to *"walk in the light of the Lord"* (Isaiah 2:5), because the future depends on our response today.

We are sent forth, as disciples-missionaries, to an encounter with those persons who must confront the frailty of their bodies, their minds, and their souls. Those sufferings should move us in the very depths of our being. Throughout the world, members of various associations, teams, communities, groups, etc., have mobilized themselves in order to provide those persons with care and love, in order to accompany those persons on their journey toward material, psychological, and spiritual autonomy. “The whole person and every person” (Paul VI).

“I was hungry ... I was thirsty ... I was a stranger ... I was naked ... I was sick ... I was in prison.”

Let us first examine three elements that ground our service as members of the Vincentian Family. Then I shall present, by way of conclusion, some simple invitations that will enable us to participate (together with others) in the building of a better future where “*there shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover the sea*” (Isaiah 11:9).

- **A fundamental conviction:** the poor are at the center of our lives
- **A call:** to overcome obstacles
- **A gospel attitude:** reciprocal welcoming

1. A fundamental conviction: the poor are at the center of our lives.

Allow me, as a Daughter of Charity, to begin with some words from our Constitutions, our Book of Life: “*The Sisters find Christ and contemplate Him in the heart and the life of those who are poor ... through faith they see Christ in those who are poor and they see those who are poor in Christ*” (Constitution 10).

The poor are at the center [heart] of our life. The heart is understood not only as some sentimental feeling but as the vital core, the place of reason, of our desires, of our action, and of faith. In fact, the poor have a central role in our missionary life, our community life, and our prayer life. Our whole life is organized around service on behalf of those who are poor.

An encounter with persons who have been wounded in any way is the place of our encounter with Christ. Such encounters open us up, transform us, and evangelize us, because they are authentic spiritual experiences that are rooted in sharing life with those persons who are most vulnerable.

In other words, we are dealing with a history of encounters: an encounter between God and us, between us and those persons who are poor, among all of us. Is this not the manner to enter into a Trinitarian relationship? Is this not a way to enter into the mystery of love *par excellence*, into the mystery of incarnate love?

Pope Francis, in his message on the occasion of the First World Day of the Poor insisted and repeated the fact that *poverty has the face of women, men and children exploited by base interests, crushed by the machinations of power and money* (19 November 2017, #5).

Jesus, by washing the feet of the disciples, points out another path; namely, caring for the whole person through basic human gestures, gestures of compassion and kindness. The members of the Vincentian Family, whatever the branch of their membership, know that all those gestures of closeness, solidarity, and communion enlighten humanity and participate in its healing.

Personally, we have nothing more to offer than our own vulnerability. Together, and thanks to our differences, these are all our skills, our energies, and our generosity that we, in hospitals, dispensaries, social services, associations, etc., place at the service

of our brothers and sisters. We do this also in places where we listen, are present, and accompany others, as during visits to people in their homes.

What is the greatest need? Let us listen to this cry (the prayer of a woman in a situation of poverty):

“I am alone and very often sad. I pray. No one speaks to me, no one looks at me. I have no one with whom I can speak. Wake up! Do not leave me alone and abandoned” (Gwennola Rimbaut, *Partager la Parole de Dieu avec les pauvres* [*Share the Word of God with the Poor*], p. 121).

Our Pope Francis awakens and challenges us: *We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work ... however good and useful such acts may be ... they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life* (First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017, #3).

“A sharing that becomes a way of life...” In accord with our own vocation, how can we live, with more integrity, this conviction that the poor are at the center of our lives? Are we not called, among other things, to change our lifestyle? A change of lifestyle based on the principle of the common good, which demands sharing, simplicity, and responsibility.

We are called to change our behavior, especially in our habits of consumption; to live better together; to engage in the struggle for peace and justice; and to draw ever closer to the most vulnerable, so that they are truly at the center of our lives and our faith. Everything goes together.

What do you think Saint Vincent? *Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love* (CCD IX, 466; Conference 51, The Spirit of the Company, 9 February 1653).

2. A call: to overcome obstacles

Let us return, once again, to the message for the World Day of the Poor: *“Blessed, therefore, are the open hands that embrace the poor and help them: they are hands that bring hope. Blessed are the hands that reach beyond every barrier of culture, religion and nationality, and pour the balm of consolation over the wounds of humanity. Blessed are the open hands that ask nothing in exchange, with no “ifs” or “buts” or “maybes”:* they are hands that call down God’s blessing upon their brothers and sisters” (Pope Francis, 19 November 2017, #5).

Pope Francis provides us with a road map and invites us to continue what we all want to put in place on behalf of our brothers and sisters, migrants, who arrive every day to lands that are unknown to them. To be open, welcome, aid, overcome obstacles of all kinds ... an unconditional welcome ... Is this easy? Is it obvious?

The call to “overcome obstacles” of cultures, languages, religions, and nationalities surely resounds in each one of us. We are all very aware of the obstacles that exist within us, among us, and with regard to the other who is different.

We are fearful, especially of being too disturbed, fearful of our own limitations, fearful of being consumed by the other’s sufferings. Welcoming the stranger can produce mixed feelings of joy, anxiety, and mistrust. Up to what point does one extend a welcome? *“Make yourselves at home!”* Certainly, we have extended this invitation, but of what are we afraid? Let us break down these barriers!

There are many communalities among us and among the different branches of the Vincentian Family, but there is also much diversity. How do we accept them? How do we use that extraordinary and complementary richness for the common good, for those who are poorest? We must identify possible obstacles and tear down the barriers!

With regard to the other who is different: *“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”* The one who is different can disturb us greatly. He/she comes from elsewhere, is unknown, has other reference points, other lifestyle habits, other ways of living relationships ... expectations, many expectations. Welcoming is a way to go together, the other and me, the other and us, together. Come on, break down the barriers!

We are all strangers to one another and there will be no encounter, and therefore no true welcome, unless this reality is recognized and accepted. To love the other with his/her difference is the only possibility for true and long-term love. This is our common value, it is our faith, it is the gospel in action.

A new world arises whenever we take the risk to become a place of asylum for the most vulnerable (Véronique Margon, *La Parole tout près de ton cœur [The Word So Near Your Heart]*, p. 38).

With this prayer of Pope Francis in Lesvos in 2016, let us ask the Lord to help us overcome all obstacles:

*“Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals,
to see that those who come to our shores are our
brothers and sisters.
May we share with them the blessings we have received
from your hand,
and recognize that together, as one human family,
we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you,
our true home,
where every tear will be wiped away,
where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace”*

(A Remembering of the Victims of Migration, 9 April 2016).

What do you think Saint Vincent? *To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! ... It's being a caricature of a Christian; it's inhuman* (CCD XII, 222; Conference 207, Charity (Common Rules, Chapter II, Article 12), 30 May 1659).

3. A gospel attitude: reciprocal welcoming

God became man, our brother. He did not bend down toward us. He settled with us, face-to-face, to speak to us, to listen to us, to lead us toward our brothers and sisters, to bring us to the Father. He gave us, gave everything and, at the same time, he did not want to be and do without us: *"I wish that where I am, they may also be with me"* (John 17:24).

And us? We want to give. We want to give effectively and generously, but what would we be without our sisters and brothers who are poor? What do they teach us?

Our Pope Francis uses an expression dear to Saint Vincent: *"They can be teachers who help us live the faith more consistently* (World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017, #7).

Last May, when marking the 50th anniversary of the erection of the Diocese of Val d'Oise in France, "the more vulnerable" individuals were invited to distribute copies of the Gospel of Saint Luke and to participate in the celebration.

Let me share with you three things they said.

"First, I was filled with joy to have been called to this wonderful mission. When you asked me to come with you to distribute the Gospels, I said "yes" immediately ... I accepted even though it was early in the morning! I soon realized that we were not being asked to do some service, but that we were being given a gift! We were chosen, we, the most vulnerable individuals in the Val d'Oise! It is we who bring the Good News to the respectable people!"

"I liked it when they read the passage where Jesus spoke in the church and said that the Spirit of God was with him and that he came to bring the Good News to those persons who are poor. I told myself that we also received the Spirit of God when we had the baptism and that we too, when we arrive with the Gospel, bring, like Jesus, the Good News to the poor. We are poor, but Jesus needs us to bring the Gospel to the poor too."

"The priest said that he would pray for me and asked me to pray for him! Do you realize, he is counting on my prayer. So, I do not forget, I am obliged to pray for him, because he relies on me!"

So then, who gives and who receives?

Let us question ourselves and hear this call to live with an open heart, and in truth, the call to live a simple and humble companionship where, together, we can walk toward a new future because, that is how the Lord speaks to us:

"Lo, I will spread prosperity over her like a river and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem, you shall find your comfort. When you see this, your heart shall rejoice" (Isaiah 66:12-14).

Yes, Lord, truly *"We are all the work of your hands"* (Isaiah 64:7), brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, men and women who are alike in their thirst to be recognized and to be loved.

For this reason, our different commitments lead us to put all our strength enthusiastically in the gift of ourselves in order to respond to the cries of those who are poor, through concrete gestures of solidarity and communion, and require us to give priority to the dimension of sharing, participation, and reciprocal welcoming.

“No one is so poor that he/she has nothing to share” (Bishop Bernard Housset, final message of the Diaconia gathering, 2013).

Giving and receiving can become a way of being, a way of living in communion in order to *“protect our common home”* (*Laudato Si’*, #13), thus bringing about the coming of God’s kingdom now. It is a sign of gospel communion that highlights the equal dignity of the children of God.

What do you think Saint Vincent? *“You must treat poor persons with great gentleness and respect: with gentleness, reflecting that they have to open heaven for you; for the poor have that advantage of opening heaven* (CCD X, 545; Conference 115, Rules for the Sisters in Parishes (Articles 12-18 and Appendix), 25 November 1659).

Conclusion

I believe it important to repeat here that, in all our branches, we are particularly sensitive to the dimension of caring, of taking care of others. We also know that this involves looking at the person in every dimension, the meaning of real charity as understood by the Church and by our Family.

I am going to read for you a short extract from an article by Father Thomasset (A Jesuit at the Centre Sèvres in Paris), who associated the notion of “taking care” to the dimension of “charity”:

“The word “charity” should be understood as a concern to provide for the needs of others, but also as the need to manifest to all the love with which God loves us. Charity is the love of God in action, the expression of faith in the One who, like the Good Samaritan, came to the aid of wounded humanity, took care of it, and took it to the inn of reconciliation and rest” (*Christus* #234, April 2012, p. 194).

Charity is a dimension that is bound up intimately with all our actions, our thoughts, and our spirituality, that of Saint Vincent. The only challenge that I dare express is perhaps the following: take time, in our different meeting places, to reflect on our way of thinking and, above all, to live charity, that received from Christ.

I have been asked to present challenges for the whole Vincentian Family. I renounced this challenge, because we are such a large Family with so many branches and ramifications, so many different contexts, different stories, that it would be risky to become too concrete.

I tried, rather, to highlight **seven invitations**, which take up the essential points addressed, or which are their logical consequences.

Perhaps these can be deepened and, especially, reinforced in the practical order, in your places of mission and where you live. Reinforced, because it is obvious that these invitations are not new. However, as sons and daughters of Saint Vincent, we are called to “more”:

- Integrating people living in poverty situations ever better into projects, their planning, their evaluation. We believe that the Kingdom is theirs.
- Living in communion with our sisters and brothers who are poorest, reaching out in friendship, being evangelized and sharing the word of God together.
- Learning to know each other better among the various branches, being happy to enrich one another and work together more where we are.
- Pursuing with conviction ongoing formation within our different branches, studying Saint Vincent’s thought in depth in light of the gospel and the Church’s social teaching.

- Responding dynamically to the calls of the excluded, impelling us to take initiatives on behalf of peace and justice, committing ourselves simply with our sisters and brothers who suffer.
- Changing our behavior with regard to the use of common goods and the earth's resources, being convinced that the future depends on us today.
- Preserving the simplicity and humility so desired by Saint Vincent, so that our daily encounters are characterized by respect, gentleness, and compassion, living the gospel ever more.

Isaiah has accompanied us from the beginning and shows us how much the future depends on us now. Therefore, let us conclude with him, because

If we place the poor at the center of our lives, if we overcome the obstacles, if we live reciprocal welcoming then ...

“Light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; then the Lord will guide you always ... You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; ‘repairer of the breach,’ they shall call you, ‘restorer of ruined homesteads’” (Isaiah 58:10-12).

Toward what future? *“The future depends on the decision to love, with all that it implies and all that it requires” (Pierre Ganne, *Le pauvre et le prophète [The Poor and the Prophet]*, p. 32).*

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

From Here To Where?

Matteo Tagliaferri, CM

This conference was prepared by taking into account the requests made to me by the organizers of the Symposium.

Introduction

- a) **Only the person who understands himself as being poor can receive the other in his poverty.**

It is difficult to accept the poor without the same heart.

- Dependence on a worldwide level reminds everyone of his/her radical human poverty.

One day I asked myself: why in the Community there can be believers or non-believers, Jews, Muslims, Christians, from various cultures, and it is OK, there is harmony; and, yet elsewhere all this can be a motive of misunderstanding and violence?

I found the answer in the fact that in the Community everyone feels equal; because all have had the experience of, and have recognized, their poverty (dependence) that is, that a man/woman is not sufficient in him/herself (cf. Genesis 3).

Consequently, only a person with a heart of poverty can receive another in his/her poverty.

Indeed, the Father becomes, in Jesus, tender and merciful love only for one who experiences him/herself as poor!

(From the prayer of the workers of the Community in Dialogue):
“... *Thank you, because by this involvement that you grant us, you make us appreciate ourselves as poor, for every other person who meets us in his/her poverty receives from us the same energy, power, and love.*” The certitude of love is the foundation of Christian hope, and, as Paul VI said to the Vincentian Family, “you are the hope of the poor.”

b) To favor participation when encountering personal poverties.

- When I began the experience of the Community in Dialogue, now some 26 years ago, I thought that it would be enough to remove the persons suffering dependence from their own places and from substances (heroin, alcohol, cocaine, etc.). These certainly produced grave physical and psychological damage, besides the expense of interior resources (reduction of the capacity for judgment, reduction of liberty, etc.), and they rendered the persons more and more incapable of living more involved relationships, rather hedonistic ones instead.
- Then, all of a sudden, I realized that, behind the abuse, there was a “person” with his/her own problems and regrets that arose from the fact that he/she found him/herself inadequate in the face of the reality of life: reality that places limits and brings with it fatigue and exertion in responding positively to every real and human situation.

It was thus that we formulated “principles for orientation” for a positive solution to the problem. In this way, it became necessary to activate a process of maturation in the person on a cognitive, relational, and spiritual level.

The urgency of responding to such a situation of the young peoples' unease (too often undervalued), moved through the assumption of the need for education with regard to the person in difficulty, so that he/she would become an active participant in his/her own life. In this way, we began to structure a communitarian experience, by placing the person at the center of the educative activity.

From this point, we had rules, principles, and other educational instruments drawn up, to make them capable of responding positively to their reality, and thus to make them active participants [protagonists], especially in the spiritual dimensions (often turned off), and in relationships, thus healing their lives of great sufferings.

From this point, it became evident that the medical response alone to the problem, though necessary, was not conclusive inasmuch as it did not confront the causes of the distress, but only the psychophysical consequences of substance abuse.

- Along the educational process, the young people reviewed critically their situation of distress and suffering so as not to fall into it once more. At the same time, they became critical not only of their own outdated and inadequate attitudes, but also critical of the larger culture that had determined their distress and malaise.

According to systemic cultural aspects, if one is poor in one way, he/she is even poorer if he/she does not know of what he/she is poor!

For this reason, I came to call the youth escaped from a culture of death, mutilated in transcendence, and illiterate in relationships, to become reminders within society itself.

*Following the introduction,
I move to answering the questions
proposed to me about the theme.*

“FROM HERE TO WHERE”

1.a) What do we mean today by healthcare and Social Services?

A few years ago, the World Health Organization (WHO), in its Ottawa Declaration, stated that any health intervention must be done in such a way as to promote the well-being of the person, the happiness, and not simply the absence of illnesses and infirmities. We also are convinced, through our experience, that happiness results from the person's ability to know, choose, and live values: to live freedom, self-confidence, creativity, but also to allow oneself to be attracted by such values as beauty, truth, esteem for the human being, responsibility, etc., values that inhabit freedom and give an appropriate and positive meaning to every human expression.

- It should also be remembered that recent global research (made over 20 years by two American universities in 180 countries, see *The Lancet*) has indicated, among major causes of illness and death, the decline of traditional pathologies (such as tuberculosis and HIV, often linked to a lack of hygiene and nutrition, and a lack of prevention); and the increase in dependencies and psychopathologies. However, while tobacco abuse is tending to decline, narcotic and psychopharmacological drug intake is increasing.
- From all this emerges the importance of the educational and cultural aspect to address the root problem of dependencies globally: the person must be helped to find

the best part of him/herself, the one that makes him/her more honest, sincere, humble, authentic and freer. This brings about a change in how to conceive of the existence that affects at the core the use of substances, whatever they be (opiates, alcohol, psychopharmacological drugs, etc.), so that one learns how to live out the fullness of one's own existence!

- Looking at the situation from an educational perspective, it seems important that health services take into account:
 - a. that proposing treatments with high maintenance doses, for example, methadone, which, instead of reinforcing in the person the necessary awareness to change, further promotes normalizing, medicalizing, and making chronic the person's state of confusion and dependence. Is this not also reinforced by the common idea that drug dependence is a chronic illness, and, therefore, one tends to cure the effects and not respond to the causes of abuse?
 - b. It is also necessary that health services never cease to have the young person recognize his reality and the consequences he is paying in terms of health and wellbeing, compromising social and family relationships. This is why we must not abandon the person in trouble, nor even minimize his/her serious situation with excessive doses of drugs and methadone that, in the long run, will extinguish his/her hope of recovering.
- 1.b) **How can we both GIVE and RECEIVE that which we need to make the relationships among us thrive again, living in communion with others; for example, what can we do for the common good?**
- Many irrational deviations and explosions in young people result from the lack of positive and mature affective

relationships that have not been given to them to experience in the family: a requirement that did not happen in the delicate years of growth. In my experience, I regularly see families capable of often-not-very-mature affective relationships, and especially the inability to provide orientation. The adults frequently are more inclined to please rather than to promote!

- To go beyond emotional dissonances and illiteracy of relationships (often very self-centered and hedonistic) one must help the young person to pass from the agonizing search for well-being (control within him/herself of the egocentric-egoistic sphere), "to make one feel good," that is, to activate and integrate affectivity into the sphere of values and of gratuitous and positive love.

Therefore, the capacity for mature affection goes hand in hand with the maturation of Love: "... *know that you can always choose to love!*" as a principle of the Community states it.

In Community we say, "*It is good fortune to feel loved, but it is a misfortune not to have learned to love!*" So, not only love, but also educate the other to become capable of mature love.

- The Community favors this ability to mature in gratuitous love, activating relationships characterized:

by listening deeply to the other: listening with the heart!

by the sense of wonder before the other: I am happy that you exist!

by the respect that overcomes every form of manipulation of the other.

The success of this maturation, therefore, is achieved in the Community when the person makes this phrase true: “You come back to life because others have welcomed you, loved you, and esteemed you; but you have life within you when you give back what you were given to live again.”

1.c) How can what we do... and even who we are... make us care agents (and not only in healthcare terms), so that we can remove the barriers that divide us from the stranger?

- Can we be specialists or religious without likewise being asked about the responsibility of adults involved in the same questions on the meaning of life and relationships that young people pose with their malaise and escape from reality? Certainly for effective intervention we must not forget that one cannot underestimate their reality of unease and inadequacy, nor the meaning that it poses to every human being.

If, as Donald Winnicott says, “We still will be too poor if we are only healthy,” then in what wealth are the youth and today’s culture especially poor? If one is poor in something, he is even poorer if he does not know in what he is poor!

- “With science but beyond science” means that if it is necessary to care for the person and his neurobiological and psychosocial “functioning,” of his studious nature, it is also necessary to link the “functions” to the “foundation” upon which they stand. What transcends nature is grasped more with amazement than with reason.

Taking care of the functions also means recognizing the “central nucleus,” that remains in “subjectivity” beyond the disharmonies and dysfunctions that require care.

Understanding and deciphering through science the language of the macrocosm, as well as of the microcosm, does not mean incorporating also the foundation on which they are based.

Beyond the noblest work of the human being, which is knowledge, it is necessary to grasp the essence of things, and nothing captures that “core” of being a person as love does. For example, who are more in touch with the essential reality of a human being: those who grasp the somatic traits and recognize what reasonably can be inferred from them, or those who, being endowed with empathetic perception of love, **perceive the best interior and unique reality of it?**

1.d) How do we stay focused on the poor, embracing the wisdom of the poor person him/herself?

- The experience of worldwide dependence leads us to a need to recover existentially and culturally the awareness of radical human poverty, which makes us all equal: it is like returning to the primordial experience of the ancestors. Not, therefore, the sufficiency of scientific optimism – a more subtle dependence than substance addiction; but not even religious perfectionism, which risks not leaving presumptuously a place for the action of God in man.

However, everyone comes from the same radically poor human family, all equally poor and in need of a merciful God: to announce it is to say to the other, encountered in his poverty, as God has loved me, in my poverty, so he loves you in yours. Love generates hope! This applies to all people, whatever their religious and cultural membership, whatever their people and nation.

At a conference on “Science and Spirituality, listening to unease, recovery of the mystery,” a question was asked of the head rabbi of Rome, of a representative of the Islamic cultural center of Rome, and of the bishop of our diocese: “What sort of God is there for a man marginalized and in need, for one who experiences loneliness and despair?”

They all (the rabbi, imam, bishop) began from the books (Bible, Qur’an, Gospel) and they seemed to answer almost with the same language: in the face of suffering and distress, God is a tender God, a God of mercy, justice, and goodness.

Christians then recognize that Jesus is the tangible, historical expression of this graced event, of this incredible love of the Father, revealing his tender and radiant face, revealing his goodness and mercy to the poor. “*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me ...*” (Luke 4:18).

- Some in the Community, whatever their race and culture, may have been left, from previous situations, physically and psychologically tested, yet these limits have not prevented them from expressing their positiveness and communicating their best part; indeed, they appear not only serene, but also happy. All this they attribute to “something that has happened inside” them, to feel “something bigger within,” to feel loved! To this, they attribute the energies of beauty, courage, newness, creativity, generosity, and love emanating from them.
- Mounier recalls the need to pass culturally from Descartes’ “*cogito ergo sum*” [I think, therefore, I am] to “*amo ergo sum*” [I love, therefore, I am], with the difference that in

the act of loving the person is grasped not only in his/her existence (*cogito*) but also in his/her existing with fullness! (*amo*).

In implementing the potential and the value of love, therefore, man/woman, along with inexhaustible fullness, also finds the meaning of his/her life!

1.e) The poor show us their needs. They are the spirit of the Vincentian Charism.

- Is it possible to talk about marginalization, solitude, failure, destruction, etc., without mentioning Love? It is love for the person, encountered for him/herself, even before his/her need and situation. In fact, I did not meet an addict, an alcoholic, or an HIV positive person; rather, I met Danilo, Claudio, Mario ... who had problems and we wanted to solve them together. This strength in togetherness and mutual attention is to advance each other!

This is how the attention for the most diverse people led us to organize and reorganize ourselves continually to provide the most adequate responses to the needs of individuals, whether they are addicts, alcoholics, gamblers, HIV-infected persons, prisoners, mothers with children, or those destabilized at behavioral and mental level, etc.; as well as thinking about their reintegration into a working life, prevention activities, family reunions, etc. All this is done by respecting the different cultures and religions, such as Christians, Muslims, Jews, and atheists, as well as people of different nations and of different social origin, of all ages and conditions and so that each one, being accepted, respected, and loved for him/herself as a person, finds him/herself within the original nucleus of the same human

dignity that makes us all great and equally in need of each other. In this way, we successfully developed conditions of friendship and solidarity where there was often a reason for division, hate, intolerance, and even war.

This putting the person in the center and accepting him/her in an integral way arises from the fact that it is God himself who has put the person at the center of everything because he/she is at the center of His Heart; Jesus also tells us: “The Father loves me because I give life for my brethren” (cf., John 10:17). So God’s thought or plan is the human being, because he/she is alive, and alive with His Love!

- That is why we find ourselves saying, “What is the greatest reality always to safeguard? It is the person!” Accept the person beyond how he/she appears or says or does, but accept the person for him/herself; welcome the person because he/she lives (or is regaining life): this is because it would be difficult for those in situations of marginalization and deviance to be able to take their lives in hand and give them value, if they do not feel welcomed and loved, if they do not feel their worth, of which it is nice to hear them being responsible for it!

In my experience with Danilo, the Community’s first young man, in seeing him suffering so and destroyed, I would have stripped before him (“take off your sandals” – EG 169). I experienced the fear that my being a priest would burden him with who knows what weights. Instead, I wanted Danilo to feel respected for himself, a respect due every person, and not as a gift from us! It is to recognize that image in him that comes from God: “What you did to one of these little ones, you did it to me” (Matthew 25).

- But no person feels accepted for him/herself (as a person) except by those with the same heart. A French prisoner writes, *“If I go by the road and you offer me your hand and I take that hand and you realize who I am and let go of that hand, do not be surprised if tomorrow another gives me his/her hand and I bite that hand and I bite that hand.”* The rise of violence in the prisoner is certainly a problem for him/her, but he/she reveals that the one who refuses the hand also has a problem! With the difference that the prisoner “knows” his reality; the other no, he/she does not recognize it. The first can better him/herself, while the other one is justified; and he/she will never know what this means, *“every person has his/her wounds, and he/she is wounded where he/she has not been loved.”*

2. The journey to the New Jerusalem

2.a) A Vincentian Vision of Health and Home: The New Jerusalem of the Prophet Isaiah.

- The initial act of the Community’s journey was in the encounter between a person who lived in love received for years who found himself welcoming another person (Danilo) who was asking for welcome and love, asking for respect and help, to receive confidence. The initial act of love consisted in welcoming the other, feeling equal because both were fragile, weak creatures, and for this reason “humble.” In such an encounter, there is the one who opens the house and changes his daily schedule, and who presumes courage and confidence that something new and positive still can happen. Love is perceived as mutual delicacy and kindness, as equally humble and open to a desire for good that made hope real in both hearts. Such positive energies of love become intimate concreteness and a possible opening

to a greater Mystery. "To love someone means to say to him/her, 'You will not die!' To love him/her in Christ is to give him/her complete resurrection!"

- Arriving in Peru in 2003, responding to a mother who asked us to help her son the 'drug addict,' I wrote to the first Peruvian young people a message:

"... Here are the friends who come from Italy, from far away. They answered your call to Jesus... Now you are building together that "Human Experience" to be a "Home" for every person who wants to find it. It is the home of your own interiority, the wounds accepted and respected, the home where everyone can believe that he/she can attain his/her best self, because he/she is loved and looked upon in his/her dignity as a person, which, no situation, however negative, can ever destroy...."

I also want to recall the words of Mirella, the directress who opened the Peru Center, killed by melanoma; a few minutes before leaving us, with emotion she said to us, "*For me to come to the Community was like going home!*"

And Carlo, a director who recently left us after a painful illness, wrote: "*The Community is love! You experience it from the first day and you continue to experience it all your life because, whatever your path, by then 'Something' has touched you!*"

- A young man long ago told me that he had attempted several times to take his life (with drugs). In response to the question if today he still wanted to die, he revolted and shouted: "No, today I want to live! Now I know what makes me live, and I would be afraid of losing it!"

What is this life then that young people no longer find?

3. Challenges / Strategies for this New Paradigm.

- 1) Assuming the educational task as an urgent need in our society, whose lack produces solitude and the most diverse poverty and degradation, means developing the sense of the other, welcoming and helping him/her to improve (cf., *EG* 170).

Without activating the incentive to improve, the person would remain in a risky state: in life's troubles, he/she could fall back into feeling abandoned, in the dark, in desperation, in degradation!

Today's social and cultural situation is mutilated with transcendence, and we live an illiteracy of relationships. The young people wrote at the entrance to a center, "*We live a culture of well-developed bodies, almost developed minds, and underdeveloped hearts!*"

Saint Vincent said, "*This night I discovered a terrible thing: before saving souls, it is necessary to give poor people a life that can make them aware of having a soul!*" (Attributed to him in the film, *Monsieur Vincent*).

We need to educate to discern among:

- important things and central things;
- love and truth together;
- developing and functioning are not the same as "improving oneself";
- being ourselves in the joy of togetherness!

To "improve" oneself requires an educational aspect: it is possible because man/woman is a transcendent body!

Accompanying with an educational will means bearing some of the burdens of the other, so that the other will learn to bear his/her own burdens: without the will to learn, accompaniment risks just giving assistance (something different, but sometimes necessary).

Thus, there is no true accompaniment without welcoming the person for him/herself, with respect and with confidence.

2) Accompanying by educating toward the encounter with “Which God?”

a) The core of Christian experience is the tender love of the Father revealed in tangible love in Jesus. It is a graced event, unexpected and amazing: “What we have seen and heard and touched, the word of life, we announce to you...” (cf., 1 John 1:1-2); “when we were still in sin, God loved us first” (cf., Romans 5:8). Gratuitous and free love!

- It experiences God and eternal life, if the love that He is becomes “deeds” and concrete action (*creation, incarnation, liberation!*). “The Father loves me because I give my life for my brethren!” (Jesus; cf., John 10:17).
- Where there is the experience of the Father’s love, there lives the realization that “something is happening”: the rebirth from on high!

N.B. When we can approach others without any self-interest, with the only interest being that the other is good, that he/she freely experiences the Good?!?!?

My encounter with Danilo and the fear that my being a priest would burden him with who knows what! “...*I would have stripped of everything before him! ... a due respect.*”

- Therefore, Gratuity is the essence of educating and accompanying into the experience of Christian love!
“*Only the one who knows he is poor can welcome the other in his poverty.*” It is as if to say to him/her: as the Father loves me, in my poverty, so he loves you in yours!
- The fundamental value of every educational and evangelizing action is the graced event: the Living One wants life for us!
- In addition, the poor are privileged and they also must know this from our attitudes towards them!

Conclusion

TO WHERE?

- 1) The person at the center is the first value that can make any other value exist. There is no honesty unless there is an honest person. There is no Community of charity unless people live love/charity among themselves.
- 2) God the Father has at the center of his heart the poor person. We make the poor the actors in a new history only if we feel humbler and poorer than they do.
- 3) We must listen not only to the needs of the people who are living their poverty, we also have to listen to what they say about us, about our lives and our faith, and let us be challenged by it!
- 4) God always listens to the cry of the poor. We are in the history of the Kingdom, which will have a future only if we work with God who wants to encounter their cry of sorrow. Otherwise, we already experience a history without a future! “The rich he has sent away empty” (Magnificat; Luke 1:53b).

Note: *EG* refers to *Evangelii gaudium*, 2013 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World.

Translated: John E. Rybolt, CM

Syrian Testimony

Vincentian Marian Youth

By: Aida Baladi

Vincentian Marian Youth National President

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:3-6).

The sound of the Lord came up from Damascus; the light of heaven shone on Damascus.

My name is Aida Baladi and I am responsible for the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria.

Starting from the day that I was asked to write a testimony about the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria until this specific moment, I felt terrified of the responsibility upon my shoulder since the request was to talk about the two most important things in my life: the Vincentian Marian Youth and my beloved Syria.

Therefore, I will do my best to use a couple of minutes to give the whole world through this Symposium of the Vincentian Family my testimony as a Vincentian Marian Youth member and as a Syrian citizen.

In order to simplify my mission, I asked for help from the most supportive group I ever met in my entire life: the Vincentian Marian Youth.

The question was also simple, “You are a member and leader of the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria and you have been living under bad circumstances. Someone asks you about the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria, what would you say?”

The answers were pure, specific, filled with love, ambition, determination, faith, and hope. Therefore, I simply quote the following sentences, which I will share with you:

First answer:

- ✓ “We have been through a disastrous war that forced us to put our scheduled activities on hold frequently. Now, and thanks be to God, we got through it and we survived. We learned from this war to appreciate things around us and to start from scratch. We are a family, a family who stands up for each other and we insist on delivering one message to the whole world that nothing can prevent us from continuing since we are the youth who have been requested by the Virgin Mary and we are going to continue with her blessing.”

Other answer that I got was:

- ✓ “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31. We will keep going with our slogan “Live” “Contemplate” and “Serve” through the Vincentian Marian Youth with the intention for each one of us. Now, as a responsible

leader, I will do my best to deliver the thoughts of “Life” “Contemplation” and “Service” to the younger generation of VINCENTIAN MARIAN YOUTH members.”

Also somebody answered me:

- ✓ “In this specific time we cannot give up on the Vincentian Marian Youth Syria. This is part of our childhood, part of our personality. Vincentian Marian Youth is a way of living. How would you give up on your life?”

And the last answer that I got:

- ✓ “The most important message we should deliver to the world as Vincentian Marian Youth is “Love” and the only thing that “love” requires is “Courage.” Because the person who loves does not let fear dominate him/her. Our country experienced an unfortunate situation that made us weak at the beginning but we did not allow the situation to stop us from delivering our message of “Love” and “Service.” Once this message is in our hearts, no crisis will expose us to despair. We were and still are showing the world that there is a light in the darkness.

Vincentian Marian Youth Syria is divided into four groups and each one has its own responsible person. The number of members has decreased drastically over the years because of the Syrian crisis; from 40 in each group before to only 15-20 now, especially with the younger group. From the beginning, we have tried to live our slogan: “Live, Contemplate, Serve” and through this we achieved many of our goals in living the Christian Life through the ways of Mary as told by Saint Catherine Labouré. Service was the core of our existence.

There was a period of growth and prosperity for the Vincentian Marian Youth in Syria when it was one of the most important Christian youth groups in our city, Damascus. We were known for our charity, volunteer work, and different activities such as fundraising events, summer camps, and prayer sessions.

When the Syrian crisis started in 2011, the difficulty of carrying out our activities also started. It affected us negatively. Our weekly meetings, camps, and other events were held mostly in the House of the Daughters of Charity, a place that we consider home, but it was in a dangerous area that resulted in cancelling meetings and activities.

Because of this circumstance, we had a shortage of human resources, most especially the ones whom we consider the backbone of the organization. The members, who were in their 20s, were the main support in carrying out the activities for the rest of the members. However, the former were planning to travel abroad because of the unfortunate situation. Because of this, the activities, especially those that would require offering service for others, suffered and decreased over the past seven years. But now we are trying to stand again. As the situation in Syria is getting better, we also try to be better. With last year's motto "*The good work grows in silence,*" we continue to strive every single day.

With the above-mentioned circumstances, we were placed in a difficult spot. We had to make hard decisions. Should we stop our activities permanently or take the risk of continuing regardless of the difficulties and danger surrounding us? So we made a decision. We decided to live. We continue to live because we are the Vincentian Marian Youth and we are Syrians. We live for the Association and we live for our dear country. This decision made us stronger than ever.

As a result of this decision, we are able to continue and start activities for the members. For example, since the war started we stopped having our annual summer camp. But in 2016, we courageously made the decision to revive it. This year, 2017, we even were graced by the presence of a dear friend, the International President of the Vincentian Marian Youth, Yancarlos, during our summer camp.

We now have Christmas parties, and we frequently participate in an “Atelier de Noël” [Christmas Workshop], which is a workshop for children around Damascus, not only for our members, to make handmade decorations for Christmas. We also had several sleepovers (small camp for two nights) in the house of the Daughters of Charity, the same place where we hold our meetings. This includes prayer time, games, and a lot of laughter.

In addition, I would like to emphasize the importance of some people without whose support and prayer, it would be impossible for us to continue: the Daughters of Charity, especially Sister Monique Kharouf, our adviser; the continuous participation of Father Charbel Naim, our chaplain, who started working with the Vincentian Marian Youth last year. He is giving us immeasurable advice. The spiritual life of Saint Vincent would not be present in us if not for these important persons in our group, Father Charbel and Sister Monique.

As a member of the Vincentian Family in Damascus, we are trying now to work with the other branches for one common goal, stronger together as we give life to the Vincentian Charism. Because of the situation in the past, and the better one that we have right now, we join forces towards our goal of Charity guided by the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The most commonly shared words used to describe our belonging are: Love without expecting anything in return, family, joy, light, way of living, strength together, message to deliver, sad and good times, duties and responsibilities.

With the country's situation, the important therapy for the youth is to be united in prayer, united in a place where we belong, and feel free to deliver one specific message through Mary to Jesus, to live the "Life" "Contemplate" and "Serve" as our slogan. In addition, we are all invited this year to participate in our Vincentian Marian Youth Syria theme, which is "I was a stranger and you took me in" Matthew 25. This is the plan for the next year.

Inside each one of us, there is "Love" which intensifies the sense of belonging and will develop happiness too.

Last but not least, I want to close this by saying that the seven years of war did not make us cowards. We did not run away. We did not hide. Instead, this war made us stronger, united, and bonded by our belonging to our country through belonging to the Vincentian Marian Youth in Damascus.

A special thanks to the responsible people who support us all the time, especially those who helped us participate in this Symposium: Father Ziad Haddad, Father Charbel Naim, Sister Monique Kharouf and others.

I am fully pleased and thankful to Pope Francis, who always prays for peace in our beloved Syria.

Peace for our Beloved Syria.

Testimonies of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society about Central Italy's Earthquake

Antonio Gianfico, National President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society

Good morning to all, I am Antonio Gianfico and I have the honor of being the National President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Last year, a terrible earthquake that killed 299 people hit areas in central Italy. Damage to homes and infrastructure was enormous.

In the aftermath of the first violent tremor of last year's 24 August earthquake, a solidarity race took off by means of a fundraiser among the Italian Vincentians. Not only that, but many of us, especially those closest to the affected areas, immediately took action, even with small gestures of proximity and support, such as providing linens and basic necessities to those admitted to the Aquila Hospital and, above all, comforting words with the delicacy and love typical of our volunteers.

Meanwhile, offers began to arrive and there was no time to waste. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society decided to direct its efforts toward recovering productive activity and reactivating the economic drive in order to engage more families in reclaiming the territory, warding off the exodus to other places. For this reason, we organized various inspections to gain awareness of the damage and evaluate possible assistance.

Therefore, the first interventions were in support of families transferred to the Adriatic Coast and to the homeless elderly, who were received in some retirement homes. In partnership with other associations, and with the involvement of public, private, and religious institutions, it was decided to finance small, targeted projects, compatible with our modest resources, but sufficiently decisive to get some family productive activities quickly restarted. In that way, some small, prefabricated wooden houses appeared near collapsed houses and unstable barns were repaired and reinforced to allow animals to be sheltered.

A camper was acquired for a needy family, some tractors for those who had to resume cultivating the land. Some head of cattle were purchased for cattle farmers. We contributed to a cheese factory, a butcher shop, a bakery, a pasta factory, a clothing store, honey production, and renting a mobile kitchen. Finally, a sports facility and a multifunctional center are about to be finished in conjunction with other institutions.

I will turn the microphone over to our friends who came to tell us their experiences: Gabriele with his family. When we met him, he had lost his smile and had no prospects. It is a joy for me to see him today, smiling and looking to the future with courage and determination, despite the many difficulties.

Gabriele Piciacchia from Accumoli, a hamlet of Amatrice

Good morning, my name is Gabriele. I am here with my wife Sara and with Simone, one of my sons. I am from Accumoli, the epicenter of the 24 August 2016 earthquake. I own a dairy company that, before the earthquake, produced milk. I live with my two sons, Maurizio and Simone, now young men, and with my wife Sara, who is originally from Pescara del Tronto, a village that is known, sadly, for its total destruction and for its 50 dead, many of whom were very dear to her.

That night, when the earth trembled terribly, clocks stopped at 3:36, the time at which we lost 300 lives and everything that had been built in the past centuries. My home collapsed: my old 1866 farmhouse, proudly bought by my grandfather – who emigrated to America – with the savings of his hard work in the coal mines. That night, the roofs of the stables were severely damaged, where about 80 dairy cows were housed.

With the help of my family, I did not allow myself to lose heart. We relied on my small mechanical workshop in order to live and, in the raging bad weather, I continued the work I love so much and for which I gave my all. After the second devastating tremor of 30 October, I had to surrender. Damage to the roofs of the structures had become unsustainable, because the roof above the helpless animals literally was falling apart and we could not jeopardize our lives and theirs.

My beloved Romanian worker, our employee for many years, died of a heart attack out of fear. My family and I had to move to a small old caravan among thousands of problems. The cows, still miraculously unscathed, despite the continuous crumbling, were sold, actually, sold at a loss to a large stable, which, nevertheless, continued to care for them, just as I did and wanted to do.

This choice, although painful for me, guaranteed the safety of my family and saved the cattle from certain death. After I sold my animals, someone pointed out to me that I was wrong, because if I wanted to be compensated for their real value, I should have let them die there under the rubble. But I am a dairy farmer and, as such, I “raise” the animals, with care and respect, as is right, so I have no regret about the decision made, not good on the economic level, but good for me.

Then, thanks to the arrival of a small, well-kept old cabin, donated to us by two fantastic sisters from Friuli, and thanks to groups of volunteers, from the Alpine army and others, all from northern Italy, who positioned it, we managed to stay in the territory. We thus avoided being “deported” to the coast, which none of us wanted to accept, especially our sons, who are now attached to the territory as much as and even more so than previously. Therefore, with the dignity that befits a family and the security that the cottage offered and still offers us, we tried to get started again.

The state did not help us much, at least until now. The red tape of bureaucracy, the inability to confront quickly the effects of this calamity, the weak steps of a slow and complex country where no one succeeds in taking any real responsibility, have made us weaker, more uncertain of the future.

The older of our sons, a bit dispirited, for now is working at jobs with firms outside the area to earn something, while waiting to get back here soon to our business that he also loves and sincerely wants to carry forward.

However, the fraternity and solidarity of Italy showed itself to us: a good, generous, empathetic Italy. Among those helping are the “Saint Vincent de Paul Society” and the “Volunteer Group of Brianza,” which gave us a financial contribution to repair one of the damaged roofs and which also aided us in repurchasing a first part of livestock for this new business.

Now, exactly one year after the earthquake, we assisted with much emotion at the birth of a wonderful calf whom we named “Federico” in honor of Frédéric Ozanam, founder of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Federico, a helpless little being, now runs and moos happily in our meadows. Just by observing him, we understood that life always conquers death. Thank God for fraternity and love.

A sincere embrace from my family and me goes to all those who have been lavish and still do all they can for us, hoping that soon many other happy little calves will run next to Federico. For our part, throughout our lives we will try to give back all that has been given to us, with good works toward the most unfortunate and disadvantaged. For now, thanks to all.

The Family of Gabriele, Sara, Maurizio, and Simone

Antonio Gianfico

Thank you Gabriele, your words touch us. Now I introduce Oriana and Mauro. When we met them, we immediately thought of Our Lady and Saint Joseph, for they were living in a stable as they had!

Oriana Girolami from Sommati, a hamlet of Amatrice

Good morning to all. My name is Oriana. I am with my husband Mauro and we come from Amatrice. On 24 August 2016, we lost many friends, the house where we lived, part of our work activities: the bed and breakfast and the butcher shop. Only the stable was not damaged and, in fact, for eight months my family and I lived there. We made a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen at our own expense.

I remember little of that terrible night, only gazes fixed in emptiness, lost in the maze of pain and fear, all with tears in their eyes. Only Elena, my granddaughter, who was four and a half months old, smiled. She was not aware of anything. She did not realize that she had been awakened in the middle of the night by the tremor, that dust covered her. She did not grasp that she had gone out the window, then to pass onto the roof of the house next door. She was unaware that, in the midst of darkness, dust, screams, and general chaos, she was passed immediately from the hands of her grandfather to those of her cousin, who with a ladder had helped her onto the roof. She did not comprehend anything. Her smile was, is, and always will be my strength to move forward.

That terrible night transformed the laughing Amatrician basin into a valley of death and devastation. For our community there are no words of comfort that serve to heal this wound, which will remain forever imprinted in our hearts. With time, maybe the smiles will come back on our faces and they will remind us of those who are no longer, certainly with a tear, but surely with so much love. It is also for them that we need to rebuild and start again, strong as the mountains that surround us, united as a big family.

We lost our identity, because that tremor destroyed everything we believed was ours forever, but we should not lose strength. I know it has been tough, but gradually we must abandon the thought of that nightmare, embrace hope and start again, because, for now and forever, 2016 will be year zero.

I am here to bear witness to the many gestures of solidarity and kindness that the Italian people have shown to us. Thank you! Special thanks go to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin and to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. They were always close to me, both spiritually and materially. They brought my family peace, love, and serenity with their concrete help. Finally, I would like to thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for giving voice to those who do not have one.

Thank you all.

Antonio Gianfico

Thank you, Oriana, your tenacity and that of Mauro are an example for us all. Now I am particularly happy to have Daniele here, a 28-year-old young man who is not discouraged.

Daniele Gianfermi from Norcia

Good morning to all. My name is Daniele and I come from Norcia. I have a companion, Mariangela, and a daughter, Gioia [Joy], joy in every sense whenever I can hold her tight.

The earthquake took away my home, a place of affection, and my work, a place of accomplishment as a man and as father of a family. In spite of everything, one year after the devastating tremors that destroyed Central Italy, I am here to tell you with certainty that the earthquake in our communities **will not have the last word**. We are already protagonists of our rebirth because, although wounded in the soul, we have found ourselves more united and supportive among one another.

I am here to bear witness also to the many gestures of solidarity and KINDNESS that I received and that gave me strength to go forward and to see light in the midst of rubble. I thank the Diocesan Caritas [Catholic Charities] of Spoleto-Norcia and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. They were close to me in these very difficult months, with delicacy and with great kindness. I felt my hand held and never was left alone.

Before the earthquake, I worked in a butcher shop, but afterwards the owner could no longer guarantee me a job. Being a professional in the processing of cold cuts and cheeses, I decided to buy a van and to go to the gourmet fairs around Italy to sell my products, but also to make those of my land known. The purchase of the refrigerated van, which enabled me to start this new business, was possible thanks to the collaboration between Caritas and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

I am putting everything into it, often sacrificing time from my dearest loved ones. I like to be in the midst of people, though not everyone understands at times your distress and the difficulties that you are experiencing. I am still paying installments on a home that is no longer and this often discourages me, but I go on because in my heart I sense the presence and the humanitarian and moral help of all the people who buy our products.

I remain driven by a strong sense of hope. I am still young, but I already have experienced other “earthquakes,” in my life, such as the tragic loss of a brother tired of living. How many existential ruins, behind the death of a dear one, shake your conscience? The doubt of not having done enough grips and consumes you little by little, leaving you with a sense of emptiness that I managed to fill only by making a new family for myself.

From my family and my land I want to start again!

Thank you all!

Antonio Gianfico

Thanks Daniele, young men like you are the future of our country!

This experience, unfortunately born of a tragic event, once again has highlighted the great resources of our people, their generosity, the kindness that gives strength and hope, which unites the one who gives and the one who receives, when it is the virtue of Charity that guides our actions.

The Vincentian Charism, which is already 400 years old, teaches us that the great truths and fundamental values that govern our existence have no time, no getting old; rather, they are renewed every time we stretch out our hand to those who suffer, to those who need it even just for comfort, to those poor who are our true masters in life.

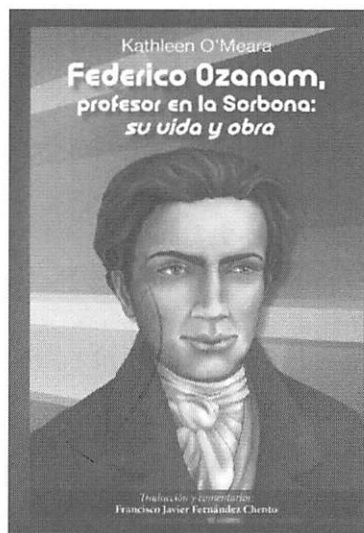
Happy Anniversary to all!

5

Bibliographical Review

Classical Biography of Frédéric Ozanam

Is Published for the First Time in Spanish



*Frederic Ozanam,
Professor At
The Sorbonne,
His Life And Works,*
written by
Kathleen O'Meara
in 1876,
has been published
in Spanish.

This work situates Frédéric Ozanam within the context of France during the first half of the 19th century, a very complex era for French Catholics and an extremely difficult period for poor people.

The publication of this work coincides with the 20th anniversary of the beatification of Frédéric Ozanam, a celebration that took place in Paris (22 August 1997) during World Youth Day and was presided by John Paul II. This publication is important for several reasons:

- The biography of O'Meara has been the source for many later biographies of Ozanam.
- The author had maintained a relationship with Amélie Soulacroix (Frédéric's widow) and her work contains details that do not appear in any other biography.
- Amélie dedicated her life to promoting the memory of her husband; that is, promoting his life, his social activity, and his commitment to charitable works on behalf of his neighbor, especially those persons who were poor.
- This work originally was written in English and this is its first Spanish translation.
- The text of the biography is introduced with a lengthy article (100 pages) dedicated to Amélie Soulacroix. There is much interest in knowing more about this exceptional woman.

The editor and translator of O'Meara's work has commented extensively on it (there are more than 1400 footnotes). Not only are the original sources identified, but complementary information is included too. This work in Spanish is an illustrated edition and, as such, contains many photographs related to the text. An onomastic appendix is at the end of this work.

If you wish to obtain a copy of this work, contact the editor at: info@chento.org

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

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Editor

Alvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM

Editorial Board

Jean Landousies, CM
Javier Álvarez Munguía, CM
Jorge Luis Rodríguez, CM
Giuseppe Turati, CM

Publication

General Curia
of the Congregation of the Mission
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Rome (Italy)
Tel. +39 06 66 13 061
Fax: +39 06 66 63 831
vincentiana@cmglobal.org

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Ceme & La Milagrosa Difusiones
García de Paredes, 45 - 28010 Madrid
Tel. 91 446 31 32 - Fax: 915932369
E-mail: lamilagrosa@telefonica.net
ceme@planalfa.es
www.editoriallamilagrosa@telefonica.net

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**In our next
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