



**CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
XLIII GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**CALLS TO
REVITALIZE THE
IDENTITY OF THE CM**

Final Document

LETTER TO ALL MISSIONARIES



"He went about doing good." (Acts 10, 38)

Dear Confreres,

We are writing to you from Rome on the occasion of the 43rd General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. We, your brothers – 115 of us – have prayed together for your concerns and those of your Provinces. We have shared our own personal stories, listened to the dreams of our young confreres, and discussed the joys and challenges of our communities and ministries. Ultimately, we felt a deep call to conversion.

The world is still struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of people are still sick, hungry and lonely. Some of us have even contracted the disease during the Assembly. This experience of vulnerability dampened our spirits, but we continued our work. In our time of need, we were mindful of the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are being denied their human rights and are being killed in senseless war, state violence and terrorism. But in the midst of this suffering, our confreres, who are caring for of the victims and survivors of these atrocities, are grateful for the support from our communities worldwide. Many people also suffer from famine caused by severe climate conditions and rising inflation. Yet the sharing of videos about the manner in which the different Provinces are responding to those who are marginalized and excluded is a great source of joy and encouragement.

In the midst of these signs of the times, we hear St. Vincent telling us: "May God be pleased to strengthen you in these hardships, enlighten you in your doubts, and bring you safely to the place where Providence intends to lead your little boat. Trust firmly in God's guidance and encourage your people to have this trust in the present disturbances; the storm will abate, and the calm will be greater and more pleasing than ever." (CCD:V: 454)

In this context, our Superior General charted the path along which our Little Company has traveled since the 2016 General Assembly. It is not possible to go into detail here, but we share some highlights. New missions *ad gentes* have been opened in Asia and Africa and several international missions have become the responsibility of individual Provinces. Several Provinces have been reconfigured in response to a decrease in numbers, but the Vincentian Family continues to expand in membership and is now present in 164 countries.

Significant numbers of confreres in difficulty have regularized their canonical status and we continue to work on structures to address the crisis of the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults more effectively.

We are also confronted with some glaring realities in the Congregation. While 483 confreres have been newly incorporated into the Congregation over the past six years, mainly from Africa, Asia-Oceania and Latin America, bringing our present number to 2,980 confreres, our numbers have actually decreased by 6.5% since 2015, when they stood at 3,187. For the most part, the number of confreres who have left the Congregation have either been incardinated into various dioceses or they have been dispensed from the obligations of the clerical state. At the same time, the number of aging and deceased members steadily increases in some Provinces.

The theme of the 2022 General Assembly, "The Revitalization of the Identity of the Congregation of the Mission", challenges us to reinterpret our charism and mission in our times. This search is not done in a vacuum because we are also aware of the ethos and temptations of the prevailing culture, that is, selfishness and individualism, defeatism and cynicism, uncritical consumption and corruption (EG 76-109), which may also impact our personal lives and those whom we serve.

In the midst of these realities, at the outset the Superior General shared with us his dreams for the Congregation: to reconnect with our roots and the origins of our charism and spirituality; to foster the culture of vocations and make vocation promotion the priority of each Province; to revitalize the presence of Brothers in the Congregation; to focus on the formation of formators; to encourage the growth of *missio ad gentes*; to revive the popular missions; to strengthen the formation of the clergy; to organize Vincentian formation centers in collaboration with the Vincentian family; to evaluate our ministries, especially in the parishes; and to strengthen the Communications Office.

In this General Assembly, we were invited to place our fragile clay at the hands of the potter (Is. 64: 8), to welcome creative ways of living our charism, and to live a "new Pentecost" so that the palpable signs of God's Kingdom might shine among us. In the midst of the uncertainties of the times, we are challenged to undertake "a journey of conversion and purification... to rediscover the foundation and identity of our call without giving way to pessimism or to the tiring frustration of those who feel powerless and prepare for the worst."¹

¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *The Gift of Fidelity the Joy of Perseverance* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), No. 2.

PART ONE: OUR PRIORITIES



Conscious of all our lights and shadows, our hopes and dreams, we tried to envision how we might strive to revitalize the identity of the Little Company during the next six years. For this, we look to Jesus, the Evangelizer of the poor who, at the start of his ministry, prophetically proclaimed the Kingdom of God as his life's mission and commitment (Luke 4: 16-21).

We also invite you and all our communities to dream with us about the following five priorities of the whole Congregation.

1. SPIRITUALITY

To Rediscover the Contemplative Dimension of the Vincentian Charism

Our spiritual life integrates and animates our community and missionary activity, which are essential to our Vincentian identity. Therefore, we commit ourselves "to put on the Spirit of Christ" and rediscover the contemplative dimension of our Vincentian spirituality as we strive constantly to be faithful to prayer, the vows, and our Vincentian virtues (C 28-50). We also commit ourselves to regular reading, reflection and praying with God's Word, to the life of the sacraments, to reading the Common Rules, the Constitutions and Statutes, and other Vincentian sources, and to participation in Vincentian formation sessions.

2. LIFESTYLE

To Foster a Culture of Encounter and the Joy of Fraternal Life

To live our commitment to God, to the poor, and to others, we feel called to become authentic missionaries who lead a simple, humble, gentle, mortified and zealous lifestyle. Therefore, in an attitude of conversion, we commit ourselves to strengthen our fraternal life "as dear friends" (Common Rules VIII:2), both among ourselves and with those we serve. This implies personal and community commitment, so that community and provincial plans include new processes for healing and growth, fostering a culture of encounter (FT 215) through honesty, accountability and economic transparency. We shall creatively use all possible resources, such as, fraternal correction and constant revision of life, among others.

3. MINISTRY OF EVANGELIZING THE POOR **To Build a Prophetic and Synodal Church**

To follow Christ, the Good Shepherd (C 11) and to learn from the example of the Good Samaritan (C 18), we will listen to the voices of those who are marginalized geographically and existentially, whose lives are literally precarious, and who live “in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20). We will work to defend the victims of hunger and poverty caused by COVID-19, war, and human trafficking. We will listen to and hear the survivors of sexual abuse who have been victims of abuse by our own confreres. We will strive to be Christ and the Good Samaritan to them.

In attending to all of these, we will revitalize the popular missions, work to protect our common home, and promote systemic change as our specific method of evangelizing. We will evaluate our works (C 12, S 1) and plan our ministries, so that, faithful to Jesus Christ, we will promote projects of evangelization with the poor and the excluded, thus, working for a more prophetic and synodal Church.

4. MINISTRY OF THE FORMATION OF THE CLERGY **To Propose a Formation Relevant to Present Challenges**

We commit ourselves to prioritize the promotion of a culture of vocations and the initial and continuing formation of our own members in view of the need for accompaniment and formation of the clergy. We also commit ourselves to carry out processes of interprovincial and Congregational collaboration that respond to the challenges of the formation of our own members and the members of the diocesan clergy today, particularly, in the area of the protection of minors and other vulnerable persons, as well as all other types of abuses.

5. MINISTRY OF THE FORMATION OF THE LAITY **To Mainstream the Social Teaching of the Church**

In the context of a digital world, we commit ourselves to create in our missions, parishes and educational institutions, centers for Vincentian formation, animated by intergenerational teams of priests and laity, and inspired by the Social Teaching of the Church. We shall also engage in formation with lay people, especially with the Vincentian Family, for a common integral “ecological conversion” (LS 217-220) and a life of “social friendship and universal fraternity” (FT 106).

PART TWO: LINES OF ACTION



The diversity in form and expressions of the Vincentian charism in multicultural contexts is a sign of the newness of the Spirit in our midst. The different Continental groups of the Congregation articulate these inculturated signs of God's Kingdom through the following lines of action.

I. AFRICA: COVIAM

- A. To be men of prayer who,
 - 1) contemplate the word of God (lectio divina, bible sharing),
 - 2) celebrate the sacraments with creative attention to our Vincentian heritage through spiritual practices (daily personal and communal prayer, monthly recollection, annual retreats, etc) that nurture life and work together as family in mission.
- B. Live modestly through, a simple and honest Lifestyle that is accountable to community directing incomes accruing from our ministries to community. (C. 32).
- C. To live as family, respectful of each other; prudent and co-responsible in the use of goods
- D. To revitalize our practice of popular mission in tune with the Church in Africa standing against all forms of poverty that dehumanizes people and dignity to migrants, displaced persons, and human trafficking (Africae Munus, NO. 84).
- E. To further train more COVIAM formators Especially,
 - 1) in the area of Mentorship and accompaniment and safeguarding training for Confreres at various stages of formation in line with *CM Ratio Formationis*
 - 2) for more involvement in Seminary and ongoing formation programs for diocesan clergy.
- F. To promote a Catholic and systemic Vincentian formation of the laity in Catechesis, Social teaching, and appreciation of the environment.

II. LATIN AMERICA: CLAPVI

We dream of a Congregation that is clothed anew in Christ and lives a profound interior life; a Congregation that is rooted in the word and in the mysticism of charity; a Congregation that is poor, austere, transparent, Samaritan, prophetic, synodal and has an ecological awareness. We are aware of our need to revitalize our own conference of CLAPVI.

A. Spirituality

- 1) To rediscover, as individuals and as a community, the passion to incarnate into the midst of the world the spirit of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor.
- 2) To implement a pastoral ministry with regard to the vow of stability on behalf of incorporated members, and to do this through a deepening of important aspects of our identity.

B. Lifestyle

- 1) To promote personal, community and provincial processes that make credible the proper demands of our state of life.
- 2) To value anew and promote the vocation of the Brother in the Congregation (the being and doing of the Brother), changing mistaken attitudes and creating concrete opportunities for the pastoral activity of the Brother.

C. Ministry of evangelization on behalf of the poor

- 1) To evaluate our work and ministries in order to see if they are in accord with our missionary, prophetic and synodal identity.
- 2) As a sign of renewal, prophesy, ecclesiality and synodality, we will enter into a relationship with other ecclesial networks and groups of men and women religious in order to better serve the poor.

D. Ministry of Formation of the Clergy

- 1) To capacitate our ministers of evangelization and the diocesan clergy as authentic disciples who configure their lives to that of Christ and who offer themselves to God and the poor.

E. Ministry of Formation of the Laity

- 1) To deepen our relationship with the laity, especially the members of the Vincentian Family and to promote respect for the dignity of the person and for creation so that we ultimately live relationships of equality and fraternity.
- 2) To form the laity so that as members of the Vincentian Family they are able to engage in prophetic, synodal and missionary activities and are able to respond to the new poverties.

III. UNITED STATES: NCV

A. Spirituality

We shall rediscover the contemplative dimension of our vocation as intimacy with Jesus Christ by:

- 1) Developing a systematic ongoing program of formation for our members;
- 2) Creating opportunities for ongoing spiritual formation through meetings, interviews, and various encounters that help our members grow in the spiritual life;
- 3) Engaging the Visitors and local superiors to mentor and accompany our members;
- 4) Designing a regular program of assessment of this line of action.

B. Lifestyle

We shall foster a culture of encounter and cultivate joy in our fraternal life by:

- 1) Attending to confreres most in need through demonstrations of care, challenges and offers of support as well as providing appropriate resources;
- 2) Promoting healthy common living that promotes healthy, happy confreres in the areas of work, service, care for personal health, continuous learning, and an appreciation for beauty;
- 3) Promoting structured and unstructured time together;
- 4) Designing a regular program of assessment of this line of action.

C. Ministry of Evangelization of the Poor

We shall build a prophetic and synodal Church by:

- 1) Listening, consulting, and prayerfully discerning in order to learn of the most pressing concerns in the Church and society so that we may respond as Vincentians in the US.
- 2) Designing a regular program of assessment of this line of action.

D. Ministry of the Formation of the Clergy

We shall propose a Program of Formation Relevant to our Challenges by:

- 1) Conducting an assessment of the needs for ongoing formation of our members across the three US provinces in light of the *Ratio Formationis* and the newly published the USCCB *Program of Priestly Formation* (5th ed).

E. Ministry of the Formation of the Laity

We shall mainstream the Social Teaching of the Church by:

- 1) Developing teams of Vincentians within our own ministries;
- 2) Drawing upon available resources that effectively present both the theory and practice of the Vincentian charism;
- 3) Designing a regular program of assessment of this line of action.

IV. ASIA AND PACIFIC: APVC

A. Spirituality

- 1) Renew our “interior life” through our traditional spiritual exercises (meditation, Eucharist, regular recollections and confessions) and regular community sharing and reflection on the Word of God and our ministries.
- 2) Regular reading of the Constitutions, Statutes and Common Rules and participation in Vincentian formation sessions.
- 3) Integrate Vincentian spirituality sessions in existing APVC formative structures.
- 4) Organize annual retreats in the next six years on Vincentian spirituality themes.
- 5) The Asia Pacific Formators meeting shall focus on Vincentian Identity and Charism.

B. Lifestyle

- 1) Make a Provincial Plan (SMART or specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) with particular emphasis on our lifestyle and sense of belongingness; and monitor this plan at regular intervals.
- 2) Make a community plan putting emphasis on reviving community practices such as meetings, revision of life, positive chapter, fraternal correction, and sharing of the joys and challenges of the ministry.
- 3) Integrate reflections on the Vincentian virtues in our Provincial and local community meetings.
- 4) Make use of digital technology to enhance connectedness, especially among confreres living separately because of the demands of the mission.

C. Ministry of Evangelizing the Poor to Build a Prophetic and Synodal Church

- 1) Revive the popular missions in all Provinces and create a “popular mission” culture by organizing systematic exposure to the popular missions among those in formation, the young confreres, and confreres from different Provinces.
- 2) Conduct an honest revision of our ministries using C.12 as criteria, identifying those in the peripheries and victims of various abuses, starting and prioritizing ministries for them.
- 3) Strengthen, expand and explore other areas for *missio ad gentes* in support of the 1% Project.
- 4) Promote systemic change as methodology for evangelization and set up viable models.
- 5) Participate in the 13 houses program of FAMVIN in support of the campaign against homelessness.

- D. Ministry of the Formation of the Clergy to Propose a Formation Relevant to Present Challenges
- 1) Organize regular ongoing programs for the diocesan clergy in the next six years. These programs shall include safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults, awareness of different forms of abuse (human trafficking, protecting the integrity of creation, etc.)
 - 2) Designate confreres to be available for spiritual retreats and accompaniment of the diocesan clergy by way of organizing programs like that of the "Tuesday conferences".
 - 3) Promote a culture of "clergy formation" among our candidates and invest in the training of formators.
 - 4) Initiate an interprovincial collaboration to share information and provide resources for the training of formators.
- E. Ministry of the Formation of the Laity to Mainstream the Social Teaching of the Church
- 1) Organize ongoing formation that includes the Social Teachings of the Church, Vincentian Spirituality, Integrity of Creation, and Respect for Human Rights for the Vincentian Family members, parish communities, youth, seminaries, and in our schools.
 - 2) Write, translate and disseminate "popular" materials on the Social Teachings of the Church.
 - 3) Explore the use of social media for the formation of the laity.
 - 4) Promote and establish the Vincentian Lay Associations like SSVP, AIC, VMY, AMM, etc. wherever we render service.

V. EUROPE AND MIDDLE EAST: CEVIM

- A. Spirituality
- 1) Cultivate our interior lives, placing Jesus Christ at the center of our life, making this known clearly and easily by our words and our works.
 - 2) Be faithful to community prayers, to daily meditation and to the practice of our spiritual exercises.
 - 3) Share our faith experiences in community, by updating our forms of repetition of prayer.
 - 4) Reflect faithfully on the word of God, the Constitutions and the teachings of St Vincent, and share in community how each of these speaks to us.
 - 5) Celebrate the Liturgy 'con gusto' having prepared for it properly and rejoice in its beauty with the people of God.
 - 6) Bring to prayer the events and life of the people.

B. Life style

- 1) Give time to community dialogue and discussion; meetings to define criteria, to plan, to discern together, to evaluate and to share achievements, difficulties and possibilities.
- 2) Ensure the community plan is set-out, carried out and evaluated in a co-responsible way, as a means of missionary vitality. Live a way of life that is sober, transparent and close to the people around us.
- 3) Live in truth; practicing, and welcoming humbly, fraternal correction, in creative forms that will be a positive support for the confreres.
- 4) Overcome individualism in our ministries and isolationism in our communities.
- 5) Participate in community moments, set-put in the common plan, with faithfulness, joy and punctuality.

C. Evangelization of those who experience Poverty

- 1) Make the character of our mission and service of charity visible in our ministries, especially in promoting Vincentian lay groups.
- 2) Be attentive to the voice of the Poor and the signs of the times.
- 3) Make concrete the Vincentian response to the reality of various forms of abuse in the Church; with the collaboration of experts, listening attentively to the victims, and, especially, including this in our formation plans.
- 4) Strengthen the popular mission teams in our provinces and up-date their content and methodologies.
- 5) Revitalize relationships between the provinces and undertake a project focussed on refugees and migrants.
- 6) Apply Systemic Change as the common method of our evangelical actions.

D. Formation of our own members and of the Clergy

- 1) Cultivate closeness, a welcoming spirit, collaboration, participation, familiarity, and openness with our brother priests.
- 2) Be available as confessors and spiritual directors.
- 3) Accompany and take care of the priests, when we are close to them during popular missions.
- 4) Share our missionary spirituality and community life which help to open new ways of priestly holiness close to the poor.
- 5) Show ourselves available to bishops to substitute for priests who need a rest or who undertake courses of formation.
- 6) Include in our plans of formation the cultivation of a listening spirit and a sensitivity to the effects of all forms of abuse in the Church.

E. Formation of the Laity.

- 1) Work with the laity in all our communities to promote the participation of the laity in the services and ministries of the ecclesial community.
- 2) Offer to parishes, freely, days of evangelization and prayer and work to attract back to the practice of faith those who have distanced themselves from the (church) community.
- 3) Cultivate an understanding of the Social Doctrine of the Church amongst lay people and cooperate in shared projects for the service of the poor.
- 4) Promote Vincentian formation, on the occasion of the anniversaries of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission and the Apparitions of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal.
- 5) Facilitate the coordination, at local and national level, of the various groups of the Vincentian Family.
- 6) Set up a team/committee that will explore the possibilities of using digital media for the formation of individuals and groups in the Vincentian Family.

CONCLUSION



Dear confreres, we are aware that the journey of each and every missionary towards an authentic living of our identity is fraught with trials and difficulties. While some experience the joy of community living, others suffer deep pain and persecution. While many are happily fulfilled in their ministries, others find themselves in very difficult circumstances. We express our solidarity to all of you.

Like St. Vincent's experience in Folleville and Chatillon, it is in our direct encounter with the poor that we become aware of our own poverty, and there, in that profound encounter with Christ in them, our need for personal and missionary conversion arises. It is the prophetic challenge of the poor that makes us leave behind our complacent lives and enter into an authentic revitalization of our identity.

"The poor, always and everywhere, evangelize *us*, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. They have much to teach us. Besides participating in the *sensus fidei*, they know the suffering Christ through their own sufferings. It is necessary that we all let ourselves be evangelized by them."² (Pope Francis)

It is only in this mystic encounter with Jesus in the person of the poor, in the act of contemplation in the midst of action, that we become spirit-filled evangelizers (EG 259-261), "evangelizers who pray and work". This is what Pope Francis told us during a private audience at the conclusion of the General Assembly.

"Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts" (EG 262). The witness of the Saints confirms to us that "what is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity. Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere

² Pope Francis, "Message to the Fifth World Day of the Poor," (14 November 2021), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/20210613-messaggio-v-giornatamondiale-poveri-2021.html>

conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out” (EG 262).³

This “interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization” (EG 288).

In our search for ways to revitalize the identity of the Congregation of the Mission in our times, we entrust each and every confrere and the whole Congregation to the maternal protection of Mary, our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. May she lead us to Jesus, the evangelizer of the poor and open our hearts to the surprises of the Spirit in our times.

³ Pope Francis, “Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the General Chapters of the Basilian Order of St. Josaphat, the Order of the Mother of God and the Congregation of the Mission,” Clementine Hall, Vatican City, 14 July 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/july/documents/20220714-capitoligenerali.html>