

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 29 May 2005
Solemnity of Corpus Christi

To the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

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

At the 11th meeting of the heads of some of the principal branches of the International Vincentian Family, which was held from 28-30 January in Paris, we looked at the most important activities of 2004 and those planned for 2005 for each one. It happens that all the lay branches have assemblies or international meetings this year: the AIC in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 11-13 February; the SSVF in Salamanca, Spain, from 19-23 June; the JMV in Paris, France, from 7-12 August; the AMM in Rome from 24-28 October and MISEVI in the Berceau, France, from 26-30 December. We also evaluated the campaigns of recent years. We all agreed that the campaigns were an occasion to become more united as the Vincentian Family in the various countries where we are. We would like to share with you some reflections from our dialogue on the activities of the Vincentian Family (appendix 1).

As we do every year, around this time, we are writing to encourage you to begin **the preparation for the “Day of Prayer of the Vincentian Family,”** which is held around 27 September.

After a lengthy reflection on the most recent world events and the different situations of poverty and marginalization, we decided that the theme for this next year will be “Vincentian Solidarity,” with the motto:

***“United as the Vincentian Family in solidarity
with the most vulnerable”***

We believe that this theme is thought-provoking and we hope that, everywhere, you will identify the situations of our most

vulnerable brothers and sisters and respond to these close and concrete circumstances in your countries. Who might be the most vulnerable in our respective countries? You have the answer. They might be the street children, the elderly who live alone and abandoned, the indigenous peoples, the women, the victims of natural disasters, etc. The celebrations around the feast of our founder, St. Vincent de Paul, will be held in this context.

In appendix 2, we present to you some situations of vulnerability in different contexts of the world. Without a doubt, each of you know other situations of vulnerability closer to you.

We are certain that you know other realities of poverty among the defenseless in your respective countries. We would like the different branches of the Vincentian Family or the National Councils of the Vincentian Family to identify these poverties and from their own real possibilities to develop projects for intervention, taking into account the three levels or phases of intervention: consciousness-raising or “political action,” educational action and concrete actions; all of this to respond to these situations of poverty. We invite you to develop, yourselves, proposals for the prayer around the feast of St. Vincent and to involve all the Family in it.


We are experiencing a privileged moment of the Holy Spirit’s action in the Vincentian Family. Let us live our Vincentian vocation with creative fidelity.

We conclude with these words of St. Vincent: *“Let us go then, my brothers, and apply ourselves with a new love to serve the poor, and even to seek out the poorest and most abandoned; let us recognize before God that they are our lords and our masters, and that we are unworthy to render them our little services”* (SV XI, 393).

May God grant us to live in unity as the Vincentian Family and to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable.

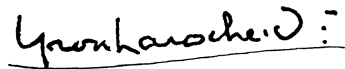
Happy Feast for the Feast of St. Vincent!

Your brothers and sisters in St. Vincent,



Marina Costa
President,
AIC

(Founded in 1617)

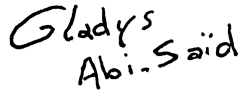


Yvon Laroche, rsv
Superior General,
Religious of St. Vincent de Paul

(Founded in 1845)



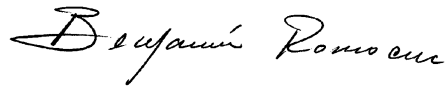
G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General,
Congregation of the Mission
(Founded in 1625)



Gladys Abi-Said
President,
Vincentian Marian Youth
(Founded in 1847)



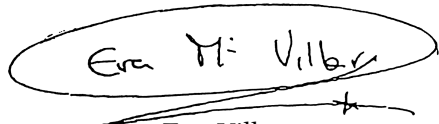
Sr; Evelyne Franc, D.C.
Superioress General,
Daughters of Charity
(Founded in 1633)



Benjamín Romo, C.M.
International Coordinator,
Association of the Miraculous Medal
(Founded in 1909)



José Ramón Díaz Torremocha
President,
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
(Founded in 1833)



Eva Villar
President,
MISEVI
(Founded in 1999)

APPENDIX 1

As we do every year, around this time, we are writing to encourage you to begin the preparation for the “Day of Prayer of the Vincentian Family,” which is held around 27 September. We also would like to share with you some reflections from our dialogue on the activities of the Vincentian Family:

1. **Campaign of the Vincentian Family since 2001:** *“The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger”* (www.secretariadojmv.org/inter/proyecto_hambre/2004/english/pagina_principal_hambre_ing.htm).

This has yielded good results. At least 160 projects have been organized throughout the world.

There are many more of which we have not received any information. While the campaign has concluded, the concrete actions in each country and in the different branches of the Vincentian Family are continuing.

2. **Campaign of the Vincentian Family since 2003:** *“Political Action Against Malaria”* (www.famvin.org/malaria/).

The person in charge of the campaign noted that this type of campaign has three phases: 1) consciousness-raising; 2) educating and 3) concrete projects. The campaign is in the first phase (consciousness-raising).

Opinions were varied: some said that the campaign had achieved its objective; others, that it had failed. Everyone recognized the valuable work of the person in charge of the campaign. As a Family, little by little, we are becoming aware that “political action” is an essential expression of charity.

We agreed **to conclude** the “political action” (1st phase) of the campaign on 27 September 2005. We also asked the person in charge to continue on the educational level (2nd phase), for which a document, *Health Manual Against Malaria*, will be translated. It will be sent, through the various branches, to the countries where this scourge exists. Finally, we decided to support these countries in developing concrete actions (3rd phase). It is well to keep in mind that in all the phases we should involve, in the measure possible, the very persons to whom the campaign is addressed.

3. **Campaign of the Vincentian Family from 27 September 2004 to 27 September 2005:** *The Year of Youth in the Vincentian*

Family: "Sharing the charism with all generations." Prayer - Formation - Service.

This year had been for us, as the Vincentian Family, an opportunity to draw closer to young people, recognize their leadership and help them to learn the richness of our charism. It is urgent that youth have a real experience of meeting the very person of Jesus Christ in the poor. We continue to share our Vincentian charism with young people through a witness of holiness of life in the service of the poor.

The JMV, in the name of the entire Vincentian Family, will organize the Third Vincentian Youth Meeting, during the 20th World Day of Youth in Cologne, Germany, 2005, from 15-21 August, with the theme: "*With Mary, we come to adore you and serve you in the poor.*" This will be the culmination of the International Year of Youth in the Vincentian Family.

4. Collaboration in the development of formation and information

- 4.1 Vincentian materials have been translated in Madagascar and Hungary. Future translation projects and adaptation of materials are foreseen for Vietnam, Mozambique, Nigeria, Congo, Ukraine, China, Ethiopia, Eritrea, etc.
- 4.2 Develop a collaboration network for financing, translating and diffusing formation material through Fr. Manuel Ginete, Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family.
- 4.3 Prepare a three-page leaflet for diffusion by the principal branches of the Family at World Youth Day.
- 4.4 Update the dossier for presenting the principal branches of the Vincentian Family.

5. Update: tsunami

- 5.1 Draft a Message of Solidarity for the members of the Vincentian Family in Southeast Asia struck by the tsunami. It will be sent to all the branches of the Vincentian Family via Internet.
- 5.2 The SSVP will organize a meeting to study the situation in Southeast Asia and develop a plan of aid. It will be on 19 April in Salamanca. All the branches were invited to send a representative.

APPENDIX 2

1. ***The State of the World's Children 2005.*** To be a child is a terrible experience for at least half the population of children in the world. UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, indicates this in its report on *The State of the World's Children 2005*. This year's report details that poverty, conflicts and AIDS are the principal threats for minors.
- 1.1 **Poverty.** In order to gauge the impact of poverty, the investigators of *The State of the World's Children 2005* based their report on studies from the University of Bristol and the London School of Economics. According to them, the principal elements for measuring the levels of poverty and the denial of children's rights are: shelter, nutrition, sanitation facilities, water, access to basic health care services, education and information. It is estimated that around 110 million children in Latin America live in poverty situations. It is chiefly the children of indigenous origin or African descent who are the most excluded. On a worldwide scale, 180 million children are trapped in the worse forms of child labor. Some 1.2 million children are annually victims of child trafficking and at least two million are exploited in the sex industry.
- 1.2 **Armed Conflicts.** *The State of the World's Children 2005* details that children are more and more the targets in armed conflicts. Around half of the 3.6 million people who died in conflicts during the 90s were less than 18 years of age. The principal consequences of this course of action in conflicts is reflected in the millions of children who are injured or disabled, are victims of sexual violence, traumas, hunger and disease.
- 1.3 **AIDS.** The death and sickness suffered by millions of adults due to AIDS wreck havoc in the lives of children and the number of minors who die from this disease is increasing. Among the principal repercussions of the epidemic on children is the surge of orphans caused by AIDS. HIV/AIDS destroys communities, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, since not only are parents and relatives dying, but also teachers, farmers, and others offering basic human services. The orphans are particularly vulnerable because they have nothing to defend themselves. For example, children whose parents died from AIDS, whether they are bearers of the virus or not, suffer from discrimination or are badly treated by people who are scared of the disease and ignorant of how it is transmitted. Many orphans have left school to earn money to survive and to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. The orphans are not the only children who

suffer the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Around three million young people, who are not all orphans, live with HIV. Millions more have to care for their ill parents and their brothers and sisters, or have lost their loved ones.

1.4 Street Children. Of the thousands of kids who live on the principal streets of Romania, the majority are minors. They are more than 5000, half of them concentrated on the streets of Bucharest. This information was released by the Romanian branch of the organization, "Save the Children." Its director explained that "children and youth who live in the street, without any help from relatives or institutions, are considered 'homeless.' The majority support themselves by washing cars, selling objects, collecting products for recycling, or asking for alms. Many are obliged to become prostitutes and an ever-increasing number of homeless minors and young people take hard drugs like heroin."

1.5 Children of the Tsunami. A third of those injured by the disaster in Southeast Asia were children. There is information that in some of the affected countries, traffickers in minors are exploiting the minors because they are left on their own. The mafia of child sexual exploitation and illegitimate adoption saw in this crisis an opportunity for its ends. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) confirmed some cases of child trafficking, as well as the use of cell phone text messages to make offers of children between three and ten years of age coming from the Island of Sumatra.

The humanitarian organization, Childwatch, verified the disappearance of 130 Thai orphans in Phuket and, on this same island, the person in charge of the women's refugee camp reported that, 24 hours after the tragedy, foreigners showed up offering to adopt minors in exchange for money. There have already been reports of sexual violence against the child population, many of them orphans who are counted among the million displaced persons. For this reason it is necessary to be alert to the mafias established in Indonesia, who could hand over the children to networks in trafficking of minors and sell them for forced labor or as sexual slaves in richer countries. The paradises of south Asia are not the only attraction for thousands of tourists who travel to these destinations. They also seek the commerce of prostitution and child pornography, as well as sex tourism with minors.

The break up of institutions, caused by the tsunamis of last 26 December, has left open a door to criminal exploitation, without scruples, of the most vulnerable. The illegal traffic in human beings is a more profitable business than traffic in drugs or arms. For this reason, the international community took a

series of steps to register all the displaced children, provide them with immediate safe care, locate their families, place a temporary moratorium on minors under 16 leaving the country and increase frontier controls to avoid illegal adoptions.

- 2. Indigenous peoples** living in broad areas on the earth's surface. Spread out over the world, from the Arctic to the South Pacific, they amount to, according to an approximate calculation, some 300 million people. Among the numerous indigenous peoples are the Indians of the American continent (for example, the Maya of Guatemala or the Aymara of Bolivia), the Inuit and the Aleutian of the polar region, the Sámis of Northern Europe, the aboriginals and islanders of the Torres Strait of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. Many of these, like the majority of other indigenous peoples, have preserved their social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics, which are clearly distinct from the other sectors of the national population.

Throughout the history of humanity, every time that neighboring, domineering peoples increased their territory or that colonizers coming from distant lands seized new lands by force, they put at risk the cultures and the sustenance — including the existence — of the indigenous peoples.

The threats against the cultures and the lands of the indigenous peoples, against their juridical situation and against their other rights established by law, as different groups and as citizens, do not always assume the same forms as in the past. Although some groups have attained a relative success, indigenous peoples in almost the entire world struggle to obtain recognition of their identities and their forms of life.

- 3. Migrants.** Migrants are those who have left their lands in search of a better life, forming a veritable human wave which flows through the world and is ever increasing. Today, there are 175 million and in 2050 there will be 230 million, according to a demographic prediction, when the world population reaches nine billion. These data appear in the Annual Report on Migration of the International Organization for Migration (OIM), which gathers information from 101 countries and follows the migratory flows in their political, economic and social aspects. Migrations have existed throughout the history of humankind and depend on various factors, like the poverty of the countries of origin, natural, political and social tragedies and the demand for labor. Because of these factors, migration cannot be blocked, but confronted as a human phenomenon that, in the end, can produce benefits for the migrants and their countries of origin, as well as those that welcome them.

In 2002, 2.9% of the world population fell into the category of migrants; that is, one in every 35 persons left his/her land: men and women in search of a better future, generally leaving the southern hemisphere and heading toward the richer countries of the north. This migratory flow can change the demography of countries. Clandestine migration and human trafficking, not checked by the OIM, are criminal and illicit activities, but highly lucrative ones. Reliable statistics do not exist, but, by the approximate police evaluation of various countries, there would be more than two million persons (illegal migrants, women and children for prostitution), whose traffic generates ten billion dollars for criminal organizations.

4. Women

4.1 Women. The feminization of poverty is “another form of violence against women.” The majority of the 1.5 billion people who live with one dollar a day or less are women. The gap which separates men from women trapped in the cycle of poverty has continuously widened in the last decade. On the average, women earn a bit less than 50% of what men earn. Women who live in poverty often are deprived of access to resources of critical importance, such as loans, land, and inheritance. Their work is not recompensed or recognized. Their needs in the area of health care and nutrition are not priorities. They lack adequate access to education and support services and their participation in decision-making in the home and the community is minimum.

Trapped in a cycle of poverty, women lack access to resources and services in order to change their situations. The following data speak to us of the marginalized situation of women: three-fifths of the 115 million children without schooling are girls and two-thirds of the 879 million illiterate are women; women have the highest mortality rate in many countries, especially in southern and eastern Asia; more than 500,000 women die annually during pregnancy and childbirth, these deaths being most likely in sub-Saharan Africa; half of the cases of HIV/AIDS affect women; the number of women who are objects of sexual deals and subjugated to fluctuating work slavery, according to the data, is between 700,000 and 4,000,000 persons. Only 139 countries of the UN have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

4.2 Women Migrants. According to an estimation of the International Labor Organization (ILO), there are presently some 90 million people in the world involved in international migration, excluding refugees and those seeking asylum, and approximately half of them are women. In many countries, the

migration of women in search of work is much greater than that of men. Images persist of the “typical migrant”: the working migrant is a man, almost always young and works for economic motives.

There are presently two worrying tendencies in feminine migration: First of all, it is clearly noted that, in many parts of the world, women migrants are concentrated in vulnerable occupations, such as domestic service, “entertainment” (including forced participation in the sex sector), and caring for children and the sick. The vulnerability of these works comes from the high degree of subordination which exists between them and their employers. This vulnerability is accentuated by the fact that these sectors tend to be excluded from national labor legislation and from the tools that regulate international migration. Secondly, the participation of women in international labor traffic, which often, although not always, adopts diverse forms of forced labor, is another worrying feature that demands international attention.