

Rome, 31 October 2005
Eve of the Solemnity of All Saints
Mission Appeal 2005

To all the Missionaries of the Congregation

Dear Brothers in St. Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I would like to begin by sharing some reflections that I also shared with the members of the Curia House when we were on retreat together during the week of 25-30 September. It fell on me to celebrate the Eucharist on the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul. Based on the traditional readings for the theme of mission, I would like to encourage all the members of the Congregation of the Mission to deepen their own sense of identity as missionaries. For, as it says in our Constitutions (52): "Among the members, all of whom share in the royal priesthood of Christ through baptism and confirmation, there are clerics and brothers, **but all are known as missioners.**"

1. I want to encourage all missioners to maintain deep within their hearts and within their apostolic expression an enthusiasm, unequal to any other enthusiasm, for sharing in the great mission of Jesus Christ in evangelizing the poor.

To evangelize the poor is a mission so sublime that it is, par excellence, the mission of the Son of God; and we are applied to it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what he had done on earth.... Indeed, it is something worthy of a missionary to have and keep this desire of going to the missions..., of assisting the poor people in the way that Our Lord would assist them, if he were still on earth, and finally to turn one's attention to living and dying in this holy work (SV XII, 80, 82-83; Conference 195 "On the End of the Congregation of the Mission").

I just ask that you reflect on what St. Vincent told his missionaries in this conference of 6 December 1658.

2. We must be aware of the need to enkindle continually within ourselves the spirit of humility, as reflected in the reading from 1 Corinthians (1:26-29):

Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world

to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.

Please reflect on this characteristic virtue of which St. Vincent was so fond.

3. The third point is taken from the motto of the Congregation of the Mission, Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

In order to announce the Word of God as it is set forth here and as it has been witnessed to down through the ages, one also has to denounce the injustices that are ever present. To do so, one needs courage. So we ask the Lord to deepen, in the hearts of all his missionaries, the gift of courage.

Those are three things, as I begin this Mission Appeal Letter, which I ask you to reflect on in terms of each of us being missionaries: our state of enthusiasm, our state of humility, and our state of courage for the world in which we live, as we all announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to the poor.

A. UPDATE ON THE MISSION SITUATION

Since my last Mission Appeal Letter we were able to place three confreres in different mission works.

- The first to respond was Fr. Rafał Brukarczyk, from the Province of Poland, former missionary in El Alto. He volunteered to go to the mission in Moskitia, Honduras. As of 15 September, Rafał is there, working together with another two confreres in an area called Patuca.
- The second confrere who responded to the appeal was Fr. Claudio Santangelo from the Province of Rome, Italy. He has volunteered to go to Istanbul, in the Province of Austria. He has a special interest for deepening his understanding of the world of Islam and its interrelationship with Christianity.
- The third confrere is Fr. Greg Walsh, from the Province of Australia, who responded to the invitation to be a missionary in the Solomon Islands, where he will begin his duties in the upcoming school year.

I received letters from a number of other volunteers, but for one reason or another, we were not able to place them at this time. I am grateful to these three confreres and to all the confreres who consider responding to this Mission Appeal Letter, because the needs for serving in different parts of the Congregation throughout the world are great.

At this time I would like to present the possibilities for volunteers for this year 2005.

B. MISSIONS NEEDING VOLUNTEERS

a) *El Alto, Bolivia (international mission dependent on the General Curia)*

As we are all well aware, one of our missionaries there, Franc Pavlič, from the Province of Slovenia, died this past year, after having served generously for five years. Before his death, the mission team in El Alto was asking for confreres. We had also received a letter from the Bishop of El Alto, asking for a team of missionaries to help in the area of formation. So I put out this urgent appeal for missionaries for El Alto. At this time, there are three confreres serving there: Aníbal Vera (Peru), Abdo Eid (Orient), and Diego Plá (Madrid). We are looking for volunteers who could work in the mission itself and who would also be willing to accompany our candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. They could also volunteer as candidates for forming a new team of formators for the diocesan clergy of El Alto. The languages needed are Spanish and Aymara. This is certainly our most difficult mission, even in terms of the physical conditions. A number of people have offered to go to the missions, but declined El Alto, because of the effects the altitude would have on their own health.

Please ask the Lord to speak to your heart if you are able to respond positively to this urgent appeal for our international mission in El Alto.

b) *Mozambique*

The second most urgent need, this one in Africa, is in Mozambique. Both our vice-province there, as well as the mission of Nacala, which belongs to the Province of Salamanca, have a great need for missionaries. The mission in Nacala, in addition to the two confreres from Salamanca (José Eugenio López García and David Fernández Núñez), has a confrere from another province (Sergio Asengo from Costa Rica). Between the vice-province and the mission of Nacala, there is a possibility of losing eight missionaries within the next year. Their contracts are running out and, for one reason or another, many are discerning not to return to the mission. So I

urgently ask you to consider the Vice-Province of Mozambique or the Mission of Nacala. The language needed is Portuguese first of all, and then some local languages.

c) Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius

The third most urgent need is for missionaries for the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. This is another very difficult mission, which, nonetheless, has great promise and enthusiasm for the future of the Church, where the faith, after having been suppressed for so many years, is being awakened in a lively manner in some places, but with much difficulty in others. It really calls for men to witness to a love of Jesus Christ in evangelizing the poor. The particular interest in the vice-province is to have men who can help to staff a mission in the near future which we will be assuming in Vilnius, Lithuania. The common language in the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius is Russian. In Vilnius, the language is Lithuanian. Many of the confreres speak Polish. As you may know, the vice-province is supported in a special way by the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, but they are not able to respond to all the needs that we are experiencing at this time in the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

d) Albania (Provinces of Italy)

Albania is a mission confided to the Province of Naples, with the assistance of the Provinces of Rome and Turin. However, these provinces are unable to supply all the necessary personnel. At present, there are only four missionaries in two places. I personally have a lot of hope for the mission. When I visited there last May, I found that, especially in Scutari, there is a very alive, animated parish, full of youth, with a wonderful desire to know Jesus and a thirst for God. There is work to be done in terms of evangelization. The languages are Italian and Albanian.

e) Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (international missions dependent on the General Curia)

Another urgent need, which would help us respond more faithfully to Pope John Paul's challenge to us during the General Assembly, is to form formators, to work in seminaries.

Many generations of priests have reason to thank your Congregation for the formation they have received at your hands. The importance of this apostolate cannot be overstated. Consequently it is essential to assign exemplary priests to this work: priests of human and spiritual maturity, pastoral

experience, professional competence, capable of working with others (cf. Pastores Dabo Vobis, 66). Many Vincentians with these very qualities nobly dedicated themselves to priestly formation in the past. I encourage you to continue this vital mission in the years to come.

The particular challenge of the Pope will be taken up as part of the plan of the General Council in trying to promote the end of the Congregation of the Mission through the formation of the clergy in new and creative ways. Along this line we have openings for missionaries in our international mission in the Solomon Islands, as well as Papua New Guinea.

I am delighted to announce that the Asian Pacific Visitors' Conference has accepted to assume the personnel question of the seminary in the Solomon Islands, expanding it in the year 2007 from a philosophy seminary to also include a theology seminary. At the same time, in the petition made to the Superior General, they want to maintain this mission open to other confreres from outside the APVC area. The confreres presently serving in that mission are: Francisco Vargas (Philippines), Victor Bieler (Indonesia), Ivica Gregurec (Slovenia), Agustinus Marsup (Indonesia), Marek Owskiak (Poland), and Joseva Tuimavule (Australia).

The language needed in both the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea is English, as well as the native languages of the areas in which we serve there. Both missions are centered on formation work, but there are many other apostolates, of a pastoral nature, in which the confreres are involved. It is very encouraging to see the formators involved in other pastoral activities, along with the seminarians as they prepare for priesthood.

We have also received a petition from Bishop Cesare Bonivento of the Diocese of Vanimo in Papua New Guinea. He is in dire need of someone to be the rector of his seminary at this time and then, hopefully, for a team of formators from the Congregation of the Mission. Once again, the language needed is English. It would be nice to be able to establish another team in Papua New Guinea, as a way too of supporting the confreres who are there now: Rolando Santos (Philippines), Homero Marín (Colombia) and Tulio Cordero (Puerto Rico).

f) Province of China

Another urgent need is for members of the Congregation to consider serving as missionaries in China. These volunteers would be members of the Province of China and would work in any part of the province, either in Taiwan or on mainland China. There are a number of confreres who are preparing themselves to go to mainland China when there is a greater openness to evangelization there, as well as others already present in a silent, yet significant, way.

g) *Moskitia, Honduras (Province of Barcelona, Spain)*

Another need for missionaries is, once again, Moskitia in Honduras. Although we have a confrere who volunteered and has been placed there this past year, he will be replacing a confrere who we are losing, in one sense. Luis Solé was a faithful missionary in the Moskitia area and has been named Bishop of Trujillo. The language needed is Spanish, then eventually the local language of the people.

h) *Province of Ecuador*

Along the same lines of responding to the Pope's challenge in regard to formation is the need for missionaries available to help serve in Ecuador. The language needed is Spanish. Again, this is an opportunity not only for formators, but missionaries as well to help support our confreres in Ecuador, which is a very small province.

i) *Province of Austria*

1. *Istanbul, Turkey*

For those who wish to continue deepening their understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Islam, I once again put out the petition to serve in St. Georg's High School in Istanbul, which is part of the Province of Austria.

2. *Evangelization Team in the Province of Austria*

There is also a team of missionaries from the Province of Austria, who have requested missionaries to get involved in their project of a new mission for Europe. This is under the auspices of the "Institute St. Justinus" and is totally dedicated to the work of primary evangelization. "I can therefor only highly recommend your Institute to everybody. May it continue to grow and expand and may it find full support in all clerical levels of the Church" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 9 February 2005).

j) *Thessalonica, Greece (Province of Paris)*

The Archbishop of Corfu, Zante, and Cephalonia, who is also Apostolic Administrator of Thessalonica, where our confreres are in Greece, came to see me with a request. He mentioned that the Vincentians have a real presence there and have had so for a long time. He would not want that to be lost. He pleaded for another confrere for Thessalonica. He also mentioned that, in the past, the confreres had a large house in Cavala, which they have had to leave. It is now an empty house. If possible, he would like to have another community there with two or more confreres. The language is Greek.

These are the needs and these are the petitions that I present to you. If there are confreres who have the desire to respond to a need somewhere in the world in the Congregation of the Mission, whether it be in an international mission or in one of a particular province mentioned, please let me know. At the end of this letter you will find the information needed to volunteer, after having discussed the matter with your Visitor. I would then get back to you after having discussed it with the members of the General Council.

C. FINANCIAL APPEAL

I would like to thank all the provinces and confreres who continue to provide financial support for the missions of the Congregation. At each *tempo forte* council meeting the Treasurer General presents a list of those who have given to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF) in support of the missions. I am often touched by the generous outpouring of support for the missions by so many confreres and provinces.

These donations to the VSF are being used to fund the Micro-Project Grants (projects of \$ 5000 or less) submitted by our missionary provinces. We have already begun receiving and funding Micro-Project Grants and will continue to do so at each *tempo forte* meeting. You will be able to read about some of these projects in upcoming issues of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) bulletin.

I do not find it easy asking for financial contributions, but I sincerely appreciate the generous response to my appeal last year. Once again, I ask you simply to reflect on whether you as an individual or a local community can make a contribution, small or large, to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. I also ask each of the Visitors to discuss with the members of the council whether his province might be able to make a contribution, small or large. At the end of this letter you will find a sheet that will provide you with the instructions as to how this can be done.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!" (Isaiah 52:7).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General