

Rome, 15 March 2006
Feast of St. Louise de Marillac

“Love is infinitely creative”

(SV XI, 146)

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

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

I write with regard to our most recent *tempo forte* council meeting from 6-10 March.

1. We discussed the possible **International Development Office** for the Congregation of the Mission. We received a first report from Fr. Carl Pieber and the ad hoc committee he chaired on this possible project. We are not at the point where we want to begin the Development Office, but we will continue to look for different ways to solicit funds to help us match the very generous offer that has been made which will help us to establish patrimonial funds for the remaining poorer provinces of the Congregation.
2. We talked about the **Vincentian holy places**, based on a meeting that I had with the Visitor of Toulouse and the Superior of the Maison-Mère on the Rue de Sèvres. There is a real interest on the part of the council to try to fulfill one of the postulata from the General Assembly, which asked that we might highlight the historical memory of the Congregation of the Mission, in particular, St. Vincent's birthplace in the Berceau and the Chapel on the Rue de Sèvres where his body rests. We hope, in some way, to encourage the entire Vincentian Family to promote these holy places as a way of helping us to deepen our charism and Vincentian spirituality.
3. Also present at the *tempo forte* meeting was the **Commission for the Revision of the Statutes**. The 2004 General Assembly proposed that we consider a revision of the Statutes for the 2010 General Assembly. The members of the Commission are: Frs. Alberto Vernaschi (Rome - coordinator), Giuseppe Turati (Turin), Juan Julián Díaz Catalán (Co-Director of CIF), Eli Chaves dos Santos (Rio de Janeiro), and Paul Golden (Midwest USA). A letter will be sent to the Visitors shortly concerning the process for the revision of the Statutes. It will take into

consideration participation from the grassroots level, including the Visitor and his Council, the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico in 2007, and Domestic Assemblies as preparation for the 2010 General Assembly.

4. The **Commission to help confreres in difficult situations** was also present at our meeting. The members of that Commission are: Frs. Varghese Thottamkara (Procurator General - coordinator), Michael Joyce (Midwest USA), Wiel Bellemakers (Holland) and Carlos Albeiro Velásquez Bravo (Colombia). The purpose of the Commission was to prepare a workshop (Rome, 10-16 January 2007) to help Visitors and/or persons they designate to learn to facilitate processes for helping confreres in difficult situations.

We hope that it will have a two-fold purpose: a forum to discuss why confreres get into difficult situations and how we might be able to prevent such desertions from the Congregation; and a means of preparing confreres to help those in difficult situations and/or to facilitate the process of separating them from the Congregation legally. This Commission prepared a questionnaire for the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission to help it orient the direction this workshop will take.

5. We discussed the report of the first meeting of the **Think Tank Commission**, which had met the previous week from 27 February to 2 March. The members of this Commission are: Frs. Robert P. Maloney (USA Eastern - coordinator), Norberto Carcellar (Philippines), Pedro Opeka (Madagascar), Joseph Foley (USA Eastern, UN NGO Representative for the CM), Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C. (Great Britain), Mrs. Patricia de Nava (AIC), and Mr. Eugene Smith (SSVP). There were also two resource persons who participated in this first meeting: Fr. Dan McDonald, S.J., from the Gregorian University in Rome and Mr. Marco Tavanti from the Vincent De Paul Leadership Project of De Paul University in Chicago.

Their mandate had as its object to bring about systemic change through the apostolates of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially those ministering to the oppressed poor. They had a very lively interchange, speaking about effective strategies flowing from their experience of our Vincentian tradition in the service of the poor. It is a project that was originally established to promote the creativity of the members of the Congregation of the Mission, but we want to make this a Commission that is open to serve the entire Vincentian Family.

6. We discussed the search for a **new Treasurer General**. Fr. Elmer Bauer has asked us to begin looking for his replacement. Elmer has served generously in this position for seven years, so

we discussed possible candidates to replace him. He has assured us that he will be willing to remain as long as the transition with the new Treasurer requires. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Elmer for his fine service as the Treasurer General.

7. We also reflected on a memorandum from the Secretary General on the **statistics of the Congregation for 2005**. There were many interesting points. As of the end of 2005, there are 3424 incorporated members of the Congregation of the Mission. We have 918 non-ordained students. We have another 592 admitted members and aspirants to the Congregation. Seventy confreres died last year. When we examined our ministries, that with the greatest number of confreres is parish ministry, in which there are 877 priests, 22 brothers and 17 deacons, not including missionary parishes. The second category in which the greatest number of confreres work is missionary parishes with 213 priests, ten deacons and seven brothers. I find striking the gap between these first and second ministries in terms of the number of confreres involved in them. This needs to be reflected on seriously by the entire Congregation of the Mission.
8. We also did the evaluation of the **CIF program**. The highlights of that are some new initiatives that are being taken on by the coordinators of the program. One is a session having to do with community and apostolic leadership. This program will take place from 18 June to 14 July 2006. Also for this year, the 21st Ongoing Formation Program will be held from 10 September to 8 December. It is open to those who speak Spanish, Portuguese and English. The Heritage Program will only be held once this year from 30 April to 27 May and is for Spanish and Italian speakers. This program has had a very positive response so far in terms of participation.

The other new initiative is a mini-CIF program, which the directors will be offering in the summer of 2007. More details about that will be forthcoming. We also encouraged the directors to be actively involved in other programs of the Congregation, such as SIEV (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies), as well as an openness to doing ongoing formation for the Conferences of CLAPVI, COVIAM, and APVC, in order to collaborate in the formation of confreres in those provinces. I take this opportunity to thank Frs. Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán for their generous service to the Congregation at the international level in and through the development of the CIF program.

9. In the quarterly report that Brother Peter Campbell gives us on the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**, he noted that the office was

able to secure, from December to March, close to \$200,000 in funding for 13 projects, eight of which were fully funded and five were partially funded. The office was also able to award \$15,000 in Micro-Project Grants to three projects. Other news from the Vincentian Solidarity Office is that Peter and his office are now working together to co-fund projects with COVIDE-AMVE, which is a Vincentian organism for cooperation for development and missionary action out of Spain, directed by Brother Francisco Berbegal Vázquez.

I take this occasion to thank publicly Brother Peter Campbell and Mr. Scott Fina for the fine work they are doing to help procure monies to underwrite projects presented by poorer provinces of the Congregation.

10. We had the report of Fr. Manuel Ginete, **Delegate for the Vincentian Family**. Among the interesting things that he mentioned in his report was the meeting of the heads of the International Vincentian Family in Paris from 27-29 January 2006. The main topics taken up at that meeting were the reports from each group on the activities of 2005 and projects for 2006, presentation on the De Paul Leadership Project, presentation on the Depaul Foundation, discussion on criteria for belonging to the Vincentian Family, report on the Campaign Against Malaria, presentation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's African Project and a general discussion on annual themes and international projects.

He also reported on the Fourth Meeting of the Latin American Vincentian Family in Bogotá, Colombia, from 12-18 February 2006. In place of Fr. Ginete, Sr. María Pilar López, who is the Executive Secretary of the Vincentian Family Office here in the Curia, participated and gave a talk on the spiritual dynamism of our solidarity with those most vulnerable. There were 117 participants from at least 11 different branches of the Vincentian Family in Latin America.

11. We had the report from Fr. Alfredo Becerra, who is responsible for **Vincentiana, Nuntia, and the website** here at the Curia (www.cmglobal.org). In his report on *Vincentiana*, he mentioned that the following issues remain to be published for 2005: 4 and 5, which will deal with the five Vincentian virtues today, and 6 which will be a second volume highlighting some lesser-known confreres. Alfredo also gave a rundown of the themes of *Vincentiana* for 2006. The first issue will deal with Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* and the Vincentian charism.
12. We had a report from Fr. John Freund on the **famvin website**. Among other interesting things that John mentioned is the

project that he did in conjunction with the members of SIEV, which is a collection of *Vincentiana* on CD. One hundred copies of these are now available.

13. Fr. José Antonio Ubillús, the **Assistant for the Missions**, presented his first draft of the Statutes of the International Missions. We also discussed an informal report on the Superior General's visit to the international mission of El Alto, Bolivia, from 18-25 February. The mission at this time has three missionaries and five places of apostolic activity. The confreres are: Frs. Aníbal Vera (Peru), the superior; Abdo Eid (Orient), the veteran of the group and accompanier of the three candidates in the discernment house; Diego Plá (Madrid), the youngest of the missionaries.

They are awaiting the arrival of two new missionaries who have been assigned there: Fernando Sánchez (Argentina), who will arrive shortly; and Cyrille de Nanteuil (Paris), who will join the missionary team sometime in the near future. We discussed the names of two more volunteers for the missions whose letters have arrived on the desk of the Superior General. At this time we are doing the usual consultation with regard to their future placement.

These are some of the matters we discussed in our last *tempo forte*.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General