

FEATURE:

The Vincentian Family

Rome, April 2006

*To the members of the Vincentian Family
throughout the world*

Dear brothers and sisters:

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

We are experiencing a time of grace in the Vincentian Family. The Vincentian charism continues to be a blessing for the poor, for the Church and for society. Every day, all of us, members of the Vincentian Family, become more aware of that. To live the Vincentian charism today is to be evangelizers and witnesses of charity.

I would like to place in your hands the present dossier, which contains updated information on various branches of the Vincentian Family. The first of its kind was published 11 years ago, in September 1995.

The purpose of this dossier is to contribute to the knowledge of some branches of the Vincentian Family, so that we might value the special characteristic of each one of them, encourage union within the Vincentian Family and develop common projects in favor of the poor.

Let us live our identity as Vincentian evangelizers! We can only be evangelizers in our times by being aware of the major changes that humanity and today's society have undergone, by overcoming the inertia of remaining anchored in the past, and by undertaking, generously and joyfully, urgent responses to the questions of today's poor.

This requires living our spiritual patrimony, our charism with fidelity. Authentic fidelity is always a return to the sources and a response to the challenges of the poor at the present moment.

The present situation of globalization has consequences for the poor and Vincentians cannot remain indifferent to it.

The “more than 1000 million” people living in extreme or absolute poverty in the world today constitute a challenge for any Christian and, in a special way, for us, members of the Vincentian Family, who dedicate our life to the service of the poorest. To love them and to have a Gospel effect on them is an urgent task for every follower of St. Vincent: *“Now, given that, I ask that you see the reason we have to praise God for having sent us to remedy this misfortune and how much we must inflame our hearts with love for the work of assisting poor people and devote ourselves to it in earnest because their need is extreme and God expects it of us”* (SV XII, 82).

Dear lay brothers and sisters, live your leadership in the evangelization of the laity! I hope that, in the coming years, you will assume an even greater role in the task of evangelizing the poor. That will require of everyone, laity and consecrated, to recognize and develop the vocation of lay evangelization.

In addition to lay leadership, it is necessary to bear in mind, in our evangelizing task, another fundamental element: organization. That will avoid lack of coordination, dispersion of forces, atomization of resources. In recent years we have tried to promote planning and coordination, but we still fail to take on, with greater efficacy, the challenge of common Vincentian projects.

Let us be servants of the poor! The Vincentian service of the poor, both corporal and spiritual, presents multiple fields of action which we must examine now in order to define how to evangelize today. This service must be carried out through an organized pastoral work, which is always in direct and personal contact with the poor.

Let us serve the poor with Vincentian steadfastness; that is to say, our service must begin from life in the Spirit. The Spirit places in our hearts and in our lives the very attitudes of Jesus Christ, which, in corporal and spiritual service, have their own translation: humility, simplicity, gentleness, zeal, mortification... love! Without these attitudes it is impossible for our Vincentian service to be authentic; we would not be doing it according to the Gospel. For this reason, every Vincentian evangelizer must have a great interior experience of the Spirit of God!

We are spokespersons with the poorest in our closeness to them, to their realities, to their anxieties, to their hopes! Let us be audacious as St. Vincent de Paul was! In order to go forward we

must take risks! The real risk is the lack of evangelizing drive. Vincent would say to us today: *“May difficulties not shake us; the glory of the Eternal Father and the effectiveness of the word and passion of his Son are at stake. The salvation of the people and our own is a good so great that it is worth prevailing at all costs; and it does not matter if we die sooner or later, as long as we die fighting; we shall be all the happier for it”* (XI, 413).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General