

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 30 July 2007
Saint Justin De Jacobis

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

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

On this the Feast of Saint Justin De Jacobis, a missionary *par excellence*, I announce to the worldwide Congregation the five projects that were granted the **Mission Award for 2007**. There is a brief discription of the history of each of the projects, as well as the goals and objectives proposed to make them realizable.

I wish to encourage the Visitors to continue to promote not only the Mission Award, granted on 30 July every year, but also the Systemic Change Award, granted each 25 January on the Feast of the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.

As I try to make clear each time these awards are announced, the overall objective is to stimulate among the provinces and individual confreres or teams of confreres creativity, which, when motivated by love, is infinite.

This year only 11 projects were presented, perhaps because the date was advanced for presenting these projects, due to the fact that we were holding the Visitors' Meeting in June, which is when we usually have our *tempo forte* meeting to select the winners.

I encourage the Visitors to animate the members of their provinces to participate actively in these efforts to help improve our quality of evangelization for the Poor in our world today.

The winners for this year are from the Provinces of Saint Justin De Jacobis (Eritrea), USA Midwest (Kenya), Philippines, Paris (Region of Cameroon), and Ireland.

1. PROVINCE OF SAINT JUSTIN DE JACOBIS

History: Saint Justin De Jacobis Province's preferential option of apostolate, especially in the past 12 years or so, has been mainly the formation of the clergy and laity and the popular missions. We really are convinced that these are very Vincentian works and are in accordance with the first article of our Constitutions.

Despite the unstable and insecure socio-political situation of our country, our Church is blessed with many vocations. Nevertheless, we suspect that the real motivation of the many young men in formation to the priesthood arises from the oppressive political situation. This is why we have opted to help the diocesan priests in their ongoing formation. Our province is convinced that the popular missions are very effective and dear to our people all over the country. For these very Vincentian works we have a team of confreres, who regularly organize the formation of the clergy and the popular missions.

Goals and objectives: The first and foremost goal of this project is no more than a decision to work according to our Vincentian charism. Through the popular missions we try to reach the poor of the abandoned villages, most of them without fixed parish priests. Therefore, our popular missions are a way of awakening and strengthening the faith, as well as issuing a call to live an authentic Christian life. The ongoing formation of the clergy and laity is also very important because, as in the time of Saint Vincent, we suspect that the many vocations in our country are not all motivated by a genuine call from Christ. We, Vincentians of the Saint Justin De Jacobis Province in Eritrea, are convinced that we need to play a significant role in the ongoing formation of the clergy, the catechists and the lay Vincentians.

Method and strategies: The confreres of the "House of Providence" in Hebo, for years now, have been engaged in the ongoing formation of diocesan priests. This has been done by way of the annual retreat and conferences. It was very much appreciated by the Eparch of Asmara and the bishop himself always participated in the annual retreat.

Since the formation of two new Eparchies of Eritrea, Keren and Barentu, in 1996, there have not been good relations among the three Eparchies. The bishops asked the members of the Congregation to do something about this. After serious evaluation and reflection, we decided to present an annual ongoing formation program. It was a wonderful experience, even for us. The evaluations made by the participants have been incredibly encouraging. Therefore, the main method will be various kinds of workshops, conferences and retreats.

However, we are open to modifying the structures to meet the needs of these priests.

We have two confreres to organize and to follow-up the ongoing formation program, which is especially for the young priests within ten years of ordination.

2. PROVINCE OF USA MIDWEST (KENYA): The Emmaus Programme, Nairobi

History: The Emmaus Programme for Diocesan Priests fits the creative programmes for the ongoing formation and education of diocesan clergy in mission territories. The Emmaus Programme was created by confreres and is directed by confreres of the Kenya Mission, but in collaboration with religious and laypersons.

The Programme addresses the four pillars of formation for priests in missionary territories: human, spiritual, intellectual, and apostolic. The project dovetails with the charism and purpose of the Congregation of the Mission: to help the clergy in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor. The Programme aims at providing ongoing formation for these poor priests to be better priests in their ministry to the poor.

The Emmaus Programme for Diocesan Priests is now in its fourth year. Vincentians of the Kenyan Mission direct the programme three times a year. Over 200 priests have attended the programme.

The Programme began as a response to the call of Kenyan bishops that Vincentians reach out to their priests, many alone and lonely, scattered throughout the desolate areas of Kenya. Members of the Congregation of the Mission understand that seminary formation and education alone are not enough to form good priests in missionary areas. The opportunities for these priests after ordination are scarce. Instances of scandalous behavior with its deep and lasting wounds also convinced Vincentians that these brother priests needed not only further formation and education, but also support to help them live out what they already know to be proper priestly conduct.

While the Emmaus Programme once focused on the Ecclesiastical Province of the Archdiocese of Nairobi, it has now expanded to include priests of other Ecclesiastical Provinces. At a recent episcopal meeting (2007), bishops voiced concern and desire that their priests be afforded opportunities for ongoing formation and education. The facts are: the Emmaus Programme has been received with great acclamation by the priest participants, and it has proved its effectiveness, value and credibility over the four years of existence. Additionally, a greater number of Kenyan bishops desire their priests to participate in future programmes.

Goal: To provide an integrated series of seminars in a reflective, spiritual setting to enable diocesan clergy to engage in formation and ongoing development to encourage personal holiness, increase priestly support and morale and assist in improving ministerial competence in missionary areas.

Objectives:

- 1) To encourage continued growth in diocesan priestly spirituality.
- 2) To provide theological and scriptural updating in the African context.
- 3) To offer pastoral updating to assist clergy to effectively engage in evangelization, pastoral and liturgical ministry and human promotion.
- 4) To provide administrative assistance in areas of parish organization, Church personnel and finances.
- 5) To foster the healthy social life of the priest for mutual support, encouragement and the sense of priestly fraternity.

3. PROVINCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

History: Two decades ago, in April 1987, the Lay Missionaries of Saint Vincent de Paul were organized and incorporated with the Popular Mission Ministry to partner with the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity in the work of the missions. They come from the areas where the popular missions were given, from Vincentian lay associations, parishes, schools run by the Daughters of Charity, and private as well as public schools.

At present we have a core of 120 lay missionaries collaborating with us in our six Regional Mission Teams and Centers where they provide leadership. The bulk of missionaries are for the 24 missions organized and given annually.

Moreover, they assist in the follow-up programs as well as maintain the mission spirit in their communities (parish, schools, barrio chapels) and in Diocesan Programs (e.g., Youth Ministry, Catechetical Ministry, Music Ministry, Liturgy Ministry).

Aside from the Basic Formation, they attend a regular ongoing formation program regionally and nationally. We believe that the quality of their missionary commitment could be enhanced by a deeper and systematic theological, spiritual, catechetical and Vincentian, and pastoral leadership formation. We feel that a good number of them have the potential to become formators as well as full-time lay missionaries for the local missions, as well as the missions *ad gentes*.

Goal: To provide our Lay Missionaries (the core and the new) a deeper and a systematic formation in catechesis, theology, spirituality, Vincentian and pastoral leadership.

Objectives:

- 1) To train lay missionaries in our institutions — schools and parishes — to become missionaries and pastoral agents.
- 2) To continue the regional ongoing formation sessions.
- 3) To hold an Annual Meeting of the National Officers for input, evaluation and planning.
- 4) To hold a National Convention regularly (every two years).
- 5) To form and train a Core of Formators among the Lay Missionaries.
- 6) To enhance their pastoral leadership with the John C. Maxwell Leadership Series.
- 7) To widen their horizon and perspective through exposures and educational tours.
- 8) To acquire facilities in our formation centers (e.g., laptop computer, LDC projector, etc.).
- 9) To print an adapted Christian Prayer for the Lay Missionaries for their spiritual sustenance.
- 10) To arrange for those who are qualified to study at theological and catechetical centers that offer Diploma, MA and Doctorate.

Methodology: The formation process is: Interactive Lecture - Workshop - Actual Mission Exposure - Evaluation. They are then made to participate in future formation sessions as lecturers and workshop facilitators.

Moreover, we coordinate and seek the assistance of the “theological and catechetical centers” for the content, methodology and attainment of degrees (Diploma, MA, Ph.D.).

4. PROVINCE OF PARIS (REGION OF CAMEROON): To develop ties of collaboration with the Vincentian Family in the Central African Republic

Presentation: The idea is to send a community of two or three confreres of the Congregation of the Mission to Bangui in the Central African Republic (next to Cameroon) in order, first of all, to accompany the Vincentian Family, which has about 3000 members

in Bangui alone and then to reflect on a presence of the Little Company for a longer period.

For several years, there have been contacts with the Diocese of Bangui. In addition, we have already had the occasion to organize meetings with the Vincentian Family in Bangui. The idea, then, is to plan for a permanent presence of a team of missionaries.

On several occasions, the branches of the Vincentian Family and the Archbishop of Bangui have indicated their desire to welcome a community of the Congregation in the capital. There is a concern to support missionary openness of the Region of Cameroon. The presence of Central African confreres, the nearness of the country, the ties already established are so many elements which push us toward this commitment.

Goals:

- 1) To assure a presence for the Vincentian Family at Bangui in the Central African Republic beginning in September 2007.
- 2) To accompany and assure the formation of the members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family (AMM, SSVF, AIC, JMV, etc.) in Bangui and eventually in the surrounding area.
- 3) To foresee some important missionary experiences in Bangui in connection with the Vincentian Family present in the different parishes.
- 4) To reflect on a new implantation, for a longer period, with socio-educational implications.

Objectives:

- 1) To found a community, after a year's trial, in Bangui of two or three confreres from the Congregation in connection with the Region of Cameroon.
- 2) To organize sessions of Vincentian Formation for the members of the Vincentian Family. To reply to the expectations and suggestions of the different branches of the Vincentian Family.
- 3) To assure and make contacts with the local clergy of the Archdiocese of Bangui.

Concretely, the first objective is the accompaniment and service of the Vincentian Family. Then, the idea is to begin missionary projects and, finally, to assure a pastoral commitment on Sundays in the different parishes.

Use of the Award: This award will help the province in the "extraordinary" expenses for this new implantation. The Province

and the Region have been questioning themselves seriously for many years. They must decide on this extension of the mission from the Cameroon. This award will help us very much in the concrete carrying out of this project and will represent the interest of the entire Congregation for this project in Central Africa.

5. PROVINCE OF IRELAND: The Ember Team

History: The Ember Mission Team has been in existence, in its current format, since 1978. More recently, it moved to a Lay Directorship, with members of the Congregation and lay people forming the team. The focus of each parish Mission is “Encounter with Christ.”

The Ember Mission Team seeks to encourage “Encounter with Christ” by four means: Liturgy, Faith Formation, Communications, and Social Interaction and Outreach to the Marginalised.

In the past years, we have noted that, while we have been, in the main, successful in the first three of these, the last remains more difficult to realise.

The team recognizes that such outreach is best achieved by the people in the local parish, but there is little or no formation provided in the skills and attitudes needed to undertake such a ministry.

To this end, the Ember Team wishes to establish a training course for people in parishes to enable them to reach out to the poorest and most marginalised in their community.

In recent years, we have been called on to give Parish Missions in poor parishes both in Ireland and in Britain. Often the cost of formation for the people in the parish is more than the parish can easily bear.

We also wish to emphasise that, in the past five years, there has been a great deal of cooperation and exchange of personnel with “*Pathways: Exploring Faith and Ministry*,” the lay-ministry course in All Hallows College, which has been training people for ministry in the local community since 1984.

Goal: To provide a course in formation in “mission outreach to the poorest and most marginalised” for people who will work on and with the mission team.

Objectives: To host six training and reflection workshops in All Hallows College (or other suitable venues) to be held between September and May.

Use of the Award: We recognise that those who seek training in “catechesis and mission outreach” to the poorest and most

marginalised often, themselves, come from among the poor and marginalised and from the poorest parishes.

The money received would allow us to host the training, pay for skilled experts in the field, provide educational resources for both presenters and those attending and, also, provide refreshment.

It is important to note that such training is quite specialised and is not currently available in any of the dioceses of Ireland.

I ask the Lord to pour out his blessings on all those who have worked to develop these projects for the evangelization of the Poor. May your good work continue and inspire others to do the same.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General