

GENERAL CURIA

WINNERS OF THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE AWARD FOR 2008

Rome, 25 January 2008

*Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul
Anniversary of the foundation of the C.M.*

To All the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear Brothers,

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

I write to you to announce the winners for the Systemic Change Award for 2008. In our December *tempo forte* meeting, the Council and I reviewed nine applications that were forwarded to the Curia from provinces throughout the world. After careful study of each of the projects, we selected four winners, following the criteria that were included in a letter sent to all the Visitors 27 September 2007.

As you recall, the award was established to acknowledge and support projects developed by an individual confrere or groups of confreres which reflect St. Vincent's creativity in finding and implementing unique and even untried ways to respond to the urgent needs of the poor. We used the criteria that were set forth, that is that the project involves the poor themselves, the vision is holistic, that the programs are self-sustaining as they try to address the root causes of poverty, and that the project itself fosters transparency by involving the people themselves in budgeting and financial reporting. We also looked to see if the projects worked to construct a shared vision among a diverse range of peoples.

Following are the winners of the January 25 2008 Systemic Change Award.

I. From the Province of Barcelona, San Pedro Sulla, Honduras, Central America, **Friends Forever Showing the Way**, accompanies children and their families who live in high risk areas.

This program, Amigos Para Siempre, was begun in 1993 as a preventive measure developing socioeducational actions directed particularly towards families and children. In the area there is a high incidence of selling and consuming drugs, youth gangs, sexual exploitation of children and young people, lack of decent work, which often forces families into selling of drugs, and prostitution. The program is dedicated to work with the children and families making them principal agents of change. The program proposes to prevent, to avoid and to create alternatives so that children do not fall into situations where they become street children, members of gangs and adolescents involved in prostitution.

Treatment and intervention that are important in the prevention is urgent and indispensable so the project provides different forms of support: psychological, value formation, education, tutoring, nutritional and health care services. The older youth and their mothers are given technical preparation. The program works in conjunction with other neighborhood organizations creating activities together for the good of the community. At the state level, an organization coordinates the various entities that work with the problems that children face. The project maintains a close relationship with this government entity in order to help bring about solutions for the very difficult situations in which the children live.

II. The next project comes from the Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the **Depaul Kharkiv Street Children's Project**. What the confreres hope to accomplish is to make a real Vincentian contribution to the city of Kharkiv in the post-Soviet time when massive social problems are being left unattended to. The project focuses on the most vulnerable of these groups, the street children.

At the beginning, the involvement of the children in the planning stages of the project was minimal. The project was carried out by many members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family in the city of Kharkiv; that is, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the AIC, the DePaul Foundation and to a lesser degree the Vincent de Paul Society. Once the program began just over a year ago, very quickly the children were listened to and their suggestions as to meeting places in the city and services at the Day Center were acted upon. The program evolved to adapt to the reality that these children experience.

Clearly, this program is dealing with a wide range of human needs. The children have either run away from home or have been driven out of their homes, and are living in the streets. Theirs is a world of crime, glue-sniffing, alcohol, narcotics and prostitution. The project attempts to attend to the children individually, giving them a

sense of self-worth and respect. Their medical and physical needs are addressed. But also, as trust develops, care is given to the emotional, social and educational needs. During the summer months, several of the children were helped to find temporary jobs.

The root causes behind the situation of the more than 130 children that the program has cared for, could be the prevalence of alcohol abuse, domestic violence, marriage break-up and the collapse of the social care which was offered under the Soviet Union. The project has an international dimension to it, and so they are required to comply with legal requirements, not only of the Ukraine, but Great Britain as well, which also provides for a greater transparency in regard to reporting. The project is very much a partnership and each element within the partnership has gradually been forced to abandon preconceived ideas and to come to a shared vision. Directly involved on a daily basis are the confreres, the Daughters of Charity, the AIC, the DePaul Foundation and the Orioni Sisters. Just two years ago the city denied that there was any problem in Kharkiv. Now the project cooperates with city authorities who have asked for the assistance of the members of the project. The media has been used for fund-raising and to help to raise the consciousness of the public. Presentations are given in schools by social workers, legal teams and local authorities.

The project is developed in three stages. Stage one is outreach in order to establish contact with the children. A mini-bus specially fitted so that up to ten children can sit inside and share a hot meal, goes to four locations in the city each night. Stage two is the Day Center. As children become more trusting they are invited to come to the Day Center based in St. Vincent's Parish. As many as seventy come there each day. The third stage is sleeping accommodations. For the time being, the parish provides only emergency accommodations because of legal restrictions.

III. The third project, entitled **They are Brothers and Sisters**, is a project for accepting and uplifting HIV and AIDS patients in the Province of Southern India. The project provides personal social help to enhance the holistic care of persons with AIDS. This is done through education, medical assistance, humanitarian help and raising awareness in eight villages through the mass media. The AIDS patients find themselves among the poorest of the society. They are rejected, disregarded, and degraded by many, including their own family members. They are misunderstood and stigmatized by the society and often judged harshly. Often they are denied basic necessities, like medical treatment and even in some cases, last rites

before death. Through awareness programs many have participated in the development of the program.

The project aims at a holistic change in the lives of the patients by responding to their needs, helping to bring them into the mainstream of society through awareness and health care programs. The project addresses personal, social and spiritual issues including educational and self-employment programs. Because of their rejection, many AIDS patients are denied jobs which leaves people in utter poverty, confusion and depression. The project sets up certain self-help programs such as tailoring, hand crafts, needlework and light physical work. Some of the projects were suggested by the patients and they have taken an interest in training others in these fields. To achieve financial transparency there are financial resource meetings, a financial committee, local auditors and a timely and regular control of accounts as well as a budget preparatory committee and the public presentation of the accounts. Many young men and women volunteers from the local colleges and other educational institutions help to carry out the plans and projects. Of particular support has been the care and acceptance that the patients have received from members of the Catholic Church, which has paved the way for involving many others to contribute to the projects for the patients. There is hope that the project will continue to play a vital role to bring about a transformation in society for a better tomorrow where all are considered brothers and sisters.

IV. The fourth and final project, DePaul WoodWorking Project, comes from the USA Midwest Province mission in Kenya. The overall purpose of the program is to prepare young people with skills and knowledge of a trade so that they can find employment. After completing a two-year training course in carpentry, students can receive a Grade Three Certificate in carpentry which qualifies them for job opportunities to make a living allowing them to provide for their families. This project was started in July 2003 for young men who lived in the slums of Nairobi where unemployment is over 50% and they try to raise their families on a mere \$4 a day. The DePaul WoodWorking Program now includes women as students, since many of the poor are single mothers searching for a way to provide for their families. The products made in the workshop are supplied to organizations in need and some of the furniture is sold to help the classes that follow to buy tools and equipment.

The project itself has two phases: training and production. Through the generosity of some donors a small shop was purchased and the production side of the workshop began. At the end of the second year in the program the participants take the national trade

test in carpentry administered by the government. All the students who have taken the test have passed. The Certificate is recognized as entry level into a trade. Two of the graduates from the program have started their own furniture-making business. They make products that DePaul WoodWorking sells, thus providing salaries for them and a small profit for the workshop. One Kenyan carpenter who had been trained in the program is in charge of the production work and another is in charge of the training. These graduate students give back to the program, and others give financial assistance or donate tools. So a network has been established among those who have participated in the program. The budgets for the program are prepared and reviewed by the house treasurer and the provincial treasurer and then submitted to the financial committee for review, thereby fostering transparency in the program.

These are summaries of the four winners of the Systemic Change Award for 2008. I am happy to share with you the presentation of these Systemic Change Awards on the very day on which we remember the birth of our Congregation. This effort of Systemic Change is without doubt an expression of our faithfulness to the holistic project of evangelization that Saint Vincent conceived from his first sermon of the mission. May the Lord bless our efforts in the service of evangelization, like He blessed that sermon, answering the prayers and the good will of Madame de Gondi.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General