



The New Funding Landscape in the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic  
by Fr. Gregory J. Semeniuk, C.M. and Regina Rossi

In early April, the Vincentian Solidarity Office, 'VSO', decided to track the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project activity and co-funders.<sup>1</sup> This brief study summarizes our findings about the response to COVID-19 by funding agencies and their local partners, and VSO partners in the developing world. The list of funding agencies is limited to those that provide funds for Catholic pastoral and social activities. The VSO analyzed data from webpages, Twitter and Facebook, and includes communication with Vincentian missionaries, funders, and one office with a mission like that of the VSO. This study by the VSO documents the following: (a) new initiatives by funding agencies and changes in funding priorities in response to COVID-19; (b) impact of pandemic on the amount and availability of funding for projects; and, (c) new challenges for local partners and project managers in the developing world. The VSO did not compare the present social media content with previous postings. The time period of this study runs from April 16 - May 22, 2020. The study follows a chronological order of when the webpages were accessed and other information received. At the end of the study, the reader will find a summary of the findings and offer avenues open to project managers concerning how to advance project activity in the time of pandemic. I begin with a survey of the fundraising activities of the Catholic agencies in Europe and the United States.

*Catholic Funding Agencies*

On April 6, the Italian Bishops Conference, 'CEI' (<https://www.chiesacattolica.it/>) announced a 6 million Euro package of aid to Africa. Applications were offered to partners for projects that equipped healthcare professionals with PPE (Personal Protective Equipment, i.e. gloves and masks). The deadline for these applications was April 30. On May 18, it was announced that an additional 3 million Euros were allocated to help in African countries. This will be used for health and education. Financed projects must be completed within 3 months of disbursement.

On April 16, Missio Austria's post on Facebook indicates that their organization was requesting donations to help in Syria because of the Coronavirus.

On April 28, the VSO contacted the Archdiocese of Cologne (<https://www.erzbistum-koeln.de/>) via email. We received an auto response saying they were working in a very limited way during this time of quarantine.

Kindermissionwerk (<https://www.sternsinger.de/>) states they have set up an emergency one million Euro fund. On May 1, the organization disclosed that it was in talks with partners on how to best help. On May 15, the homepage banner had this message:

Everyday life has changed a lot for children in our projects worldwide due to curfews. The children are not allowed to go to school or to projects. Many parents are out of work and there is growing concern that the family cannot be fed. In addition to measures to protect children, our partners therefore take care of the most urgent needs of families: with food packages and hygiene kits.

---

<sup>1</sup> The VSO is a service of the Congregation of the Mission to Vincentian Missionaries, working in the developing world, to assist with projects of evangelization and service of the poor by fundraising activities directed at institutional donors. The authors of the study, Fr. Gregory J. Semeniuk, C.M. serves as the Executive Director, and Regina Rossi serves as Executive Assistant.

Kindermissionswerk then describes two projects: (1) a project in Columbia helps 1500 children with food and psychological help; and (2) a local partner in Malawi distributes hygiene products, disinfectants, nutritional supplements and food to 1700 people in need.

Aid to the Church in Need (Kirche in Not) webpage (<https://www.kirche-in-not.de/>) makes frequent requests for donations to fund COVID-19 relief. On May 18, the VSO identified a webpage with information about the COVID-19 pandemic effect from partners in the field. Partners in Brazil reported on the dissemination of disinformation about the true impact of the virus and ways to limit transmission. In Cameroon, partners reported that they have been without electricity for months and have a curfew in place. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, partners report that the priests are going without Sunday donations from the Masses because of the lockdown, and therefore lack resources to meet their own basic needs. In Chile, partners report widespread fear of an economic collapse despite having lower rates of infections than most other countries. On another webpage, the VSO found the following:

Corona has the world under control. Priests and religious make sure that pastoral care and charity continue during this time. Corona meets people in war and developing countries with particular severity. Often, when it comes to health care, they depend on the commitment of the Church. The church operates hospitals and homes and provides the population with food. Pastoral care always comes first . . . To alleviate the effects of the corona pandemic KIRCHE IN NOT provides emergency aid for priests and religious. Financial aid particularly supports aid projects in the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

From the reports of multiple partners, Aid to the Church in Need is focused on assisting Church leaders, priests, and religious men and women in order that critical pastoral activities continue. Essential services of organization of communities and resources help countless beneficiaries especially in times of the current pandemic.

Adveniat's (<https://www.adveniat.de/>) website has some details on how the virus is affecting people in countries they serve (accessed on May 16, 2020). Individual articles from Latin America countries recount how people are forced to choose between protection from the virus and eating. On its webpage, Adveniat announced a 2.5 million Euro fund:

“Extraordinary situations require extraordinary measures: That is why the Latin America aid agency Adveniat is making a special fund of 2.5 million euros available for projects in the context of the corona pandemic.” Essen-based aid agency announced. The Latin America relief organization had already provided emergency aid of 100,000 euros in March. However, it quickly became clear that the need was immense. Especially because the church is providing the poor with basic food and medical aid and must take over where government agencies fail or do not exist at all. “I am grateful to the bishops of Latin America that they acted quickly from the beginning of the Corona crisis and - unlike some Latin American politicians - found clear, warning words,” said Adveniat Bishop Overbeck literally. “Church acts: In Argentina, places of worship are currently being equipped with beds and medical equipment in order to prepare them for the possibly necessary admission of people, for example from old people's homes. Church hospitals, the social pastoral care in the parishes, the numerous religious and priests help the people, especially those on the margins of society, for example the homeless,” said Bishop Overbeck.  
<https://www.adveniat.de/presse/bilanzpressekonferenz/>

Missio Aachen's website (<https://www.missio.at/application/>) has a message addressed to friends and donors letting them know that their work is continuing and they wish to remain in contact, however they are working from home and to please excuse any delays due to this. They have launched a “Corona Solidarity Fund” of 1.5 million euros to support project partners in Africa, Asia and Oceania. There is

June 15, 2020

Page 3

also some discussion of the Church in Africa and Asia having to provide for essential needs in instances of failure by government to adequately care for its citizens.

The Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities has a message on their website (<https://www.rfca.org/COVID-19-Resources>) notifying that they are flexible regarding the reports they are owed. They only ask to be kept informed. They then go on to give a list of resources, (May 16, 2020). On a May 8 meeting with the foundation, the VSO learned that the funder continues to receive and fund a variety of projects in both the United States as well as in other countries.

Up to the time of this report, May 22, the Propagation of the Faith had not included any reference to the COVID-19 pandemic on project activity or funding.

#### *Daughters of Charity International Project Service*

On May 15, Ms. Therese L. McFarland, Director of Development and Communications of Daughters of Charity International Project Services reported to the VSO the following,

At this time, I have no news from our supporters regarding COVID-19 response. Although I did see something on FAMVIN (<https://famvin.org/en/tag/coronavirus/>) a coordinated response to COVID, so you may want to check that out.<sup>2</sup> We have reached out to them, but not heard back yet.

Sister Mary Louise Stubbs, D.C., Executive Director also of Daughters of Charity International Project Services is actively seeking funding from institutional donors for social projects focused on feeding people and other immediate needs, such as, health care.

#### *Vincentian Solidarity Office*

In the period of this investigation, the Vincentian Solidarity Office has been in contact with its partners. A number of partners in Asia and Africa report delays in preparing projects for funding because of the limits to activities. Several construction projects have been hindered by government office closures, business closures, scarce imports of available construction materials, and increased labor costs. In early April, one co-funder in northern Italy of a social project in Ethiopia was delayed in transfer funds to a project because of bank closures in northern Italy. The Vincentian missionaries are working to organize communities and use available resources to share with the poor. In Costa Rica, a recently funded project of a seminary vehicle is now benefiting the hungry by the collection and distribution of food to elderly poor. In Tanzania, a confrere is working on a project to help feed people there in a poorly equipped quarantine camp for those infected with COVID-19. He reports there are many cases of the virus there but their government is not addressing it. In the city of Mysore, De Paul Apparels with the help of the VSO prepared a project to sew and distribute 200,000 protective masks for free in 20 villages and the slum in Mysore.

#### *Conclusion*

In summary, the activities of funding agencies, Vincentian Missionaries, and VSO office are adapting fundraising activities and project work to the new realities of the global pandemic of COVID-19. Some funding agencies, like Aid to the Church in Need, have focused fundraising on emergency relief to benefit priests, religious men and women. Project activities, such as construction, have been delayed because of social distancing and targeted closures of government offices and businesses. In the short term, emergency funds are becoming available and new projects have been initiated for COVID-19 relief.

---

<sup>2</sup> FAMVIN is a webpage Vincentian Family, namely, religious men and women congregations, lay associations, and youth groups that follow the charism of St. Vincent de Paul (+1660).

June 15, 2020

Page 4

Certain funders give priority by some of the funders, and all agencies expect that project managers demonstrate an awareness of the impact of COVID-19. Other funding agencies, like the Raskob Foundation, remain open to a variety of projects (meeting with the VSO, May 8, 2020). Partners in the funding agencies have identified challenges such as decreased funding from private donors in Europe and the United States, for example. It is an open question as to when donations will return to their pre-COVID-19 level. The data collected by the VSO, therefore, suggests four ways for project managers to advance project activity: (1) focus attention on emergency projects that target basic needs of religious leaders; (2) consider writing a project to benefit those who have been affected by COVID-19; (3) expect delays in project activity and funding; and (4) investigate funding sources among secular agencies who partner with faith based initiatives.