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40th General Assembly 2004: Consultation Document

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40TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2004)
Consultation Document

INTRODUCTION

On 8 June 2002, in his letter to the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, the Superior General convoked the 40th General Assembly (to be held in Rome on 5-29 June 2004) and proposed this theme:

Our Vincentian Identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — an evaluation and three challenges for the future.

As we all know, our Constitutions are the result of **long period of discernment** by the Congregation of the Mission in response to the call of the Second Vatican Council to revise its fundamental law and formulate more clearly its proper charism. The extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969 elaborated a first draft of the Constitutions. The 1974 Assembly, in addition to redrafting some sections of the Constitutions, formulated a few Declarations in order to illuminate, stimulate, and direct the effort of the entire Congregation and each of its members. These declarations contributed, in fact, to focusing and enriching some themes of the Constitutions. The 1980 General Assembly, after thorough and refined work, rewrote the entire text of the Constitutions.¹ Having been presented to and approved by the Holy See, they took effect on 25 March 1985.

¹ Cf. In *Vincentiana* the texts approved by the General Assemblies: *Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis* (1969) in *Vincentiana* (1969) 85-126; *Declarationes* (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 286-302. *Constitutiones et Statuta. Textus completus Conventus Generalis anni 1968-1969 emendatus a Conventu XXXV* (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 303-345; *Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis* (1980) in *Vincentiana* (1980), 193-268. “Promulgación de las Constituciones” (1984) in *Vincentiana* (1985), 1-11. To study the path taken by the Congregation up to the promulgation of the present Constitutions, cf. M. PÉREZ FLORES, “Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980” in *Vincentiana* (1984), 751-784; “De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984” in *Vincentiana* (1985) 84-146; C. Braga, “Las Constituciones de la Congregación de la Misión: notas históricas” in *Vincentiana* (2000), 291-308. To do an in-depth study of the various centers of interest of the Constitutions, see the articles published in *Vincentiana* (2000), 283-424, under the title: “The New Constitutions: 20 Years of Existence.” Other studies on the Constitutions: E. ANTONELLO, “36^a Asamblea General de la Congregación de la Misión” in *Vincentiana* (1980), 334-354; C. BRAGA, “Le nuove Costituzioni della Congregazione della Missione” in *Vincentiana* (1981), 63-82; J. O. BAYLACH, “Comentando las Nuevas Constituciones” in *Vincentiana* (1981), 222-227 and 384-409; M. PÉREZ FLORES, “Comentario a las Constituciones” in *Vincentiana* (1982), 147-187.

In promulgating the new Constitutions on 27 September 1984, Fr. Richard McCullen declared: *“Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated.”* He expressed his fervent desire in these words: *“We must not be content to leave that delineation on paper alone. The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the Gospel to the poor. For that purpose much reflective reading and prayer of our Constitutions is called for and it is my hope, and indeed the hope of us all, that these Constitutions will be the means that will enable us more effectively to love what Saint Vincent loved and practiced what he taught.”*²

How much have persons, communities, and provinces changed since the new Constitutions went into effect? Have they become a book for our life in the Congregation or a book for the library? Twenty years have passed — what is the result?

The next General Assembly (2004) hopes to start from this reflection/evaluation. It will not deal so much with evaluating the text, as with **evaluating and revising our life and mission in the light of the Constitutions**. Each missionary, each community, each province, and the entire Congregation is asked to reflect sincerely how our Vincentian identity, defined by the Constitutions, is expressed in our lives. Twenty years have passed since the Constitutions were proposed to us as light for the journey; we wish now to put ourselves under their dynamic power once again.

The Constitutions have balanced the necessary juridical elements with the more charismatic ones; they drank from the fountain of the Word of God and the attitudes of Christ, the Rule of the Mission; they realized the intuitions of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian tradition in order to give impetus to our lives as we follow Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor. For these reasons, the Constitutions are a **permanent reference** against which we must confront ourselves constantly.

The theme of the next General Assembly (2004) intends to involve us all. It is **in the life of each missionary and each local community** where we live out the Vincentian identity today.

From the time the Constitutions were drafted to today, there have been many and very noteworthy **changes** within our communities and provinces, as well as in the Church and in the entire world. The most recent General Assemblies of the Congregation have offered proposals in order to bring up-to-

² *Vincentiana* (1985), 5.

date our vocation and mission.³ With the same pastoral orientation, the next General Assembly (2004) will have to articulate the **challenges** we Vincentians need to face in the near future.

CONSULTATION FOR THE DOMESTIC AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES
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In order to draw up the DOCUMENTUM LABORIS for the next General Assembly (2004), the Preparatory Commission has formulated some questions for the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. These questions deal with the **essential elements of our Vincentian identity**. Please answer them personally, as a local community and as a province. (Kindly send to the Preparatory Commission only the responses from the Provincial Assembly.)

1.- We evaluate

1.1. **Vocation.** How is the articulation of our vocation in the present Constitutions (cf. nn. 1-9) contributing to the deepening of our Vincentian identity? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

1.2. **Apostolic activity.** How does the apostolic activity in your (local, provincial) community make explicit our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 10-18, especially n. 12)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

1.3. **Community life.** How is your experience of community life contributing to the deepening of our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 19-27)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

1.4. **Spiritual life.** What efforts are we making in order to know and appropriate the Vincentian spiritual experience (following of Christ, evangelical counsels, proper virtues, prayer, missionary spirituality...) and how do we express it in our lives as missionaries (cf. nn. 28-50)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

³ The 1986 General Assembly offered to the entire Congregation the *Lines of Action 1986-1992*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1986), 549-605. The 1992 General Assembly, with its *Letter to the Confreres* set forth various commitments with a view to *New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1992), 362-368. The 1998 General Assembly promoted collaboration with the various groups of the Vincentian Family in order to respond to the challenges of the mission: *With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1998), 384-397.

1.5. **Formation.** How do we impart to and share with our candidates our vocation, charism, values, ministries, spirit ... all the elements proper to our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 77-95)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

1.6. **Corresponsibility, subsidiarity, active participation.** How do we in our communities (province) practice the principles of corresponsibility, dialogue, collaboration, subsidiarity, active participation, service (cf. nn. 96-100)? How do these principles contribute to the deepening of our Vincentian identity? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

1.7. **Temporal goods.** How is our Vincentian identity shown in the way we use and administer temporal goods (cf. nn. 148-155)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

2.- We direct our attention to the principal changes in the last 20 years.

2.1. In your opinion, what are the principal changes that have taken place in the situation of the Church and society in the last 20 years, particularly in relation to the aspirations of the poor?

2.2. What impact have these changes made on the Vincentian identity of our (local, provincial) community?

2.3. What implications do these changes have for our Vincentian identity today?

3.- We articulate three (3) challenges for the future of the Congregation of the Mission.

3.1. After having evaluated the principal elements of our Vincentian identity today, taking into consideration the implications of the social and ecclesial changes in the last 20 years, what are the **three (3) most important challenges** that the community on the local and provincial levels will have to face in the coming years?

3.2. How will the community on the local and provincial level respond concretely to these challenges? Please be as precise as possible.

<p style="text-align: center;">PROPOSED PROCESS FOR THE DOMESTIC AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES</p>

The Assemblies offer all of us in the Congregation a time of grace, renewal and a celebration of fidelity. So that the theme proposed by the Superior General for the next Assembly might inspire our lives in the coming years, it is not enough simply to answer some questions formulated by the Commission. Why not spend the time of the Assemblies as an occasion for animation and growth?

1.- Embracing our Constitutions wholeheartedly

Undoubtedly, the younger confreres have had the occasion to read and deepen their understanding of the Constitutions during the time of the Internal Seminary or during various formation meetings. Perhaps the older confreres were able to participate in some formal study of the Constitutions. But, in the midst of day to day activities, many times we take for granted those principles which inspire our lives. We hardly turn to the Constitutions, except to resolve some questions that arise from our community conversation.

To prepare for the Domestic Assemblies, it would be very appropriate for each confrere to dedicate time for reading and deepening his appreciation for the Constitutions, especially for its more charismatic elements. Each missionary ought to take to heart the content of our Constitutions.

2.- Praying our Constitutions

Each confrere may deepen his appreciation for the Constitutions by bringing them to prayer. In prayer the Lord invites us to embrace his plan. Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor, calls each one of us to follow him by identifying ourselves with his own attitudes. Likewise, it is a time for us to give thanks for the great gift of our vocation. It is a time to pray for our brothers in community, for the Mission in the world, and for the sufferings of the poor. It is a time to ask pardon for our lukewarm attitudes and lack of commitment, personally and as communities. Finally, it is a time to contemplate in order to proclaim and to serve.

The time of preparation and celebration of our Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies could prove very fruitful if each missionary makes the effort to pray the Constitutions.

3.- Focusing our attention on our Vincentian identity today

Those who have studied them carefully stress the essential value of some articles in the Constitutions. The Preparatory Commission suggests that we focus our attention on key articles that spell out our Vincentian identity decisively. After having deepened our appreciation for the Constitutions, and having brought them to prayer, it would be useful to devote major attention to these key articles which may illuminate our reflection and our contributions to the Assemblies.

4.- Moving from personal reflection to communal sharing

The work proposed for the Assemblies involves three movements:

- Toward the last 20 years since the promulgation of the Constitutions in order to evaluate how they have energized our life and mission.
- Toward the concrete situation that impacts on our Vincentian identity today in order to remain faithful to the vocation which the Constitutions describe.
- Toward the challenges that we need to confront in creative fidelity during the coming years.

If each missionary makes the dedicated effort to reflect on the questions proposed for the work of the Assembly, our sharing will become more fruitful, both on the level of the community and of the province. In this way, we will succeed in identifying better the way the Congregation ought to take in the future. Thus, we will appropriate our Vincentian identity even more.

5.- Answering the questions

If each missionary and each community and province follow the plan described here, answering the questions would not be a tedious exercise but an expression of commitment — a commitment animated by the Spirit who inspired Vincent de Paul and still inspires the Congregation in order to continue in the world the Mission of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer and Servant of the poor.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

As we draw up the synthesis of the responses from the Provincial Assemblies, it would be most helpful to us in the Preparatory Commission if your reports were written as concretely and concisely as possible.

We appreciate your interest and we remind you that the responses to this Consultation Document, together with the form for the election of delegate(s), should arrive at the Secretariat of the General Curia on or before 30 October 2003.

Rome, 30 June 2002