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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

The Vincentian Charism in the Church

1. THE CHARISM OF ST. VINCENT AND VISION OF THE CHURCH

Since its beginning the Church has brought together unity and a healthy pluralism when implementing certain aspects of its life and organization, maintaining unity over what is fundamental and a certain degree of liberty over what is accidental. Throughout history there have appeared different types of communities and different “spiritual families,” which tried to live in fidelity to the Gospel, emphasizing some aspects, which gave a certain charismatic identity within the Church.

For the “Vincentian Family” it is important to know how St. Vincent lived and understood his “being Church,” since his experience may enlighten our place among the pilgrim People of God in history. The Church, together with the Gospel and the Poor, was for him one of the greatest keys of his growth in faith. While he discovered his vocation and mission in the poor, the sacrament of Christ, the Gospel enlightened and involved him, and the Church was the point of reference where he received his vocation and carried out his mission.

1.1. Ecclesial Experience of St. Vincent de Paul

We will not find in St. Vincent a single and static image; rather, his conception of the Church will continue evolving and maturing throughout his life, marked above all by a series of experiences which will purify and complete the authentic face of the Church and his mission in it. The young Vincent comes across a Church which contemplates a seemingly hierarchical and clerical society, one in which he aspires to “a career.” But God will talk to him through different experiences, which will purify his vision of the Church of Jesus, a Church that he discovers as the People of God (experience in Clichy), evangelizer of the poor (Gannes-Folleville), “good Samaritan” for the marginalized (Châtillon), guided by the Spirit (Montmirail-Marchais), and universal and missionary (Madagascar).

In order to appreciate the contribution of Vincent to the formation of the Church of his time, it is necessary to situate it and see it within the ecclesial context in which he lived and reflected on

the Church. As a man after the Council of Trent, he is influenced by the image of the Church which sprouted from it. Although this Council did not deepen the ecclesial issue, its reform programs had as their base a determined, underlying ecclesiology and the vision of the Church as a “perfect society” with these characteristics: societal dimension, hierarchical structure, indifference and even hostility towards the world, apologetic and anti-protestant character, etc.

The Church which St. Vincent de Paul experienced is a community incarnated in history: pilgrim, sinful, divided, interdependent from the state, at times with some pastors who are incompetent and unworthy, with some religious communities which need reform and an abandoned Christian people who need a profound evangelization, etc.

1.2. Vision of the Church in St. Vincent de Paul

Starting from this ecclesial situation and as a response to these urgent situations, Vincent discovers and tries to put into practice a new image of the Church, one that is evangelical and which has the following among other marks:

- “Mysterious” character of the Church, which cannot be reduced to its more visible and social aspect. The Church is a divine work which has its origin in the Trinity. It is a work of the Father, which carries on the mission of Christ, evangelizer of the poor, guided by the Holy Spirit.
- Close relation between the Church and the Kingdom. The Church has as its mission to establish the Kingdom and spread it throughout the world, a Kingdom wherein the privileged ones are the poor, those who, in spite of beginning their life in this world, do not have its fullness here.
- Centrality of the category of people, of the “poor people”; the hierarchy and all ecclesial life must be in function of this.
- Insistence on the theme of evangelization “by word and work,” as the fundamental mission of the Church and its structuring element.
- The central place of the poor in the “body of Christ,” setting the basis for a reflection on the “Church of the Poor.” The spirit of charity and mercy has to be a mark of the People of God, if one is to be faithful to God and credible to men.
- Evangelic vision of the role of authority in the Church, contemplating the persons of the Pope, bishops and the other ministers from their vocation of service more than from their categories of power.

- Renovation of religious life and the opening of new channels of consecration to God, from within the world, and an option for the service of the poor.
- Rediscovery of the place of the laity in the life of the Church, coming from a baptismal spirituality, the universal call to holiness and its participation in apostolic life, especially in the fields of charity and evangelization.
- Reinsertion of the woman in the life of the Church and its apostolic work through feminine lay associations.

Some of these intuitions, which were, at times, more applied and lived-out than theorized, have made it possible for Vincent de Paul to be considered as “one of the architects of the modern Church.” Given that these contributions have been assumed and enriched by praxis and post-ecclesial reflection, he may be considered as an authentic “prophet of the present ecclesiology.” With reason, during the funeral prayer at the death of St. Vincent, his friend, Msgr. Maupas de Tours, affirmed that, “He just about changed the face of the Church.”

2. MODEL OF THE CHURCH IN THE VINCENTIAN CHARISM: THE CHURCH OF THE POOR AND FOR THE POOR

The taking of ecclesiological positions multiplied in the years after Vatican Council II. The Pre-Conciliar model — institutional and societal — was maintained, but the proposal for a communal Church made by *Lumen Gentium* or the proposal for an open Church, servant of the world, by *Gaudium et Spes*, were being assumed.

Soon, however, a new model was to be glimpsed in a world divided between developed peoples and those who are still in the process of development, who are getting poorer and poorer all the time: the Church of the Poor. This model sprung forth, especially in the world of poverty, from certain documents, such as the encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI, or the conclusions of the Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín and Puebla, as well as a reflection from “Liberation Theology.”

In the light of *Gaudium et Spes*, this model presents a Church which desires to commit itself to the service of humanity, but concretely to this real humanity which divides men on the world level, making “the rich richer and the poor poorer” each time. Before this harsh reality, the Church must not remain indifferent, but rather it should find solutions in the Gospel, making a clear “option for the poor,” placing itself on the side of the lost, the outcast and the marginalized, converting itself into a Church for the service of the “non-humanity.”

2.1. Characteristics of the “Church of the Poor”

Some of the characteristics of the face of this Church of the Poor are:

- It is centered in the world of the poor and from them it contemplates and discerns reality. The poor are not a “part” within it; they are the core of its totality.
- It is a “prophetic” Church, which knows how to discern in what happens in the present world, the signs of the presence of God, as well as the presence of the “mystery of evil,” which acts against the plans of God. For this, in addition to proclaiming the will of God throughout the world, it has to denounce sin and sinful structures which are opposed to these projects of God.
- It is a Church which continues in history the option of Jesus of Nazareth for the poor and the marginalized.
- It is a Church which interprets its saving mission as an “integral liberation” from all types of slavery of the entire man and of all men. It is a Church which, aside from proclaiming the Good News, tries to convert itself into a “good reality,” through the liberation of the oppressed.
- It is a Church which, in its service to the Kingdom of God, emphasizes the evangelical perspective of the priority of the poor in this promised Kingdom, for they are the privileged ones of the Kingdom.
- It is a Church in which the relations among its members are based on equality and fraternal service and in which the poor are the principal protagonists. It is a Church which is not only for the poor, but it is with the poor and, preferably, of the poor.

2.2. Vincent de Paul, inspiration of the “Church of the Poor”

This model of the Church has many points of contact with the ecclesial experience of St. Vincent, who may be considered a precursor or prophet of this vision of the Church centered on the poor. The poor taught Vincent de Paul to understand the Church and its mission. His contact with them led him to contemplate the ecclesial community with new eyes and commit himself to its reform in order to give it a new face, one that is more evangelical by its proximity and service to the poor. Let us look at some convictions of St. Vincent in relation to this ecclesiological model:

- The poor are concrete persons (not a category or idea), who live in a situation of misery, exploitation, marginaliz-

ation, and injustice. But aside from that, in the light of faith, they appear to him as “a living mediation of Christ,” “sacraments” of him who “wanted to become poor and is represented to us in the poor.” They are the favored ones of God and among them is the “true religion.” This “mystic” vision of the poor lays the foundation for his understanding of the Church, which has to be understood and organized in function of the poor. He thus rediscovered in the Church of his time an aspect which had been abandoned: an option for the poor, “the most precious members of the body of Christ.”

- The poor are the favored ones of the mission of Christ and his Church. Vincent contemplates Jesus Christ, above all, as the “evangelizer of the poor.” “He himself desired to be born poor, to welcome the poor in his company, to serve the poor, to put himself in the place of the poor....” From this Christological vision, he discovers that the Church, as an image of Christ in the world and continuing his mission, has to take on the attitudes of the Master and present itself as poor and servant of the poor.
- “God started the Church with some poor people.” Looking back at the beginnings, St. Vincent discovers that Jesus “upon instituting the Church chose poor men, ignorant and fishermen, to found and plant it in the whole earth.” God still chooses “poor people” to continue his work in the Church.
- “The Church of Jesus Christ is the city of the poor.” “In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, pre-eminence belongs to the poor, who are the firstborn of his Church and his true children.” “In the world, the poor depend upon the rich and seem to have been born only to serve them; on the contrary, in the Holy Church, the rich are not admitted but on condition of serving the poor” (J.B. BOSSUET, “Sermon on the Eminent Dignity of the Poor in the Church”).

The Church is for the poor: preferential option for the poor. It is one of the greatest concerns of St. Vincent in his life: to give back to the clergy and the laity solidarity with and service to the poor, as requirements of their own faith. He sees the need of the Church to be converted to the world of the poor in order to become an authentic image of Jesus Christ. To return the poor to the Church and the Church to the poor is thus how one may summarize his work.

The Church of the Poor has to be a merciful Church. The Church fulfills itself and makes itself credible by compassion, which must be one of the “marks” of the true Church of God.

From these convictions of St. Vincent, which gave meaning to his life and motivation to his works, the “Vincentian Family” cannot forget this face of the Church: a poor Church and servant of the poor, a “merciful” Church which makes itself “Good Samaritan” to the outcasts in an unjust world. This is the face of the Church which the “Vincentian Family” is called to give in order to be faithful to the Vincentian charism, to build a Church with its own style and to give credibility to the Church of Jesus Christ, which, above all, must be the Church of the Poor.

3. THE CHARISM OF ST. VINCENT IN THE CHURCH

Many followers of Jesus Christ consider St. Vincent de Paul as their “spiritual father,” as an inspiration and guide by his presence and action in the Church and in the world. The life, doctrine and charism of Vincent, in spite of the temporal distance, continue to inspire their style of being Christian.

Various Religious Communities, Societies of Apostolic Life and Associations of the Laity directly created by him or inspired by his spirit, take St. Vincent as their “father.” As such, he has become a “patriarch” of the Church, a “father of many people.”

This fact makes us aware that we form part of a family within the Church, the “Vincentian Family,” with some common roots. This family is “multifaceted,” since the Spirit in diverse eras and circumstances inspired different instruments and institutions to respond to the call of God in favor of the poor from the same Vincentian charism. Although in a broad sense the Vincentian Family is composed of more than 268 institutions, insofar as they have adopted characteristic aspects of the Vincentian charism, in a restricted sense in speaking of this Family we refer to a concrete group of ecclesial associations: Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, International Association of Charities, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Association of the Miraculous Medal, Vincentian Marian Youth, Vincentian Lay Missionaries, etc.

This plurality of the Vincentian Family implies, for its members, a task of knowing what is “common,” what unites, what creates communion and allows us to form ourselves, work and celebrate together. However, it is necessary to know what is proper to each Vincentian association and its identity in the Church in order to respect and appreciate its autonomy.

Yet insofar as we are all in the Church and work from it in the same mission, union and collaboration in the Family will be a means for our apostolate of charity to be more effective: “Act together against poverty.” Guaranteeing the continuity of the mission that God entrusted to St. Vincent in the world of the poor — and not so

much the survival of each association — has to be a great challenge for our “Family.” Poverties continue to speak to us so that we might act together.

4. CONSCIENCE OF THE FAMILY: VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Starting from spirituality as “the process of following Christ, under the impetus of the Spirit and the guidance of the Church,” one may say that each Christian has to have his/her own spirituality. Within the unique Christian spirituality, there could be varied spiritualities, which are not essentially different, for they always refer to the following of Jesus, but vary in the historical modality of following him and the values of his message that they emphasize.

When a group of persons, usually following a master, take on the very characteristics and values of Christ, we say that they live out the same spirituality. As such, we can speak of the spirituality of the “Vincentian Family,” insofar as we drink from St. Vincent’s special experience of Christ, which continues to inspire his followers today. The same spirituality may be lived out in the diverse states of life and in various times and places with slight differences. This awareness of living the same “spirit” is what creates in the Church the consciousness of “family.” What is essential in the Vincentian charism is the following of Christ, evangelizer and servant of the poor, from whatever state or condition of life, man or woman, clergy or layperson, adult or young person, Catholic or not, married or celibate.

Trying to gather some of these characteristics of Vincentian spirituality, which creates in all of us, who are inspired by St. Vincent, a certain consciousness as a family, we can highlight the following:

– **Theocentric spirituality: “Being dedicated to God”**

The Vincentian is anchored in God. His/her primary vocation is to be dedicated to him. He/she lives a privileged relation with the Trinity, beginning and model of his/her spiritual dynamics. He/she does everything to please God and “does always and in everything the will of God, doing what the Son of God himself came to do on the earth....”

– **Christocentric spirituality: “Live for Christ”**

The Vincentian has Christ as the “rule of his/her life,” “the life of his/her life,” “the sole aspiration of his/her heart.” He is “the true model and it is in this large picture that we have to shape all our acts.” Looking at ourselves in Christ, we contemplate him as the “adorer and missionary of the Father and servant of his loving design,” who makes his own the prophetic words: “He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4:18). “Our

vocation is a continuation of that of Jesus Christ... to reveal God to the poor, to proclaim Jesus Christ to them and to say to them that the Kingdom of God is at hand and that this kingdom is for the poor.”

– **Charismatic spirituality**

The members of the Vincentian Family, within their diversity, recognize in St. Vincent and his manner of life the “spirit of Jesus Christ,” his main source of inspiration. His way of listening to God, reading the Gospel and following Christ were so extraordinary that he continues to be a model and source of inspiration for many people and organizations that work in the field of evangelization and promotion of justice and charity.

– **Ecclesial spirituality: in the Church and as Church**

The Vincentian lives out his/her vocation and mission in the Church and as Church. People of God, members of the Body of Christ and living stones of the temple of the Spirit, we sense a dynamic force within the Church, appreciating fraternal life and working as a team. He/she lives attentive to the Social Doctrine of the Church in order to know critically the reality of the world and have criteria and principles of action for his/her social and charitable work.

– **Spirituality of action: “All our work is in action”**

The Vincentian is aware that charity is neither a task of intelligence nor of feelings alone; rather, it is manifested above all in action. The love of God is expressed with works and in truth: “Brothers and sisters, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.”

Contemplative in action, the Vincentian is inserted in the world, especially in that of poverty, in order to discover the needs of those whom by “turning the medal” one sees as brothers and sisters, images of Christ.

The Vincentian Family, more than a group of social reformers moved by sociological or political currents, is a community of Christians which believes in the power of affective and effective love, which feels urged by the love of Christ.

– **Spirituality of incarnate service and solidarity: to serve the integral man**

The Vincentian lives a personal encounter with the poor, in the light of the testimony of St. Vincent, who sees in them “his burden and pain,” “his lords and masters,” “signs of the presence of God” and “sacraments” of the suffering Christ.

From this “mysticism” of the poor, he carries out his corporal and spiritual service of the weaker and marginalized, discovering in them his “portion” and showing the “partiality of God,” who demonstrates his option for the littlest ones.

Recognizing the dignity of the poor, worthy of all respect, the Vincentian is situated close to the poor and accompanies them with love, gentleness, respect... trying to remedy their specific needs, yet without failing to look for more general solutions from an analysis of the causes of poverty and seeking promotion and change of structures. Assistance, promotion and commitment for justice go together in his mission.

– **Liberating spirituality**

The Vincentian has experienced that the Gospel is a liberating force for everyone and preferably for those whom suffering and injustice visit. For them, in order to give life to the Gospel, he/she commits him/herself to the promotion of the person, of the entire person and of all people.

Organization is important in charitable activity, because we have to work together against poverties, since the plurality of the forms and faces of poverty requires a multiple and coordinated response.

– **Missionary spirituality, open to universality from inculturation**

The Vincentian Family is aware of its plural and intercultural reality. Furthermore, it feels called to the universal mission of the Church, which does not close in on some determined frontiers of place or culture, but rather is open to the global presence of poverty and an overall response to the world’s problems.

– **Committed Marian spirituality**

The Vincentian grants an important place in his/her spiritual experience to Mary, discovering in her the “mother,” model and intercessor, especially in the message of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to St. Catherine and the gift of the “Miraculous” Medal. She invites us to live by listening to the Word, contemplating God in life and Jesus Christ in the poor, serving as she did with the option for the littlest ones.

– **Vital, witnessing spirituality**

Vincentian Spirituality is concretized in a style, in a willingness of the person and the Christian, which is marked by the practice of some rather specific virtues or values. Vincent was aware of human weakness. For this reason, he gave his own a series of counsels and points of reference that would help them to lead a

life in the proper spirit and would be the distinguishing signs of the Vincentian identity. Among these “virtues of one’s state,” he will insist on simplicity, humility and charity (for the Daughters of Charity and members of the Confraternities), to which he will add gentleness, mortification and zeal (for the Missionaries). The Conferences of Ozanam take joy, cordiality and justice among the favorite virtues; the members of the Vincentian Marian Youth emphasize the spirit of collaboration, sensitivity to poverties, fulfilling the will of God, and openness.

The Vincentian Family

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: in the Service of the Poor

Motivation

“This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness. Now is the time for a new ‘creativity’ in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by ‘getting close’ to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.”¹

Our identity as the Vincentian Family (VF), comes from our roots, our history, and the potential that we possess as VF. True to that identity we will value our past, incorporate it into our present and move towards the future to serve the poorest.

Special material exists that has treated this subject of VF, from a historic perspective,² with a group vision,³ and in regards to its juridical-ecclesial aspects.⁴

The Congregation of the Mission dedicated a General Assembly to the Vincentian Family.⁵ The Assembly called for a greater awareness of the importance of the VF in the service of the poor.

“The 1998 General Assembly sent all the members of the Congregation to collaborate with other members of the Vincentian

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 50 (6 January 2001).

² Cf. BETTY ANN MCNEIL, “The Vincentian Family Tree,” in *Vincentian Heritage* (1998), 99-120; BETTY ANN MCNEIL, “Genealogical Development of the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (1997), 43-58; ROBERT P. MALONEY, “On the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (1997), 117-124; BENJAMÍN ROMO, “The CM and the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (2004), 321-330.

³ Cf. J. IGNACIO FERNÁNDEZ DE MENDOZA, “The Vincentian Family: An Overall Vision,” in *Vincentiana* (1998), 341-353.

⁴ Cf. ALBERTO VERNASCHI, “Vincentian Family Associations: Juridical and Canonical Dimensions,” in *Vincentiana* (2002), 478-489.

⁵ 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, “The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium (Rome, 6-31 July 1998),” in *Vincentiana* (1998), 193-402.

Family, responding together to the cry of the poor. Our mission does not end with just the personal or community surrendering to the poor. It goes farther and calls us to seek concrete ways of involving others, men and women, young and old, so that they, by discovering the richness of our charism, will serve the poor.”⁶

We will attempt to answer some questions: What is the Vincentian Family? What is it that characterizes the members of the VF? What is their particular style as VF? What is their common heritage? What is their present situation? What are their challenges, commitments, and dreams? Is there any concrete proposal?

1. Yesterday: “Everything Started in France in the 17th Century”

“Since 1617 the extended Vincentian Family has grown to include several hundred diverse groups of women and men, laity and religious, Catholic and non-Catholic. Such a record testifies to the ongoing impact of the extraordinary life of a single individual...”

A majestic family tree has developed because his mission, spirit and rule have been adapted to many cultures since emerging in seventeenth-century France.”⁷

We participate in a historic, doctrinal, and spiritual patrimony. In the many branches of our Family there have been great saints, confreres, Daughters of Charity, laity... everyone in love with the mission of Jesus Christ, and his kingdom of the poor.

2. Belonging to the Vincentian Family

“All those institutions which in a direct or indirect way found their inspiration in St. Vincent at the time of fixing their aims and defining their spiritual character; all these can be called branches of the Vincentian Family, in the broad sense.”⁸

The expression, Vincentian Family, then, refers to an entirety of congregations, organizations, movements, associations, groups, and persons that, in a direct or indirect way, prolong in time the Vincentian charism, having been founded by St. Vincent de Paul directly, or finding in him their source of inspiration and dedication to the service of the poor.

⁶ BENJAMÍN ROMO, “The Vincentian Family in the World,” in *Vincentiana* (2002), 218.

⁷ BETTY ANN MCNEIL, “Genealogical Development of the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (1997), 43. We recommend reading the entire article.

⁸ J.M. ROMAN, “The Vincentian Family, a continual renewal,” in *Vincentiana* (1995), 224.

According to the degree of affinity and specificity of each branch, the VF today has more than 165 branches worldwide that share a common heritage: the recognition of St. Vincent de Paul as founder or as the source of inspiration; an orientation stressing service of the poor; an inspiration based on the image of St. Vincent, with special emphasis on concrete and practical charity, lived out in simplicity and humility.

Today we refer to the “main branches of the Vincentian Family”⁹: *“Its largest branches bear communities with which Saint Vincent himself was personally involved, those under his patronage, or those founded by members of his own communities.... Other large limbs on the family tree bear communities that also share Vincent’s mission of serving Jesus Christ in the poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity.”*¹⁰

More than 400 years ago, St. Vincent de Paul began, in France, the adventure of serving and evangelizing the poor, to which, he gathered, invited, and motivated men and women of his time. He invited them to leave themselves and go and find the poor and cure their needs, convinced, in faith, that by “serving the poor, you are serving Jesus Christ” (SV IX, 252).

First, he started with a small group of women under the name of the “Confraternity of Charity” to help with the basic needs of the poor. Later, other priests joined him and he founded the “Congregation of the Mission” to evangelize the poor. He completed his work with lay women, the “Daughters of Charity,” who were consecrated for life to the service of the poor. His work is carried on today in many countries of the world where his charism (a particular way of following Jesus) is present and entrusted to many associations and congregations. We all feel responsible for a shared charism, that makes us feel like a family, a big Vincentian Family.

3. Our Style as Vincentian Family

We could say that there are some characteristic principles that define the identity of the VF. Among them are: Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, the poor in Jesus Christ; serving the poor through

⁹ The International Association of Charities (AIC), the Congregation of the Mission (CM), the Company of the Daughters of Charity (DC), the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP), the Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV), the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM), the Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI), the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (RSV).

¹⁰ BETTY ANN MCNEIL, “Genealogical Development of the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (1997), 43.

personal contact; the poor, sacrament of God; effective, affective and contagious love; Mary, teacher of a life of service and intercessory mother.

The VF has common origins, a style of its own. We could mention some of its characteristics: the centrality of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor; loving Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ, serving them “corporally and spiritually”; service to the poor with practical and concrete charity; striving to live and serve with simplicity and humility; personal contact with the poor who are considered our “lords and masters”; loving in a way that is effective, affective, inventive and communicative; being evangelized by the poor; missionary aspect of the Vincentian charism; living a Mariology with a “Vincentian take.”¹¹

The missionary dimension of the Vincentian charism or what we hereby defined as “missionary aspect of the Vincentian charism” deserves some special attention. The mission is the reason for our existence in the Church. The VF can not stay at the margins of Christianity. We can enumerate four characteristics of the VF mission: our mission is global; our mission demands mobility; our mission is evangelization and service and our mission involves organizing and forming others in the service of the poor¹² and takes into account some missionary challenges that the VF has for the Third Millennium.¹³

4. A Common Heritage¹⁴

What is the common heritage that every member of the Vincentian Family possesses? We have much in common: our spiritual growth, our Vincentian formation, both our apostolic and missionary effectiveness, which can promote union, knowledge, mutual esteem and the ability to seek and find common projects that benefit the poorest of the poor in our countries.

We affirm that there are some elements that unite us together as a Family: having St. Vincent as founder or inspiration; a loud and clear desire to serve the poor; Vincentian spirituality; the virtues of charity, service, simplicity and humility, among others.

¹¹ BENJAMÍN ROMO, “Unifying Elements in the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (2002), 409-420.

¹² Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, “The Vincentian Family as Missionary,” in *Vincentiana* (1998), 355-358.

¹³ Cf. *Idem*, 359-364.

¹⁴ ROBERT P. MALONEY, “On the Vincentian Family,” in *Vincentiana* (1997), 121.

5. Principal Branches of the Vincentian Family

The branches of the Vincentian Family that have up until today kept closer ties are: the International Association of Charities (AIC), the Congregation of the Mission (CM), the Company of the Daughters of Charity (DC), the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP), the Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV), the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM), the Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI). Joined to these, there are many other Associations and Congregations that nourish their spirit from the fountain of the Vincentian charism.

In order to coordinate the almost two million people who make up the Vincentian Family, a decade ago, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Robert P. Maloney, began gathering the leaders of each branch once a year to promote the ties of unity and to launch common actions on an international level. The experience has been so rich that we are going to have the 13th meeting and the common actions that we undertake become clearer each time.

During these annual meetings, all the common actions from the last year are set forth and those for the next year are elaborated; there are moments of formation; common plans are revised; new interventions are outlined; but, above all, one is carried away with the dream of a big family dedicated to the corporal and spiritual service to the poorest on earth, wherever and whoever they are.

6. Our Future: Challenges, Commitments and Dreams¹⁵

They are: unity, collaboration, prayer, and specific Vincentian formation. To go to the poorest, to be creative.

As the Vincentian Family we want to join efforts, dreams, and courage to serve and evangelize the poor. It is clear that each of the branches has its own identity. The proposal of the VF is wider. It is not a juridical organization, it is not a new movement, and it is not a particular segment. The expression Vincentian Family refers to all of the congregations, organizations, movements, associations, groups and persons that, directly or indirectly, carry on in time the Vincentian charism, whether having been founded directly by St. Vincent de Paul or having him as source of its inspiration and dedication to the service of the poor.

Already since 1991 four challenges were identified: to live the Vincentian charism here and now in our history; to make serious

¹⁵ We recommend the complete reading of the final document of the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission (Rome, 6-31 July 1998), especially where it refers to the challenges, convictions and commitments of the Vincentian Family, in *Vincentiana* (1998), 384-397.

efforts in the area of formation; to reach out to the world of youth, and to form Vincentian missionaries with a mentality of collaboration.¹⁶

With respect to the autonomy of each group, in a spirit of fraternity and mutual assistance, the proposal of the Vincentian Family should be a joint effort to:

1. Recognize and become more deeply aware of the challenging reality of the poor.
2. Deepen the Vincentian charism in light of the present appeals of the poor
3. Work together more closely in both initial and ongoing formation. We have much to share.
4. Greater unity, mutual assistance, and development of service to the poor.
5. Create a database with information about the reality, needs, hopes and fears of the poor.
6. Elaborate common apostolic projects among the members of the VF.¹⁷
7. The innumerable joint initiatives of the VF in recent years are beginning to yield a rich harvest and make clear a new and broad horizon of promise, all with a view toward closer collaboration and union among the branches of the VF for a greater and better service of the poor.¹⁸
8. Formation in and dissemination of the Social Doctrine of the Church,¹⁹ teaching branches of the VF of its extreme importance to us who live in the Vincentian tradition.

As the VF we can have dreams, hopes. The great challenge is that the dreams become reality.²⁰

¹⁶ BENJAMÍN ROMO, "The Vincentian Family in the World," in *Vicentiana* (2002), 223-225.

¹⁷ Fr. Robert Maloney enumerates some of them: concrete works of charity; working together in foreign missions participation in popular missions, dissemination of the Vincentian charism; prayer and celebration of Vincentian feasts together. Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, "On the Vincentian Family," in *Vicentiana* (1997), 123.

¹⁸ BENJAMÍN ROMO, "The CM and the Vincentian Family," in *Vicentiana* (2004), 321-330.

¹⁹ Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, "Ten Foundational Principles in the Social Teaching of the Church," in *Vicentiana* (1999), 201-209. The author proposes the principles of: the dignity of the human person; respect for human life; association; participation; preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable; solidarity; stewardship; subsidiarity; human equality and common good.

²⁰ Referring to the dreams of Fr. Robert P. Maloney for the VF in the Third Millennium: the VF will become a united force, an army of

7. PROPOSAL on an International Level²¹

In different countries, the proposal for joining together as the VF, is catching on and is becoming a concrete reality. Several meetings have taken place among the international leaders of some branches of the VF and diverse proposals have been presented and defined: day of common prayer of the VF, preparation of the Web site on the internet, efforts of mutual help, resources for reflection about the Vincentian charism, incentives for common projects to serve the poor, etc.

1. *Joining together of VF*

Throughout the years, the different branches of the VF, have always developed some spontaneous forms of rapprochement out and mutual collaboration.

In the 90's, based on several experiences in different countries, the major superiors of some branches met and a persistent proposal of Vincentian collaboration emerged from that. With a formal and renewed impulse, this VF proposal of organization does not have juridical canonical effect; rather its purpose is the sharing of all the groups and persons that participate in the Vincentian heritage, so that they relate to and collaborate with each other, always looking for providing a service to the poor.

2. *Objectives and principles of the VF*

The proposal of the VF organization is based on the conviction of our missionary responsibility in the service of the Kingdom, with on the prophetic and dynamic power of the Vincentian charism.

Encouraged by the power of charity, with openness and creativity, we want to develop mechanisms to meet the present demands of the Vincentian charism, and respond together to the real and urgent cries of the poor.

evangelization and human and integral promotion for the poor; will enrich ourselves mutually with formation programs; make the voice of the VF heard in international organizations like the UN and the European Community; use the most modern means of communication to form creatively for the service of the poor and channel our energies in themes of justice and peace; be able to motivate youth to join us in our groups and form other groups in the service of the poor; that MISEVI be present in other countries; that we become a family that prays with devotion and in a beautiful way. Cf. <http://www.pbcm.com.br/favi.htm>

²¹ CF. <http://www.fv.org.br/fvBrasil.asp?ID=5>

The proposal for the joining together of the VF, has the following specific objectives:

1. To intensify fraternity and understanding among the laity of the different branches;
2. To deepen the Vincentian charism in light of today's appeals;
3. To develop forms of collaboration in the formation of the members of the various branches;
4. To undertake common projects at the service of the poor, according to their new and real clamors.

To make these objectives concrete, some basic principles should be followed such as:

1. Openness of each branch within an ecclesial context of the service of the poor;
2. Wide respect for the autonomy and specificity of each branch;
3. Spirit of fraternity, of mutual help and equality among the different branches;
4. Valuing the experience of each branch and its concrete place in Vincentian heritage.

3. *Lines of action*

1. Join forces, walking spontaneously, to strengthen the laity in the VF, in view of a strong boost to benefit the service of the poor.
2. Seek better formation of the members of the VF through our knowledge of St. Vincent and his charism.
3. Strengthen the joining together of the VF, seeking the participation of other branches and organizing and developing the VF in parts of the world where it is not present.
4. To respect the autonomy of each group, in a spirit of mutual collaboration.

4. *Organization*

1. Promotion of groups of the branches of the VF in diverse countries.
2. Development of coordination on a national level.

3. Organization of a VF national secretariat.
 4. Preparation of national formation programs for the laity of the VF.
 5. Guarantee accompaniment from the CM and the DC, in the Vincentian formation and in the service of the poor.
5. *Activities being developed*
1. Having an annual meeting of the representatives of the main branches of the VF.
 2. Disseminating news of the VF through the web site (www.famvin.org and www.famvin.net).
 3. Publication and exchange of Vincentian animation and formation materials.
 4. Joint celebration of the common day of prayer of the VF and another Vincentian celebrations of important feast days within each branch of the VF.
 5. Joint service projects for the poor in different countries.
 6. Continental meetings of the VF, reinforcing the initiatives for closer ties, unity, formation and collaboration among the members and branches of the VF.

Conclusion

We are now in the Third Millennium which calls us to renewal, to change, and to Christian conversion. We cannot be content with what we are doing, with what we know, and with serving those whom we have always served.

The poor keep growing and multiplying, and us... shall not we grow and multiply as well in order to find the cure with more energy and efficacy? There is so much to do! Each member of every group must become a multiplying agent, someone who attracts many other passionate people to serve the poor.

Our founders, St. Vincent, St. Louise, Blessed Frederick Ozanam, and the Servant of God Jean-Léon Le Prevost were practical persons, not theoretical. We are called to a stronger commitment to the poor.

“The necessities of the poor are immense. The Lord is calling us to respond together. St. Vincent was conscious of the communal dimension of the service of the Gospel. He knew that by channeling our energies and growing in unity we could be more effective instruments to face the concrete needs of the poor.”

Let us make the Gospel effective for the poor. Let us live our identity as the Vincentian Family. Today there are new forms of poverty awaiting, from all of us, a response of love from God who knows them, who forgives them, who waits for them... and who loves them.²²

Responsible:

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²² We refer to the complete reading of the final Synthesis, "A New 'Creativity' in Charity" from the *Vincentian Month 2002: Advisors of the Vincentian Family* (Paris, July 2002), in *Vincentiana* (2002), 498-507.

International Association of Charities (AIC)

“Against Poverty, Acting Together”



It was in Châtillon-les-Dombes, a small village near Maçon, in France, that St. Vincent created in 1617 the first “Confraternities,” later called “Charities.” A Sunday of August, during a homily in the church, Vincent de Paul exhorted his parishioners to

help a large, poor and sick family. Many of them, mainly women, rushed to help this family, but their generosity was not very effective, through lack of method. That is why St. Vincent was led to “organize charity.” So was born the first nucleus, the first charity, from which stem a great number of groups. The latter, while St. Vincent was still alive, spread, thanks to the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission, first to the whole of France, later to Italy in 1634 and to Poland in 1651. St. Vincent was the first one to give women a place in the Church and an active and recognized social role, in a spirit of solidarity. St. Louise de Marillac was his closest collaborator and animator of the Charities.

AIC, International Association of Charities, stems from those groups of women. *AIC has been international since its foundation, because St. Vincent wanted to create groups in Italy and Poland. As the years went by, the groups went on spreading to many other countries.*

Charities began their action with home visits, but, when he realized how diversified were the needs of the poor, St. Vincent urged them to make distinct projects, such as taking care of orphans, imprisoned deserters, the sick in the hospitals.

Traditionally, the president of the “Confraternities” of France, became the International President and the member associations, autonomous as far as the types and forms of actions were concerned, were registered at the center in Paris, situated on Rue de Sèvres.

From the beginning, they have remained united by a common spirituality that has always animated them. In 1971, for the first time, a Council and an International President were elected and existing national associations gathered under the name of “International Association of Charities,” founded by St. Vincent de Paul, with the following motto: **“Against poverty, acting together.”**

AIC Today: Vision, Spirit and Objectives

AIC is an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO), which is composed mainly of women, organized at world level, with more than 250.000 volunteers, in more than 50 countries, on four continents. AIC harnesses energy and develops social co-responsibility around an innovative project, inspired by St. Vincent’s doctrine and teachings, firmly fixed in local reality, making disadvantaged people and those excluded from society partners of their own social reintegration.

Its fundamental project: *“To be a transforming force against poverties and in society”* broaches diverse aspects:

- To fight all forms of poverty, injustice and social exclusion, through initiatives, which give priority to solidarity and being alongside people at grass roots level.
- To maintain the Vincentian spirit and direct contact with the poorest of the poor, both through home visits and each action and project.
- To be involved first and foremost with women throughout the world, helping them help themselves.
- To increase the participation of disadvantaged people so that they become agents of their own development and that of their community.
- To encourage networking and collaboration at all levels, particularly with the Vincentian Family.
- To be a transforming force in society, by being aware of the social co-responsibility of all parties, from international authorities to local teams and disadvantaged people.

Its concrete role:

- To be present in the field. The teams are made up solely of local volunteers, responding to the needs expressed in their communities by disadvantaged people. These teams initiate projects based on local reality, enabling the poorest of the poor to draw up projects, and implement their own projects.

- To heighten public awareness to the growing problems of social exclusion. It does this by questioning local, national and international civil and Church authorities about human rights violations, the problems, needs and aspirations of excluded people, of women and of the family in today's society.
- To train volunteers in spiritual values and the Vincentian spirit.
- To develop their skills by emphasizing the multidimensionality of the causes and effects of poverty, the participation and **empowerment of the beneficiaries, partnership, social co-responsibility and networking** (2002-2006 AIC Operational Guidelines).

AIC with the International Authorities

Aware of the importance of its representativeness (250.000 volunteers) and of its experience in the fight against poverty, AIC ensures an active presence with the following international authorities: UNESCO, ECOSOC (Economical and Social Council of the United Nations), Council of Europe, Conference of the ICO (International Catholic Organizations), EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network), Crescendo (Network for a human and Christian ageing).

The AIC representatives' mission is to transmit grassroots experience to international organisms and to inform AIC about the main themes of interest concerning eradication of poverty and its causes. In the name of AIC, the representatives consider international policies towards the poorest of the poor, and particularly excluded women, as key priorities.

Apostolic commitments and main actions and projects of AIC associations in the world:

- 8976 projects involving being alongside people and accompanying them.
- 2493 projects of social inclusion or reintegration.
- 2460 projects to develop the community.
- 1841 projects with the elderly.
- 1694 projects for the personal development of women.
- 969 projects to improve health.
- 921 projects of welcome and support.
- 527 educational and training projects.

- 443 projects with migrants.
- 429 food and nutritional projects.
- 427 projects of economic activity to generate income.
- Participation in common projects of the Vincentian Family to fight hunger and malaria.

In all these projects, AIC commits itself in transmitting the Gospel values, as St. Vincent did, and by being alongside the poorest and visiting them at home, tries to become a tangible sign of the love of Jesus Christ towards the poorest and to make God's plan reality.

AIC in the World

- **Africa and Madagascar:** Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria.
- **Latin America:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela.
- **Asia:** Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.
- **United States.**
- **Europe/Near East:** Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

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Congregation of the Mission (CM)



The Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission

St. Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission in 1625 for the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy. The Congregation has stated its purpose at the present time in the following way:

“The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:

- 1° make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (*Common Rules* I, 3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (*CR XII*, 13);
- 2° work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned;
- 3° help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor” (*Constitutions*, art. 1).

The General Assembly of 1980 when it was stating this purpose, in view of the signs of the times and the realities of our day, did not repeat what St. Vincent said in the *Common Rules*: “To preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas” but rather chose the words: “Work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned”; in place of St. Vincent’s: “To help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry,” it chose: “Help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor.”

The Spirit of the Congregation

“The spirit of the Congregation comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence” (*Const.*, art. 6). “The Congregation, furthermore, tries to express its spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely, simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. Speaking of these five virtues, St. Vincent said: “The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them” (*CR II*, 14)” (*Const.*, art. 7).

Characteristics and Works of the Congregation

“These are the characteristics to be kept in mind in this work of evangelization which the Congregation proposes to carry out:

- 1° clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5);
- 2° attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world’s goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;
- 3° some sharing in the condition of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;
- 4° genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation;
- 5° readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation;
- 6° striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind’ (Rm 12:2)” (*Const.*, art. 12).

Juridical Status

The Congregation of the Mission is a Society of Apostolic Life comprising priests and lay brothers. Our juridical status is defined by our Constitutions, within the framework of canons 731-746 of the Code of Canon Law. We take vows but we are not religious, following St. Vincent's intention who always wanted us to have the flexibility and mobility of an apostolic society which lives and works in close contact with the world.

Some Statistics

In 2005 the Congregation had 3419 incorporated members: 31 bishops, 3096 priests, 168 lay brothers and 52 philosophy and theology students (who have already taken their vows).

Where do We Work?

We work in 85 countries, and we are organised into 5 Vice-Provinces: Costa Rica, Mozambique, Nigeria, St. Justin De Jacobis (Eritrea) and Sts. Cyril and Methodius (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine), and 46 Provinces: Madagascar, Ethiopia, Congo (with Belgium as a region), – Argentina (Paraguay and Uruguay), Brazil (Curitiba, Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro), Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama), Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States (New England, Eastern, Southern, Western and Midwest), Venezuela, – China, India (North and South), Indonesia, Orient (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Syria), Philippines, – Austria, France (Paris and Toulouse), Germany, Holland, Hungary, Ireland (England and Scotland), Italy (Naples, Rome and Turin), Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Salamanca and Saragossa), – Australia (Fiji).

Our Tasks, According to the Constitutions and Statutes

We evangelise the poor by means of popular missions (*Const.*, art. 14), nowadays especially in parishes (cf. *Stat.* 10); we have also many missions “ad Gentes” (*Const.*, art. 16).

The General Curia is responsible for the International Missions established in El Alto, Bolivia, in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Each year the Superior General addresses a letter to the entire Congregation to give news of the missions and to encourage new missionaries “ad Gentes” for Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, China, Mozambique, Cuba and other countries and regions of the word.

For popular missions or missions ad Gentes we can often count on the collaboration of the Daughters of Charity and many lay volunteers animated by St. Vincent's spirit. Several vocations for the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission come from among these volunteers.

We still have seminaries for the formation of the clergy (*Const.*, art. 15). This work does not at present have its former prominence. The Superior General, though, still receives many requests from bishops in missionary countries, or countries where there is a shortage of indigenous clergy. Many confreres are assigned to the spiritual help of the Daughters of Charity, as Provincial Directors, preachers of retreats, confessors or chaplains. "Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together" (*Const.*, art. 17).

"Lay associations founded by St. Vincent and those which are inspired by his spirit should be of special concern to our members, since they have the right to our presence and to our support. Although all members should be willing to undertake this work, it is necessary for some to be more skilled in it. It is important that this animation have a spiritual, ecclesial, social, and civic dimension" (*Stat.* 7). We work in various countries with the International Association of Charities, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Vincentian Lay Missionaries and other groups of the Vincentian Family.

In some countries schools are a very necessary part of the apostolate, with many confreres involved in them from primary level as in India up to university level as in the Philippines and the United States (cf. *Stat.* 11).

Some Notable Apostolates

There are confreres who work with those who live in the great rubbish dumps of cities (as in Payatas, Philippines and in Antananarivo Madagascar). There are confreres who commit themselves to work with communities for healing, for drug addicts, for AIDS victims (in certain European countries with the Daughters of Charity and lay volunteers), with indigenous groups (in many Latin American countries), with the deaf (in Ireland), with gypsies, with prisoners, with street children, with the homeless, etc. There are specialised pastoral ministries such as that in Brazil (Curitiba) where confreres work with truck drivers, always on the move. There are confreres who set up basic Church communities and undertake the formation

of lay assistants who will ensure spiritual help in places where there are no priests. Other confreres work at forming “multipliers of our Vincentian activity” by the animation of lay groups, in teaching in universities for ecclesiastical studies, or at other educational levels. There are confreres who take part in group meetings to reflect on the consecrated life, education, atheism, means of social communication, family ministry, psychological help, etc., and devote part of their time to giving courses in institutions belonging to dioceses, to Provinces of the Congregation, or to other Congregations.

Conferences of Visitors

In countries where there are two or more Provinces (Brazil, Spain, United States, France, Italy), the Visitors and their councils meet regularly to coordinate the apostolates which can be undertaken and carried out together, and to ensure common works such as houses of formation for their candidates (Internal Seminaries or novitiates, houses for philosophy or theology).

Other Provinces are grouped in continental conferences, such as those of Latin America (CLAPVI), Europe (CEVIM), Africa and Madagascar (COVIAM), Asia-Pacific (APVC) and the United States (NCV). The Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI) has regular meetings and runs courses for the confreres in various works (those in formation, missionaries, parish priests, those involved in lay movements). All these courses and meetings are also open nowadays to the Daughters of Charity and Vincentian laity. There are also groups of provinces which operate a joint coordination for Vincentian formation with the Daughters of Charity, as in Spain or Italy, etc. There are provinces where the seminarists meet regularly for Vincentian formation, as the Europeans or Brazilians do.

There are programmes which deserve special mention, such as the Salamanca Vincentian Study Weeks in Spain, or the *Fiches* (booklets) of the Toulouse Vincentian Animation Group in France. Various countries have published books on St. Vincent and his charism, on Vincentian topics and persons linked with St. Vincent. A History of the Congregation is being written at the moment.

Some Useful Addresses

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Phone (33.1) 4549 8484
Fax (33.1) 4549 8485

- International Formation: Center St. Vincent de Paul (CIF)
95, rue de Sèvres
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Company of the Daughters of Charity (DC)



MOTTO:

***THE CHARITY OF JESUS CRUCIFIED
URGES US***

The Company, founded in France in the 17th century by Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, is known in the Church by the name of Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Servants of the Poor.

Its beginnings were at the same time simple and unexpected, as Saint Vincent acknowledged: *"Who would ever have thought that there would be Daughters of Charity?... I did not think of it... God thought of it for you."*

Attentive to following Divine Providence and responsive to the working of the Spirit, Vincent de Paul became conscious of the material and spiritual misery of his time, and devoted his life to the service and evangelization of poor persons, whom he called *"our Lords and Masters."*

Saint Vincent de Paul was the pastor at Châtillon-les-Dombes in the diocese of Lyon (France) when he encouraged an act of solidarity which had a very significant historical repercussion. One Sunday during the summer of 1617, as he was preparing to celebrate the Eucharist, several women arrived and told him about the miserable condition of a family infected by the plague. Moved to compassion by this story of suffering, he recounted it to his parishioners in his homily, to help them be aware of the need to aid this family which was in such a critical condition.

The response of the parishioners in this town was very positive. They united together and went to the family to offer their assistance. Saint Vincent felt the need to organize this united action and assist

in its continuation. With this purpose in mind, he founded the Confraternities of Charity (1617), which quickly extended into the parishes in the villages and countryside, involving many charitable persons who wished to help those in need. Providentially, he met Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), who collaborated closely with him in his charitable work as animator of the Confraternities of Charity by visiting, guiding and accompanying the groups that had been established in the villages and cities.

In 1630, the Confraternities of Charity began to be organized in parishes of Paris. Soon difficulties arose about how to continue to serve the sick poor in their homes, as there were certain menial tasks that the ladies of the confraternities were unable to assume.

It was then that a simple young woman from the country, Marguerite Naseau (1594-1633) presented herself to Saint Vincent. Before coming to Paris and placing herself at the service of Louise de Marillac, she had devoted her time to going from village to village instructing children and young people in improvised outdoor schools. Several months before the Company of the Daughters of Charity was founded, Marguerite died of the plague in Saint Louis Hospital in Paris. She had contracted the illness from a sick woman whom she had brought into her room and cared for in her bed.

Her entire life was a witness of her commitment and solidarity and also the cause of her death. Inspired by true evangelical love, she became the servant of the most abandoned. Vincent de Paul would later say of her:

"Marguerite Naseau from Suresnes was the first Sister who had the happiness of showing others the way... although she had almost no other teacher or schoolmistress but God."

Her example was contagious. It was in this way that, imperceptibly, in the manner of things divine, the Company of the Daughters of Charity was born. On 29 November 1633, the first Sisters gathered around Louise de Marillac to live their ideal under her guidance in community.

At first they nursed the sick poor in their homes, in the towns and villages; as needs became known, they cared for the sick in hospitals, little girls in need of instruction, foundlings, galley convicts, wounded soldiers, refugees, the aged, persons with mental illness, and others.

The monastery of the new foundation would be the houses of the sick, their cloister the streets of the city, their cell a hired room, their enclosure obedience, their grill the fear of God and their veil holy modesty. Their commitment to serve God in persons who are poor is ratified by the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and a specific vow of service of those who are poor. The Sisters renew their

vows each year on the feast of the Annunciation; each Sister associates her own gift of self to the *Fiat* of the Virgin Mary.

Saint Vincent wanted the true profession of each Daughter of Charity to be confidence in Divine Providence. He frequently repeated this in his conferences to the first Sisters.

In 1652, convinced that the charity of Christ, which must urge the Company, knows no boundaries, the Founders sent the first group of Sisters to Poland. Thus, at the time of the death of the founders in 1660, there were 74 foundations at the service of poor persons with 330 Sisters, all of whom were in France except for the six Sisters who had been sent to Poland.

On 18 January 1655, the Company was approved by Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, and on 8 June 1668, eight years after the deaths of the Founders, it received pontifical approval from Pope Clement IX.

As time has passed, healthcare, education and social service ministries have developed for the Daughters of Charity, incorporating a spirit of solidarity, which has served as a role model for all European governments, who have confided to the Daughters of Charity the management of charitable institutions, public as well as private.

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Sisters' service of solidarity and assistance was carried out in France and Poland. In 1790, at the end of the age of Enlightenment, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Spain. During the 19th century, their presence extended into almost all of the countries in Europe and Latin America, in North America and much of Asia, as well as in several places in Africa and Oceania. In the 20th century, the Company continued its expansion throughout the whole world.

The gestures and witnesses of solidarity multiplied as a result of wars and epidemics. The Sisters aroused particular attention in the events of Constantinople where they were called *Angels of Mercy* by the Turks. There, the Sisters cared for Muslims as well as Christians in health dispensaries as well as in hospitals, soup kitchens, orphanages and schools.

In 1888, the historian Gabriel Jogand Pagés, in his book *Popular History of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul*, described the history of Nursing and the International Red Cross, recalling the presence and availability of the Sisters who assisted those who were ill or injured in wars and disasters.

Today, the Company is international and is currently present in 94 countries. The number of Sisters is 21,002, divided into 2,509 communities and 77 Canonical Provinces.

The diversity of services of the Daughters of Charity is as great as the diversity of poverty in the world. Wherever there is human suffering, situations of misery, injustice, lack of solidarity... that is where the Daughters of Charity want to be present.

In fidelity to the charism of its Founders, the Company casts its gaze into the future, attentively listening to the cry of those who are poor, with a heart open to the forms of poverty in the world today, in order to respond with courage in new ways, with "*creativity in charity*"¹ to the calls that come from "*here and there.*"²

The Company wants to be a helping hand, ready to collaborate in the eradication of misery and injustice that disfigure the face of God in human beings. It is ready to respond and serve, following the example of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel, whose compassion moved him to act in the face of suffering and pain that strikes those who are poor. The Company wants to be the prophetic voice of one who announces something new and decisive: "The Reign of God is near and it is for those who are poor."

Today as in the past, the Company knows that it is sent into the world to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, since "*at the school of the Son of God, the Daughters of Charity learn that no type of distress should be foreign to them.*"³ Thus, the Daughters of Charity are present in all five continents at the service of their needy brothers and sisters, in multiple ways:

In education, according to the reality of each country, assuming responsibility for learning centers, parish animation, or forming parts of education teams in primary and secondary schools.

In social ministries, inserted into marginalized neighborhoods, villages and remote areas, fulfilling different services, in contact with real needs: home visiting, collaboration with the local Church, the Vincentian Family and other organizations, in social action programs with a view to promote the integral development of the person. They pay particular attention to the situations of street children, women in difficulty, people who are immigrants or refugees.

In health care services, serving in residences for elderly persons, geriatric centers, attentive to persons with disabilities or mental illness. They provide services to those with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and malnutrition, as well as manage and promote health centers, contribute to the formation of

¹ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 50.

² Lines of Action of the Daughters of Charity 2004, p. 6

³ Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, C. 11.

community health care agents, and support initiatives of WHO in favor of children.

In parish ministry, the Sisters are present and actively collaborate in parish and diocesan ministry. They are involved in animation of youth groups and as members of teams of popular missions with the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family. They accompany the organizations of AIC, AMM and JMV as spiritual advisors. The Sisters collaborate in pastoral ministry in hospitals, prisons and with marginalized persons, and as members of ethics committees.

The call heard by the first Sisters is ever the same. Throughout the world it continues to raise up and assemble Daughters of Charity, who strive to rediscover at the source the inspiration and intuitions of their Founders, so that they may respond with ever-renewed fidelity and availability to the needs of their time.

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Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP)

International Confederation



1. THE LOGO

The logo appears at the top of this page. It represents the relationship of friendship and fraternal love which unites all the members under the merciful gaze of God.

2. THE MOTTO

The motto, which is part of the logo, is, as we can see, "*Serviens in spe*": to serve in hope.

3. SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY

The history of the Society is really quite simple. It is about the dream of a group of laypeople who were friends, quite young in fact, who in the chaotic Paris of 1833 sought to consecrate themselves to the poorest. To this end they established a Christian community that helped and participated in the pain of those who suffer.

Six young men, of whom the eldest was just 24 years old and the youngest 19, met together to offer help, consolation, and Christian love to the most vulnerable persons, committing themselves, moreover, to do this personally.

To complete the group, the maturity of these young men inspired them to place themselves under the guidance of a person older than they, who then was around 40 years old and who offered them life experience, contacts, and the capacity for relating that they needed.

The origins of the foundation have been discussed at great length, both within and outside of the Institution. The Conferences have experienced a great expansion over the years (140 countries and more than 720,000 members in October of 2003), and many have tried to discover to which of the first seven members this merit belongs.

With regard to the foundation, we can only say, with total assurance, that which the seven founders themselves expressed then: Only God, who smiled on the friendship that existed among them all, provided the group the grace necessary to dream that particular dream, and the strength to make it become reality. And so, it is our good God who must be considered to be the author and the true founder of the Society.

4. THE HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SURROUNDED THE FOUNDATION IN FRANCE IN THE 19th CENTURY. SOME CLARIFICATIONS

The history of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP) is tied closely to the social and political history of France and Europe of the 1800s.

In 1840 Frederic Ozanam, one of the seven founders of the SSVP wrote *"We are entering a period in which no one can foresee the ups and downs, but of which it is impossible to be mistaken about the advent."* At the dawn of the 19th century all of the thinkers, learned persons and philosophers, regardless of their political ideas or intellectual traditions, shared the conviction, more or less explicit, that the old world had come to an end. It was not the French Revolution of 1789 that marked the key moment of the historical shift, but rather the Industrial Revolution, whose effects were certainly noticed by 1810: the mechanization of industry, the proliferation of steam-driven machinery, the development and concentration of factories, the displacement of the populace, and the exploitation of the working class by inhumane rhythms of labor and with no thought given to the unification of this new economic world. The consequences of this situation were immediately felt: a steep drop in wages caused by competition among workers seeking jobs and thus an excessive increase in unemployment, synonymous with hunger. Faced with this situation, some of the intellectuals began to react in the first years of the Restoration. Yet they were isolated in a society which still functioned according to old patterns and which was unaware of what was about to occur. Along with Lammenais, Charles De Coux and Fr. Gerbet must also be mentioned: in 1830 they were among the first of the wave of Catholics who would be concerned for the fate of the working class. In *L'Avenir*, the daily newspaper of Lacordaire and Montalembert, they published various

articles that caught the attention of several young Catholics who would later found the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul. *L'Avenir* was suspended in November of 1831, and so De Coux and Gerbet continued their efforts through a series of conferences. Frederic Ozanam, along with some of the other founders of the Conferences, had become part of the group of Catholic students of the Sorbonne that had promoted this initiative, about which they were quite enthusiastic. The great principle that oriented this search and these reflections was the conviction that the economy should become social.

When the Revolution of 1830 exploded, one of the founders of the Conferences, who would later be given the title of Blessed, Frederic Ozanam, was only 17 years old. He had a burning faith and at the same time was open to the new ideas. Avoid class struggles, yes, absolutely. But because of his love and his faith, he would not admit using political means. In 1831, outraged by the *Journal de débats* for having called "*the working class barbarians and enemies,*" Ozanam denounced "*the contempt for human dignity, the exploitation, the comparison of the worker to a machine, the slavery, the waste in the face of human misery, the usury, the brutality of the economists and the industrialists.*" A small group of Catholic students, companions of his from the Sorbonne, had gathered around him, among them Jules Devaux, François Lallier, Auguste Le Taillandier and Paul Lamache, all future members of the first Conference along with Ozanam. With the idea of entering more incisively into the controversy with the students who were atheists, Lamache, Ozanam and Lallier decided to prepare their presentations as a group and so together they put the finishing touches on their arguments. Frederic Ozanam rose to the occasion in the controversy. Nevertheless, after presenting his principles and convictions, all sides maintained their own points of view. Le Taillandier was the first of the future founders to be on the right track as he tried to inspire his friends with these words: "*A meeting of charity where a group of Catholics gather together would have the double merit of preserving in them the spirit of faith and making their companions who are indifferent see the persistent and beneficial vitality of Christianity.*" The conclusion of all was clear "*Let us not speak so much about charity, above all else, let us put it in practice and help the poor*" added Ozanam.

Lamache, Ozanam, Devaux, Le Taillandier and Felix Clavé would be the founding nucleus of the SSVP. "*We have been brought together by a movement of Christian pity, and no one in particular can call himself the originator of the Society. When we have said that about the origins of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we have said everything*" expressed Lallier in 1856. Emmanuel Bailly, who presided over the literary conference in the *Place de l'Estrapé*, was the first person to whom the small group was drawn. He was a man of experience who

by then was over 40 years old and who had been concerned about the Catholic students for the past 15 years. One spring evening in 1833, the young men went to his home and Frederic Ozanam presented their project to him. After listening intently to him, Bailly expressed keen interest in the project and joined up with them as one more member among the rest. They went to see the pastor of the parish in the neighborhood, Fr. Olivier, who only invited them to direct the catechesis of the young children who were needy. This suggestion was not quite that for which they were looking. They were gifted with a greater generosity and a deep commitment. The oldest of the group, Bailly, had the great idea of sending them to visit a woman religious who would profoundly influence the whole group, and without whom the SSVF would not have been the same: Sr. Rosalie Rendu. In 1815, despite her young age, she was chosen to lead the community of the Daughters of Charity, and from then on, all the lower classes of Faubourg Saint Marceau, Saint Médard and Montparnasse would have to deal with her. She welcomed them with great warmth and instantly understood what they were seeking. She got to work immediately and gave them tickets for free bread which she distributed to help the poor. She showed them how to use the tickets and how to alleviate misery in the most concrete ways. These young men, along with Sr. Rosalie, began to act. Their work consisted in going personally to visit the poor in their own homes and distributing aid to them. After this meeting with Sr. Rosalie, all of the first members formed the small Conference of Saint Vincent, whose project was placed under the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul, whom Sr. Rosalie had presented as a model of boundless humility, charity and simplicity. On 23 April 1833, the first seven members met in the offices of the *Tribune Catholique*, Bailly's newspaper: thus was founded the first Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul. In August of the same year, Léon le Prévost, a learned man who was around 30 years of age, and who joined the Conference, wrote: "*In this moment there is a great movement of charity and of faith, but all this in a sphere veiled in humility*" [...] "*from these new catacombs shall come forth a light for the world.*" Le Prévost would shortly leave the Conferences in order to found the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul. By the end of 1834, the number of brothers was around a hundred and some thought of a possible division. One of the founders, who with his reasoning strongly influenced the others, was Blessed Frederic Ozanam. As testimony that the decision was correct and was in accord with the designs of God for the humble Society that was coming to life, in 1850, only a quarter of a century after its foundation, the number of Conferences in France had grown to 285. There were 37 in the Netherlands, 28 in Belgium, 24 in Ireland, 24 also in Prussia, 22 in Canada, 17 in England, eight in Mexico, five in the United States, six in Italy (actually Italy did not

yet exist as such, neither as a state, nor from a political perspective, four Conferences were founded in the Kingdom of Savoy and Sardinia, more precisely in Genoa, Nice, Ovada and Chambéry, there were two others in the Papal State in Rome), two in Scotland, two in Turkey, one in Switzerland, one in Greece, one in Spain, one in Bavaria and one in Algeria.

It is important to note that the activity of the first members was not limited only to assistance: in December 1833 the administrators of the neighborhood of "*La Bienfaisance*" asked the members of the Conferences to accept the role of "Commissioners of Charity." This was the beginning of collaborative activity between the Society and the Public Administration that continues with great success in our own days. The following year the young Vincentian students met with young workers with the idea of helping them with their studies. A short time later, the Court entrusted them with the mission of reaching out to young people in trouble. In 1836 the Court asked the Vincentians to help prisoners who had been released from confinement. In the same year the Society began its assistance to the military. In order to defend the most vulnerable members of society against the rising prices, the Conferences created food pantries and began to administer some dining rooms. The first home built for a poor family was in 1842 in Lille. The institution of the "*Avocat de pauvres*," began in 1844. In 1850 in the factory of Baudin, in Jura the first conference for businesses was founded. Around 1850 banks for unemployment and credit were founded, as were recreational clubs for workers.

The development of the SSVP from its foundation to our times has necessitated the transformation of its juridical structure to that of an International Confederation. This transformation was approved by the International General Assembly that met in Rome in October 2003. On this occasion, a new Rule was presented which contains the International Statutes of the Society.

5. SPIRIT, CHARACTERISTICS AND OBJECTIVES

What can be better than availing ourselves of the words of one of the founders, perhaps the best known for his intellectual and public work, to summarize the four objectives of the SSVP? In the report presented to the Leadership Council dated 4 December 1836, Frederic Ozanam recalled the two objectives of the Society: "*The welfare of the members and the welfare of the poor [...]*." On 11 August 1838 Ozanam wrote to Lallier: "*The presidents of the Conferences are invited to remind frequently the assemblies, which they preside, that the objective of the Society is, above all, to inflame and to spread the spirit of Catholicism among the youth; and that, to this end, regular*

attendance at meetings, the union of intentions and of prayer, along with the visits to the poor are indispensable.”

The Rule of the Confederation confirmed this spirit, affirming in chapter 1.2 on **the Vincentian vocation**: “The vocation of the Society’s members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.” It is important to cite the following paragraph, also from the Rule, 1.3 about **any form of personal help** that formulates the possible activities: “No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.”

6. THE APOSTOLIC MANDATE TODAY

The spirit of the founders’ faith (who were in the vanguard for their time, ecclesiastically speaking) remains alive today among the Vincentians. The relationship to the Catholic Church is confirmed in chapter 5 of the Rule, corresponding to **the relations with the hierarchy of the Church**: “*Faithful to the clear intentions of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions, the Society has a close relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Respect of the members for the hierarchy provides the foundation for harmonious reciprocal cooperation.*” Recently this relationship has been strengthened and been given official character with the naming of one of the members from the General Council of the Society as person in charge of the relationship with the Holy See. The Society is equally committed to ecumenical cooperation and cooperation among different religions, following the Magisterium of the Catholic Church as foreseen in chapter 6.2 of the Rule.

The Rule also expresses the relationship of the SSVP with the Vincentian Family in chapter 4.3: “*Members throughout the world, together with other communities inspired by the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and with those whom they help, form a single family.*”

7. MEMBERS AND COUNTRIES IN WHICH THE CONFEDERATION IS PRESENT

The present situation, as indicated in the first several paragraphs, is one of great expansion. We are present on all continents:

- Africa 40 countries: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

- America 33 countries: Antigua, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela.
- Asia 27 countries: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China (Hong Kong), India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, Timor, Vietnam.
- Europe 30 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, England and Wales, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine.
- Oceania 10 countries: Australia, Caroline Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu.

8. USEFUL ADDRESSES, CONTACT NUMBERS AND WEBPAGES

The headquarters of the International Council of the Confederation is located in Paris - Rue de Londres, 6 - Tel. xx 33-1-5345 8753 - Fax: xx 33-1-4261 7256. E-mail cgi.president@ozanet.org

The General President of the Confederation is, at present, José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha of Spain.

Web site: www.ozanet.org

Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV)

“To Jesus with Mary”



Brief History

We are an International Association of young Catholics, born from the wish of the Blessed Virgin Mary as manifested on 18 July 1830 to St. Catherine Labouré in Paris (France). From 1830-1847, Fr. Jean-Marie Aladel, C.M., established the first 15 centers in Paris and its surrounding area. Then Pope Pius IX gave us legal recognition in the Church through the rescripts issued on 20 June 1847 (for the female branch) and on 19 July 1850 (for the masculine branch) under the name, *Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate*. The Pope entrusted the care of the Association to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, who would henceforth become its Director General. From 1848-1879, an expansion took place outside France: the Association reached America, Asia and Africa. In 1931, Pope Pius XI conceded to the Association the faculty to establish itself in the parishes, with the permission of the bishops, and to set up its Seat in the Chapel of the Apparitions at 140, Rue du Bac (Paris).

Based on the guidelines of Vatican Council II, the Association revised its structures, combined the boys and girls into a single entity, reinforced its socio-charitable commitment and updated its name. Thus, the “Vincentian Marian Youth” was born. In 1997, the Association got off the ground on the international level through a Leaders’ Forum in Paris during the XII World Youth Day. On 2 February 1999, the Holy See approved the new International Statutes and recognized the change of name, yet retaining the same identity. In February of that same year, Fr. Robert Maloney established the seat of the VMY International Secretariat in Madrid (Spain). In August 2000, we held the 1st International Assembly in Rome, on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Youth. Five years later, to mark the 175th Anniversary of the Apparitions at the Rue du Bac, we celebrated our 2nd General Assembly in Paris from 7-13 August 2005 with the theme, “*With a Lay Spirituality, We Share the Mission: Challenges.*”

Charism and Objectives

The Vincentian charism and the Apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830 made it possible for VMY to be born as a response of the Church and the Vincentian Family to the poor and marginalized young people.

The contemplation of Christ and attention to the example of Mary shall be the driving force that will allow the Association to attain the following ends:

1. *to form* the members to live a solid faith in the following of Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor;
2. *to live and pray* like Mary in simplicity and humility assuming the spirituality of the Magnificat;
3. *to foster, animate and maintain* the missionary spirit in the Association, especially through missionary experiences, in particular, among the poor and the young;
4. *to prepare* the members of the Association individually and communally to collaborate in the Church and society with other pastoral workers, according to the directives of the hierarchy of the universal and local Church (cf. International Statutes, Art. 9).

With all the above VMY has its own physiognomy, with some marks that characterize it as an Association:

- **ECCLESIAL:** The members of the Association commit themselves to live and work actively and responsibly in communion with the members of the Church and its pastors on the local and world level as well as to collaborate with all the other associations and apostolic movements in the dioceses and parishes.
- **LAY:** Since VMY is an Association mainly of young lay people who try to live the Gospel in the midst of society, its point of reference is the Lay International Associations of the Faithful (cf. Canons 298-329).
- **MARIAN:** The members of VMY learn to follow Christ in the school of Mary. They take the Blessed Virgin as model of dedication to God and service to her brothers and sisters. Likewise, especially in the song of the Magnificat, they see in Mary, Mother of the Lord, the inspiration that helps them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk through life in faith and with an effective charity that generates justice.
- **VINCENTIAN:** Through its birth in the Family of St. Vincent de Paul, VMY is inspired by the Vincentian charism and makes of evangelization and service of the poor

distinctive characteristics of its presence in the Church and in the world. Its members commit themselves to be missionaries, witnessing to the love of Christ by word and work.

Apostolic Commitments Today

We, the members of VMY, carry out different apostolic activities from our own centers, in coordination with parishes or other branches of the Vincentian Family. Among them we would like to emphasize the three fundamental aspects:

a) Socio-charitable service:

- Collaboration and support in the social work of the Daughters of Charity
- Regular support in diverse services: hospitals, homes for the aged, psychiatric wards, prison cells, tutorial or educational assistance, etc.
- Regular visits to the sick and the poor in their respective homes
- Work in the marginalized and rural areas with disadvantaged groups: children, young people with adaptation concerns, women and immigrants, etc.
- Service experiences during the summer
- Permanent service communities, where the young people commit themselves to carry out a service project, living together for a specific period of time (months or, at times, years)
- Different programs of the “Campaign against Hunger” and the “Campaign against Malaria”

b) Evangelization:

- Support in parish catechism: for children, young people and adults
- Activities for the evangelization of young people: workshops, gatherings, etc.
- Support in the popular missions organized by the Congregation of the Mission
- Mission experiences for a specific period of time in rural and indigenous areas

c) Missions *Ad Gentes*:

- Periodic sending of “young missionaries” to developing countries

- Some countries keep Permanent Mission Communities where the young people are sent for a specific period of time to collaborate in the missionary work of the Vincentian Family (Mozambique, Bolivia, Honduras).

Number of Members

Today we are approximately 110,000 members in 65 countries on five continents. Forty-eight countries already have approved National Statutes. We are now in an expansion and consolidation phase.

Continent	Number of Countries	Approved Statutes	Number of Members	%
Africa	20	11	5.292	4,27
America	22	22	21.876	17,66
Asia	8	6	64.996	52,48
Europe	13	6	31.637	25,54
Oceania	1	—	30	0,11
Total	64	45	123.831	100,00

COUNTRIES IN WHICH WE ARE PRESENT:

EUROPE

Albania, Belarus, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine.



AFRICA

Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda and Togo.



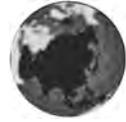
AMERICA

Argentina-Uruguay-Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States of America and Venezuela.



ASIA

India, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Syria and Vietnam.



OCEANIA

Solomon Islands.

CHALLENGES AND DREAMS FOR VMY

After nine years of journeying at the international level and with the experience of two General Assemblies, these are the challenges that VMY International has for the coming years:

- To motivate our members in the following of Christ especially through an adequate **pedagogy of prayer** that may lead us to discover “Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ”;
- To organize and revise our **formation programs and alternative “endways”** that we offer to our members so that they may become adult Christians, strongly committed to the local Church and society, through the Vincentian charism;
- To come up with a **work methodology in the form of projects** as a way of assuring the quality and continuity of our service to the poor;
- To work towards **auto-financing our activities**, promoting financial self-management at all levels, as well as handling economic resources with transparency, responsibility and gratuity;
- To live with greater awareness the **internationality of and co-responsibility within** the running of the Association;
- To promote **working together** with the other branches of the **Vincentian Family** especially in service projects and formation.



*We dream of an Association,
which lives the Spirituality
of the Magnificat intensely,
works for a young Church,
servant of the poor,
and which is more and more
of young people for young people.*

SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS FOR 2006

Our international theme for 2006 is “*Committed to the Mission with Those Most Needy.*” This expresses our desire to continue sharing the unique mission of the Church and the Association’s own mission with the Vincentian Priests and Brothers and the Daughters of Charity, to focus our spirituality on Christ and on the Gospel and to work in collaboration with the Vincentian Family in favor of the most needy and those persons who do not know Christ.

Our work in 2006 is essentially inspired by the Lines of Action contained in the **Final Document of the 2nd General Assembly**. The following five objectives will mark our activities this year:

1) To improve the initial formation process which we offer to our members:

- Update the inventory of existing formation materials in the different countries
- Exchange formation materials with the other branches of the Vincentian Family
- Update our international website, so that it may be livelier and more interactive and may allow an exchange of testimonies, experiences and materials
- Disseminate the document “*Formation Processes and Endways in VMY*” and promote Formation Commissions in each of the member countries
- Promote *visits to countries* as an instrument that may encourage personal contact with the National Councils, formation and motivation of leaders.

2) To advance in auto-financing and the presentation of projects that may allow us to obtain economic resources for our activities:

- Encourage countries to maintain the international structure through the payment of the annual membership dues
- Promote “*twinnings*” among countries
- Present project proposals and look for subsidies from different international organizations
- Publish an orientation document for member countries concerning some financial aspects (accounting, patrimonial fund, presentation of project proposals, soliciting for subsidies on the international level, etc.)
- Obtain definite legal recognition of the International Secretariat.

- 3) **To strengthen collaboration with the other branches of the Vincentian Family:**
- Disseminate the triptych of the Vincentian Family used during the WYD in Cologne 2005
 - Encourage the participation of VMY in the “Vincentian Family Councils” in each country
 - Publish, on the website, a pamphlet containing the sharing during the Roundtable Discussion of the Vincentian Family on the occasion of GA II Paris 2005.
- 4) **To welcome a new group of volunteers in the International Secretariat:**
- Facilitate processing of visa/travel documents
 - Living and working together with the outgoing group.
- 5) **To come up with a Vincentian Youth Pastoral Course, for the formation of Advisors:**
- Organize a Latin American Meeting, together with CLAPVI, on 21-29 October 2006, in Caracas, Venezuela. This is open to all advisors of the youth groups of the Vincentian Family branches
 - Publish, on the website, an **interactive course for advisors and officers/leaders of the VMY** using materials from this meeting.

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Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM)



In the year 1830, in the chapel of a house of prayer, the Blessed Virgin Mary resumed her role as the *VISITATRIX* of humanity. She started this sometime ago when she went to a town in Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth. She did so many times thereafter, especially after this date in 1830, throughout the 19th century to our time.

This time the chosen city was Paris, in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity on the Rue du Bac and the seer was a young woman named Catherine Labouré, who turned 24 on 2 May of that year 1830. The first apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Catherine was on the night of 18-19 July and the second, wherein the Blessed Virgin gave us the gift of the Miraculous Medal, was on 27 November of that same year.

Right after the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré, the *Association of the Holy Medal of the Immaculate Conception* popularly known as the **Association of the Miraculous Medal** was born.

Membership

There are the millions of persons all over the world who wear the Miraculous Medal, conferred by a priest, who neither inscribed their names in any register, nor have specific statutes and yet they are united by prayer and recite the words which appear on the medal, "*Oh Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.*"

Within this immense, unorganized body, there exists another one with *an organic or social body*: one with a register of names, Statutes and an established organization with charitable ends and apostolates proper to the Association. It is the best level of membership, since it requires more zeal and better commitment.

This group functions as one and the same at the international, national, diocesan, regional and local levels.

Ecclesiastical Approval

The first three articles of the Brief, *Dilectus Filius*, of 8 July 1909, in which Pope Pius X approved — for the whole Church — the Association of the Miraculous Medal with a definitive and universal character state that:

1. The Association of the Holy Medal of the Immaculate Virgin stands as a *living and constant reminder* of the apparition of the Immaculate Virgin Mary in 1830, whose feast is celebrated annually on 27 November. In this apparition, the Virgin gave a model of the medal, which quickly spread throughout the world. It was called by the people "*miraculous*" because of the many remarkable favors which God daily performed through its instrumentality.
2. The Association has the purpose of giving tribute¹ to the Virgin Mary, conceived without original sin, the honor that is due her, and, at the same time, of procuring one's *own sanctification* through the exercise of the *apostolate*. The Holy Medal, both by the symbolism it shows and the virtues it manifests, offers us a model and assistance for those purposes.
3. In each diocese the Diocesan Directors assigned by their respective ordinaries, govern the Association which is canonically erected, in conformity with the spirit, laws and customs proper to the Association, under the Authority of one Director General (the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of

¹ This Association has the purpose of recalling Mary conceived without sin; and also the sanctification of its members, integral formation in the Christian life, and the apostolate of charity especially to those most abandoned. Mary's Holy Medal, both by the symbolism which it shows and by the power it enjoys, offers both a model and assistance for those purposes (Article 2 of the "New International Statutes," approved by the Holy See on 19 February 1998).

Charity, primarily because the said medal was revealed by the Mother of God to a Daughter of Charity, the Venerable Servant of God, Sr. Catherine Labouré.)

Identity and Charism of AMM

It is an Association identified as Ecclesial, Marian and Vincentian.

The Home Visit: The most important means of sanctification and apostolate that the Association does is by means of an image of Our Lady or a rosary which is carried by a **“person-in-charge”** to families, the sick, institutions, etc. The needy persons and families have to engage our time, affection and imagination. It is **characteristic of our apostolate** as members of the **Vincentian Family**. This apostolate had shown its efficacy above all in the evangelization of the poor and is an impulse not only to prayer, but also to family unity. The **Visit of the Blessed Virgin** moves hearts to return the favor of paying her a visit in the house of her Son. It is a return to **“Jesus through Mary.”**

The **Association of the Miraculous Medal** has much to do in **family pastoral work**. The associates are ordinarily members of a family and, in the first place, it should be within their own families that the values of the domestic Church must flourish.

Then, through them, to the families that receive the **Visit of the Blessed Virgin** or who relate with the Association.

The new millennium has started with an urgent call to recreate the **missionary spirit** which motivated the first Christian communities. We know that the renovation of our society comes through the **renewal of the Christian Family**. The service of the Association of the Miraculous Medal to the families is the very field to cultivate because its families have to become the ferment for other families, for their vocation and mission in the world.

In her Visitation, Mary, bearer of the Savior, is the permanent reference for grasping the meaning of the **Home Visit of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal** and deepening the dispositions of those who live out this simple and warm practice among families. On numerous occasions **St. Vincent de Paul** proposed Mary’s haste in the Visitation as the model for the service of the poor: ***Honor the visit of the Blessed Virgin when she visited her cousin promptly and joyfully.***

International Organization

Invited by Fr. Gregory Gay, C.M., Director General of the AMM and with the support of Fr. Manuel Ginete, C.M., Delegate of Fr. Gay to the Vincentian Family, and under the coordination of Fr. Benjamín Romo, C.M., AMM International Coordinator, the 2nd International Encounter was held on 24-28 October 2005 in Rome with the aim, *“to review the journey traveled from the First Meeting in 2001 in order to discover our mission in the Church and to continue advancing in our missionary commitment and service to the poor.”* Its theme was, *“Loved by the Father, Guided by Mary and Committed to the Mission of the Church.”*

Challenges

We have noted some challenges to which our Association is called to respond in the coming years:

- Continue to deepen awareness of the person of Mary as the first and most perfect disciple of Christ, the mother of the Church and model for evangelizing.
- Strengthen the commitment of the laity in the AMM, so that they assume their responsibility in animation, formation, governance and in the administration of the Association. Encourage them in their role through human, Christian, Marian and Vincentian formation.
- Further ensure the integration and participation of young people within the AMM by sharing the Marian message and the apostolate of service to the poor, especially through spiritual and apostolic life.
- Through twinning programs and exchange of experiences, promote a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding among different countries in which the AMM exists.
- Integrate the AMM into parishes, preferably in areas where the Vincentian Family is already present, and in this way promote continuity of the Vincentian charism.

The webpage of the AMM is continually updated: <http://www.amminter.org>

A monthly catechesis is published with the collaboration of the Vincentian Missionaries, Daughters of Charity and laypersons. These catecheses appear on the website as an information bulletin.

In January 2006, Fr. Gregory Gay, C.M., Director General of the Association, appointed Fr. Henry Grodecki, C.M.; Sr. Blanca Libia Tamayo, D.C.; Olimpia Freire de Almeida Ruano and Luis Alfonso

Rodríguez Norato as the new members of the International Council, as well as Martha Leticia Tapia Salinas as the Executive Secretary.

The 3rd AMM International Meeting will be held in 2009.

Presence in 55 Countries. AMM with Approved Statutes (*)

Europe:

Austria,* Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain,* Switzerland, Ukraine.

Asia:

India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.

U.S.A.:

Perryville,* Philadelphia.*

Latin America:

Argentina, Bolivia, Chile,* Colombia,* Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominican Republic,* Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico,* Panama, Paraguay, Peru,* Puerto Rico,* El Salvador, Uruguay, Venezuela.*

Africa:

Angola, Benin, Cameroon,* Central African Republic, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria,* Republic of Congo,* Uganda.

Oceania:

Australia.

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Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI)



Logo

The MISEVI logo is formed with the colors of the flags of all countries as a sign of our openness to this vocation where God leads us. It is formed as a cross which symbolizes our desire to follow Christ to the end and our belongingness to the Church.

Motto

Although we do not have a concrete motto, we would like to share our prayer with the whole Vincentian Family.

Missionary Prayer of MISEVI

*God, Father of goodness,
You who call each one of us by name,
help us to be faithful to the vocation received.
We want to be salt and light of the world,
always serving among the poor
with an affective and effective love.*

*We need your Son Jesus Christ
to preach your Word
in the places we have been sent.
We want to be witnesses of the Kingdom,
living out the Beatitudes.*

*Send us the Holy Spirit
so that, as Church,
we will live in communion and unity with others.
We, lay missionaries, want to welcome
the gift of community and renew ourselves
in the light of your Gospel.*

*May Mary, Queen of the Missions,
accompany and watch over the continuity
of our self-giving in the task entrusted
by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

Brief History

Mi.Se.Vi. (Misioneros Seglares Vicencianos or Vincentian Lay Missionaries) are lay Christians with the charism of St. Vincent de Paul who are called by God to go to the Missions *Ad Gentes*.

Our story began in the summer of 1984, the year when some young people from the VMY (Vincentian Marian Youth) were sent by Spain to Honduras. Some of these young people offered to give more time to the mission and, in 1987, the first VMY Permanent Community was established. In 1992, some of them, who were not that young anymore, thought of the missionary vocation as a lifetime option. Considering that the Association which sent these young people is youth oriented and that they had already discerned their vocation, they thought of creating another association within the Vincentian Family that may provide possible responses to the challenges which their vocation presents.

The Constituent Assembly of MISEVI Spain was held in January 2001 and at it the Coordinating Team with international and Spanish functions was established.

In October 2004 the 2nd National Assembly of MISEVI Spain was held. The Coordinating Team was then elected bearing functions that were solely for Spain.

In 2005 the following MISEVI National Statutes were approved: Mexico on 19 March, Colombia on 23 April and Italy on 27 May. In addition to those, soon there will be more countries which shall form part of the Association with full rights as they are already in the process of seeking approval of their Statutes: Indonesia, France, Ireland, Venezuela and the USA.

Dreams, Spirit and Principal Objectives

Internationally, the **dreams** that MISEVI has are related to the creation of an Association in as many countries as possible. It would be wonderful if, in all those places where there is an established branch of the Vincentian Family, MISEVI should also be formed. It does not desire to become a large Association; rather it wishes to facilitate all Vincentian laypersons of the world, who have a missionary vocation, to respond to God's call to evangelize the poorest of the poor.

Our **spirit** is in keeping with St. Vincent's charism of working in the mission and finding the place which the Church of the 21st century must have for the laity, while working as a team together with the priests and sisters for the benefit of those favored by the Lord.

Our **principal objectives** are established in the Statutes:

In all the documents, presentations, comments and suggestions that have been made throughout its history, the best way to express the ends of MISEVI is by saying that it seeks to promote, facilitate, support and aid the coordination of the presence and the missionary work of Vincentian laypersons in the mission and their involvement in their place of origin after the mission. Following the activities specified in Section 2 of the Statutes, we propose these means to reach our end, the presence and work of the Vincentian laypersons in the missionary field.

To promote:

- a) The participation of MISEVI members in the missionary activities carried out by the different Vincentian and Ecclesial Associations in the place of origin of the MISEVI members who are sent as missionaries as well as in the venues of missionary service.
- b) The carrying out of activities which seek to awaken or support the missionary vocation of the layperson in the different Vincentian Associations.

To facilitate the development of the missionary dimension:

- a) By being a channel of encounter among the Vincentian laypersons with missionary vocation and the Missions *Ad Gentes* entrusted to or promoted by the Vincentian Family.
- b) By collaborating with the Vincentian Associations in the formation of Vincentian laypersons who are preparing to go to the Missions *Ad Gentes*.
- c) By making an effort to place persons or small groups, which are starting to develop their missionary life, in contact with the more experienced Vincentian Associations.
- d) By gathering all the programs and means of formation for dissemination to all the Associations of the Family and the countries preparing for reception, thus offering collaboration and mutual support at the concrete moment of planning this formation.

To support:

Our desire is to support each member who, from different options of life, forms part of the Association, the communities where he/she is involved, the Associations of origin which sends him/her and the other Vincentian

Associations. We always need to seek and introduce new forms of support yet at least we would like to offer:

- Human support
- Moral support
- Spiritual support
- Economic support

To coordinate:

- a) By being a channel of coordination for all the lay missionaries, looking for, inviting and welcoming those who would like to participate in the Association, as well as offering support to those who decide not to become a member yet form part of the Vincentian Family.
- b) By keeping the members of the different permanent missionary communities informed about the projects and activities of the other communities where the members of the Association collaborate.
- c) By supporting the active participation of its members in the coordinating structures of the Vincentian Family, which exist in the places of mission, or encouraging and promoting them where they do not yet exist.

Actual Apostolic Commitments

The year 2005 is a year of birth for MISEVI in the different countries. We held our 2nd Assembly in December, clearly the first in an international sense because the first one was also the National Assembly of Spain, and as such we hoped to involve as many countries as possible.

Once MISEVI is established, we shall work for the creation of a unified formation plan which may facilitate the sending on mission of the lay missionaries who feel God's call, from whatever country they may be.

At present only MISEVI members from Spain are involved in Missions *Ad Gentes*: three in Mozambique, four in Bolivia and three in Honduras.

MISEVI collaborates in the missionary formation of persons belonging to the different branches of the Vincentian Family, either as a possible missionary service or solely as an awareness campaign.

Number of Members and Countries where it is Doing its Work at Present

MISEVI is established in Italy, Colombia, Mexico and Spain. It is extending its missionary service in Honduras, Bolivia and Mozambique. It shall also be constituted soon in other countries, such as Indonesia, France, Ireland, Venezuela and USA.

The process involved in establishing and consolidating MISEVI makes it possible for us to quantify the number of collaborating members and those in formation at any given time. Thus, the members with full rights are: one in Mexico, two in Italy and 14 in Spain.

Useful Data, E-mail Addresses and Contact Numbers

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Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (RSV)

Foundation: 3 March 1845



Shield

Motto: *In every way, Christ must be proclaimed.*

History: the Founder

Among the first members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and in the climate of fervent charity around Sr. Rosalie Rendu, was another founder of an institute of religious life, Jean-Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874).

He was among the first who joined the seven founders of the Society, and it was he who, on 4 February 1834, suggested a title that would be adopted and maintained up to the present, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, instead of the former Society of the Conferences of Charity.

At age 31 he was the eldest of the group. He brought to the youthful enthusiasm of the others the wisdom and concreteness of a more mature age. For many years he was the president of the Conference of St. Sulpice, the second conference in the city of Paris.

In this responsibility, Jean-Léon Le Prevost and his other confreres worked to help the needy in their homes. However, the frequency of certain situations called for the creation of new institutions.

Le Prevost became interested in young prisoners. He also opened a library, which thus allowed some adults to change their opinions about their problems. He founded a group called Holy Family, to bring together needy families, give them a human and Christian formation as well as some opportunities for recreation. We would call them a "family club." This initiative of his spread all over Paris and elsewhere within a few years.

With the passage of the years Le Prevost meditated: *"There is so much to do for the poor... the harvest is great... it is not enough just to give a little time after work each day. What is needed is a full-time commitment."* The idea grew, then, to start a new religious family, which he called appropriately the Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The new institution would conduct an essentially missionary apostolate for the evangelization of the masses and, through the exercise of charity in all its forms, it would be moved to reveal the love of God for all. On 11 September 1844, Le Prevost met Clément Myionnet, a member of the Society in Angers. Clément had the same views and the same desires as Jean-Léon: to consecrate their lives to the service of the poor in a new religious congregation.

The new family began with the blessing of Bishop Angebault of Angers, imparted after the Mass he celebrated at the foot of the altar with the relics of St. Vincent de Paul at the chapel of the Vincentian Motherhouse, rue de Sèvres, in Paris. That very same morning, a young man, Maurice Maignen, joined them. The first members were all laymen who had belonged to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

After a few years, Le Prevost understood the need for spiritual assistance in his plans. He realized the need of having priests ready to dedicate themselves fully to this activity. The first priest to enter the group had been a member of the Society, the recently ordained Henri Planchat, a martyr of the Commune of Paris. Le Prevost was ordained a priest on 22 December 1860.

The new religious confronted the emergencies typical of a society in full industrial development, which touched the working class, particularly youth. They began centers for apprentices and students, for classes in professional development, for lodging for young workers, for popular initiatives such as soup kitchens, etc. Maurice Maignen was involved in the foundation of Workers' Clubs which, beyond developing a work of assistance and support, became centers for debating issues of social justice. He took part in the Catholic Social Movement that laid the foundations for the development of several reflections later elaborated in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.

Jean-Léon Le Prevost was recognized for the heroicity of his virtues, 21 December 1998 and, according to Church tradition, is honored with the title Venerable.

Le Prevost drew up in 1847 his own hymn to charity in these beautiful words:

It is charity which arouses and awakens souls around us; it encourages and unites them. Indeed it is charity that carries us along and involves us in its activity. Charity never errs nor remains on the sidelines: once it is alight, it must be spread abroad, shine and warm distant places. It nourishes all. Dear friends, we are thus unafraid; we do not reflect on our unworthiness, which often blocks us and renders us timid. Like a flame, charity consumes and purifies. We are purified in charity and filled with life. By means of charity we will be transfigured. Oh, how this thought encourages and consoles me. It is charity that impels and even pesters us. We are moved by this ardent and powerful charity, by this force, will and love: the infinite love, the love of God.

The original title, Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, then became the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul. The Community has maintained a very close connection with the Vincentian spirituality that the first members had imbibed from the beginnings, in their first experiences of the service of the poor when they were members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris and Angers. Today, too, the Congregation feels itself a part of the Vincentian Family and participates in the initiatives that the Vincentian Community proposes.

The Apostolates

For 11 years, Le Prevost had committed himself to visiting the needy in their homes, to educating young prisoners and orphan/apprentices. In these and other works, three intuitions had directed him. His experience had shown him the importance of missions in the cities, especially in the capital of France. He had also discovered that the practice of charity is the best way to reconcile the mass of workers to God and to the Church. "*Divine Providence,*" he wrote, "*desires, in our time, to save the world through charity.*" Finally, this type of work required the union of priest and religious brother for the evangelization of the people. From this he understood that the works of his institute would be "essentially missionary" and that the exercise of charity, in all its forms, would be of primary importance for revealing the love of God towards all. Finally, among the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, priests and brothers form a single spiritual and apostolic family.

Spirituality

Formed in the school of Sts. Vincent and Francis de Sales, both influenced by the French School of Spirituality of the 17th century, the founder gave his religious a double rule: to conform themselves to Jesus Christ and to show him to the world through their works.

Works

The Congregation of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul grew in France and, in 1884, established itself in Canada. Following that, and responding to the call of the popes, new works were founded in Brazil and in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Congo-Kinshasa).

They still have the clubs (the “Patros”) and other works for youth, like hostels for workers and students and clubs for young people. Their field of action reaches out to street children, the handicapped, the aged, the homeless and the unemployed.

In France and in Canada, they have taken on parishes in areas of high population. In Brazil especially, and in Congo, in parishes in densely populated areas, they work at evangelization and the formation of basic communities. These parishes are, naturally, connected with numerous and varied works: basic literacy, secondhand clothes shops, courses in catechesis, family associations and retreats.

Apostolic Commitments

1. *Evangelization of the Family*

“Following our tradition, we will consecrate our efforts to the restoration and the building up of the family.”

(Const. n° 164)

Today’s families in our kind of neighborhoods experience several sorts of difficulties: being separated, marginalized, single-parent, victims of unemployment, abandoned children, violence, abortion, homosexual couples, second marriages, problems of drugs and alcohol, etc.

In this very concrete context:

- Our pastoral activity should contribute to the development of the human person, while giving special attention to the poorest families.
- Families constituted according to the plan of God should be invited to develop their missionary sense and accompany families in distress.

- Christian parents should be encouraged to assume their role as educators of the faith of their children, especially young couples.
- All the Religious should take an interest in the family ministry of their neighborhoods and in the great questions that touch upon respect for life.

If possible, each one should be involved more directly:

“At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to the pastoral care of the family, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis” (NMI n° 47).

2. Evangelization of youth (Children, Adolescents, young People)

“We are always forced to attend to the youth in our kind of neighborhoods.”

(Const. n° 63)

Today, youth are undergoing all sorts of pressures, such as broken families, lack of basic education, the negative aspect of mass media, unemployment, lack of work, with no possibility to study, being exposed to the traps laid by drugs and pornography, being taken up in the spiral of violence, being victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation, and with no roots in the Christian life.

We insist on an apostolic action adapted to this reality:

- By an attitude of welcome, essential for a more direct contact with these young persons, as well as a profound respect for them and their sufferings;
- By an open dialogue recognizing their dignity;
- By a clear proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as a response to their search for accompaniment of those who demonstrate a genuine interest in the Christian life, by offering them a means of Christian initiation through a proper sacramental life;
- By recalling to Christian youth the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is today in decline, as a means of spiritual growth:

“... to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice” (JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter “Misericordia Dei,” 7 April 2002);

- By stimulating among young people a missionary dimension and the witness of faith in their surroundings: *“Christian formation by our Works implies a joint action of Priest and Brother”* (Prop. 201 to the Chap. 1996).

3. **Evangelization of those who are Poor**

“Being the representatives of, and ordinarily the agents of, the poor, we should have their humility, patience, detachment and recourse to God.”

(Const. n° 66)

As participants in the Vincentian charism and attentive to the calls of the Church today, which indicates to us new forms of poverty: “... threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination” (NMI n° 50).

- We are invited to a more inventive charity to face these new challenges: “The proclamation of the Gospel takes place also by the charity of works, by gestures of solidarity which ensure an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words” (NMI n° 50).
- To remain faithful to the teaching of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, from which our Congregation has arisen, we value personal contact as the first evangelization, the attention given to the wounded lives around us.
- So as not to remain involved just in simple assistance given to the poor, we should become involved with other carefully chosen organizations to struggle against misery and promote human rights: the right to life, health, housing, education, work, moving thereby from mere tinkering to social justice, in keeping with the teaching of the Church.
- Each one should be so inspired by the social teaching of the Church as to be particularly alert to the world of those workers who are very affected by new social and economic conditions.

4. **Collaboration in the Apostolate**

“Among us, the Brothers, ministers of charity, and the Priests, ordained ministers, should live in the most cordial cooperation, and vie with one another in offering mutual support,

with the one group preparing and supporting the works and the others giving spiritual strength and completion.”

(Const. n° 7b)

a) Between Priests and Brothers:

- That the union of these two elements be activated in a common apostolate; this constitutes the foundation for a vocation ministry that will bear fruit for our institute and will be the best means to reveal to young people the meaning and the necessity of the vocation of a Brother.
- That our apostolic plan should always be built, led, undertaken and evaluated mutually.
- That the specific action in the religious life of the consecrated lay brother be the first among the “committed laity,” and that his role in the missionary plan be better defined, while allowing him to acquire an adequate formation.

b) With the Laity:

- To develop volunteer laity, particularly devoted to the pastoral and charitable service of our works.
- To form them in the spirituality of our charism, in communion and family spirit, apostolic zeal and education to an adult faith in Jesus Christ.
- To seek to make them “multipliers” of our evangelical and missionary activities.
- To be attentive, with them, to awaken young people to our way of life and to the possibility of a vocation consecrated to the service of the poor and the youth.

c) With other pastoral ministers:

1. diocesan clergy;
2. other religious communities;
3. the Vincentian Family.

Today

The Congregation of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul is currently present in:

- 6 countries (France, Canada, Brazil, Congo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast);

- 236 religious (91 Brothers and 145 Priests): 71 in France, 61 in Canada, 28 in Brazil, 35 in Congo (Democratic Republic of), 26 in Africa (Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast), 15 in the northwest of Brazil.

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Portal RSV is the official site of the General Council in the service of the Religious and their coworkers. The **Infos** (News) on the central part of the home page of the Web site is published each Friday.
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