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MEETING OF VISITORS SALAMANCA, JUNE 5-15, 1996

*by J. Ignacio Fernandez Mendoza, C.M.
General Vicar*

It was at a September 29-October 2, 1993, council meeting that Fr. General and the Council decided to convoke a general meeting of all the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of the Congregation. The gathering was to take place in Salamanca, Spain, from the 3rd to the 15th of June, 1996. This latest reunion was planned to be along the lines of earlier such meetings of Visitors, held in Santafe de Bogota and Rio de Janeiro.

Once the invitation was sent, Fr. General and his council met often to define the goal for this assembly and the possible issues to be treated during it. Multiple goals arose from these reflections:

- 1) the formation of the Visitors in so far as their responsibilities in their provinces;*
- 2) the sharing of information about the Congregation by the General Curia;*
- 3) the initial preparation for the next General Assembly; and*
- 4) the organization of materials to make up a practical guide-handbook for Visitors.*

On April 21, 1995, *Fr. General* wrote a letter to all the Visitors, asking their advice about possible themes and methodology for the Salamanca meeting. From that point on, it was to be known as an *assembly convoked for the service of the Visitors and, through them, for the service of all confreres in the Congregation.*

At the council meeting of April 19-22, 1995, a preparatory commission was named. The members were *Fathers Jan Ermers, Aurelio Londoño, and Serafin Peralta.* A representative of the Curia was also named to the commission *Fr. J. Ignacio Fernandez Mendoza, Vicar General.* This commission would handle, among other responsibilities, the responses of the Visitors to Fr. General's letter, which turned out to be very numerous.

Once the preparatory commission's work was finished, Fr. General appointed an executive committee. Its members were *Frs. J. Ignacio Fernandez Mendoza, Emeric Amyot and Patrick Griffin.* In collaboration with *Fr. Jose M. Sanchez Mallo, Visitor of Salamanca,* and in dialogue with the General Counsel, they took care of all the practical details necessary to prepare for a meeting of this kind.

Shortly after this, the Holy See unexpectedly assigned June 2, 1996 as the date for the canonization of Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre. Changes had to be made in the scheduling of the Salamanca meeting. It would now begin on June 5th, not the 3rd.

By the night of June the 4th almost all the Visitors had arrived at Salamanca. For health reasons, the Visitor of Costa Rica, *Fr. Angel Plaza*, could not participate in the meeting. There was an obvious spirit of joy among the confreres. Along with the familiar faces from previous assemblies were the new ones. And this was a sure sign of how time passes and the Congregation keeps on renewing its directions for action.

The meeting began according to the program set up by the executive committee and approved by Father General. Daily activities went from 7:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. and resumed at 3:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. A facilitating group, also named by Fr. General, kept the meeting moving very well. This group was made up of three moderators, some members of the executive committee, and the Visitor of Salamanca.

At 9:30 a.m. on June 5th, *Fr. Jose M.S. Mallo* welcomed all the participants to the meeting. Fr. General then gave the meeting's official opening talk. This was followed by a celebrated opening Mass of the Holy Spirit, with Fr. General presiding. The *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, sung enthusiastically, filled every corner of the recently restored chapel.

Each day the whole assembly prayed morning prayer and had common meditation. The Eucharist and evening prayer were celebrated in language groups. Five different times during the course of the assembly, all the participants celebrated together.

The topics treated during the meeting were: talks prepared concerning the role of the Visitor and concerning inculturation; information from the General Curia; some guidelines concerning the next General Assembly; information of how the commission on prayer is going and news concerning CIF, the International Center for Formation. There were also two excursions prepared, one to Avila, the other through the city of Salamanca.

What follows are the various conferences moderated by *Frs. Hugh O'Donnell, Christian Sens, and Benjamin Romo*:

- Profile of Visitor as leader (Joseph L. Levesque)*;
- Profile of Visitor as administrator (Yves Danjou)*;
- Profile of Visitor as economic administrator (Patrick Griffin)*;
- Inculturation of the Vincentian charism: Overview (Jan Ermers)*;
- Inculturation of the charism vis-a-vis Vocation and Formation (Franciscus Hardjodirono)*;
- Inculturation of the charism vis-a-vis Vows and Virtues (Hugh O'Donnell)*.

On June 9th the visitors went to the ancient city of Avila, spending most of their time in the places where Teresa lived: the monastery of the Incarnation, the church named for the Saint, and the first reformed monastery of St. Joseph. The visit included a stop at the new house and community of confreres from the province of Madrid. The Daughters of Charity feasted the Visitors with an excellent repast. *Sister Margarita Morante*, the Visitatrix, accepted the thanks of all for the Sisters. In the afternoon the

group returned to Salamanca, not without visiting Alba de Tormes, where the mortal remains of St. Teresa of Avila are venerated.

After this delightful rest, the conferences continued as laid out in the program:

- inculturation of charism: Popular Missions (Benjamin Romo);*
- Inculturation of charism: Formation of Diocesan Clergy and the Laity (P. Aurelio Londoño);*
- Inculturation of charism: Community in the Congregation (Jose Ubillus);*
- Relating with Bishops (Francisco Sampedro);*
- Interprovincial Collaboration (Serafin Peralta).*

Then the General Curia shared the following with the Visitors:

- Instruction on the Vows (J. Ignacio Fernandez Mendoza);*
- Difficult cases (Modesto Lopez);*
- International Missions (Victor Bieler);*
- Causes for Beatification and Canonization (Roberto D'Amico);*
- The Secretariat and the Visitors (Emeric Amyot);*
- Ministries with Lay Vincentians (Lauro Palu);*
- Visits to the Provinces from the Curia (Italo Zedde).*

On the 12th of June the Visitors divided into two language groups, Spanish and English, for a tour of historic Salamanca and all its grand historical monuments.

Two invited guests participated in the meeting. *Fr. John Rybolt* informed the group about the International Center of Formation, with its headquarters in Paris. Also, *Fr. John McKenna* gave a brief overview of the work being done by the commission for prayer. He then showed the contents and way to use the voluminous collection of prayers. The hope of the commission is that provinces or groups of provinces will each add to the materials, similar to those already prepared, so that they will truly serve as a help for the confreres in their community prayer.

Outside of the meeting times other confreres spoke with the visitors. *Fr. José Eugenio Lopez* informed them about J.M.V. de España and the international Encounter of Young People, August 1824, 1997, in Paris. *Fr. Teodoro Barquin* showed a video featuring the biography and works of the great musical composer, *Fr. Jose Maria Alcacer, C.M.* The editorial CEME also gave a report on all the works it has published to date.

Fr. General asked the visitors to formulate suggestions about the place and theme for the General Assembly in 1998. He also gave an explanation of the Directory of the assembly, written in collaboration with the visitors and provincial councils.

One of the goals of the meeting was to gather data to put together a Practical Guide for the Visitor. On June 15th, at the last session of this meeting, the coordinatine commission opened a round table discussion about the possible contents for that handbook. The suggestions were many and valuable. The Visitors made it clear that such a guide would be not only convenient but also necessary.

It must also be mentioned that the participation of the visitors throughout the meeting, both in full session and in language groups or regional groups, was of high quality.

I want to express how wonderful this house was for such a meeting. There are plenty of rooms, adequately equipped, and meeting rooms, chapels, various offices and other multi-purpose rooms. I also want to give special mention to the translators, the hard working 'Silent' ones at international meetings. Special thanks also to those who arranged for our liturgies, *Frs. Julian Arana*, organist, and *Manuel Freire*, animator of the celebrations. Likewise to the zealous collaborators, *Frs. Andres Pato*, *Antonio Airas*, and *Juan de la Rosa*, and to the Daughters of Charity, always alert to help with necessities small and great. I also am glad to report that the electronic equipment used for the simultaneous translation functioned perfectly.

Finally, sincerest thanks must be given to the confreres of the Salamanca Province for their wonderful hospitality. A debt of thanks is also owed to the Provincial and confreres of the Madrid Province for their hospitality to the visitors who stopped there on their way to or from Salamanca.

The assembly ended on June 15th with the celebration of the eucharist, presided over by Fr. General. It was the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. To end the eucharist and the meeting, the participants all say a final hymn in honor of our Holy Founder: *'Teach us to love, Vincent de Paul, our poor brother as you loved him. A wonderful banner to carry back to all the provinces of the congregation.'*

(P. Van Linden, C.M., translator)