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Letter: The Vincentian Family Meeting, 17-18 January 1997 (15 February 1997)

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February 15, 1997

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission throughout the world

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I am writing today to give you a brief account of the third meeting of those responsible for the principal branches of our Vincentian Family, which took place in Paris on January 17 and 18. The participants were the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Juana Elizondo, and Sr. Therezinha Remonato, the Assistant General; the President of the International Association of Charity, Mrs. Patricia Palacios de Nava, together with Mrs. Mauricette Borloo, Vice-President; for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Mr. Amin de Tarrazi and Mr. Gerry Martin, Vice-Presidents, accompanied by Mr. Francesco de Barberis, Coordinator for Europe Group 3. Fr. Lauro Palú and I represented the Congregation of the Mission. This time two representatives of the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups joined us: Edurne Urdampilleta, President of the Juventudes Marianas Vicentinas in Spain, and Vincent Grodziski, ex-President of the Jeunesse Mariale in France.

As you recall, the purpose of our various meetings has been "to look for means by which, while preserving the particular identity of each branch, we might cooperate more effectively with each other throughout the world in serving the poor better." This third meeting went very well. The evaluation we made at the end of the second day was unanimously quite positive. The acts of the meeting are seven pages long. Here I wish to offer you only a brief summary of the highlights.

1. We spent much time exchanging information and reflecting on experiences that we had participated in together during the past year. All of us noted that collaboration among the branches of our family _ in formation programs, in common works, and in prayer together _ has grown notably over the past year. We were all particularly struck by how fully the whole Vincentian Family took part in the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre. At the time of the canonization, AIC held a General Assembly here in Rome. The Vincentian Marian Youth Groups transferred their European Congress here too. Likewise, the Vincent de Paul Society was well represented (some of us will have the chance to reciprocate next August 22 in Paris at the beatification of Frédéric Ozanam!). A huge number of Daughters of Charity also took part, as well as almost all of the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak with many of these groups during those days. At the gathering of the Visitors in Salamanca after the canonization, a number of participants suggested a theme for our next General Assembly, which was eventually approved by our General Council: *The*

worldwide Vincentian Family and the challenges for the mission in the third millennium. This is surely a sign of the importance that our global family, with its many branches, is taking on in our consciousness.

2. All the branches commented on how positive had been their experience of the common day of prayer last September 27. In some places the feast of St. Vincent also provided the occasion for an ongoing formation program, in addition to prayer and celebration together. We decided to continue this practice each year. I will be writing to the Visitors at a later date, giving more details about organizing the day of prayer for 1997.
3. We discussed the juridical status of each branch, according to its constitutions and statutes, as well as how each relates to the others. In this context we discussed some of the problems that arise (happily, they are few!) if someone fails to respect the autonomy of a particular group. This can occur, for instance, when a spiritual advisor attempts to exercise control over the government of a lay group.
4. We evaluated the level of collaboration that exists among the branches of our family throughout the world. Last year I asked each Visitor to fill out a brief questionnaire to provide us with information about how much or how little the groups within our family are cooperating. It is evident (cf. the results on the attached sheet) that in some countries the level of cooperation is very high. Somewhat to our surprise, however, there is little cooperation in some countries and even little mutual acquaintance among the members of the various groups in those countries.
5. We spent a large portion of our meeting discussing nine model projects in which the branches of our family will be working together on different continents. Some of these projects are already underway. Others will soon begin. Over the coming year we will be gathering further information about each of them. Next year we will publish a small booklet describing the nine cooperative projects. The places envisioned at this time are Mozambique, Brussels, Granada (Spain), Cuba, Madrid, Madagascar, Mexico, Cologne (Germany), and the Philippines.
6. We also envisioned other collaborative programs on the level of initial and ongoing formation, using as an example the *Institute for Vincentian Spirituality and Apostolate* in the Philippines, which all of us found to be a very interesting model. Many other examples of cooperation in formation programs already exist: the Vincentian Weeks in Salamanca, meetings organized by CLAPVI in various countries, GAV in Italy, the annual gatherings of the JMV at Benagalbón in Spain, the École Ozanam organized by the Conferences of St. Vincent in various countries, etc. I will treat this matter in greater detail in a later letter to the Visitors.
7. We discussed the formation of spiritual advisors for the various groups in our family. AIC is presently drawing up a document on the role of the spiritual advisor. This will be useful as a basis for discussion in formation programs for these advisors. CLAPVI too has had considerable success in organizing sessions for the formation of spiritual

advisors and in publishing materials on their role. At a later date, I will be writing to the Visitors about this too.

8. I took the occasion of this meeting to speak with the representatives of our youth groups about working toward a better organized international structure. This branch of our family is now, as you know, very large, with more or less 200,000 members. Representatives will be coming from all over the world to take part in the celebration of the World Youth Meeting, with Pope John Paul II, in Paris this coming August, when we will also be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the papal approval of our youth groups and the 50th anniversary of the canonization of St. Catherine Labouré. In conjunction with the World Youth Meeting, a forum is being organized for the national leaders of the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups on August 25-28. It will address themes like: a better understanding of a Vincentian Marian spirituality in the service of the poor; a contemporary Marian piety; concrete commitments to the service of the poor; cooperation with other Vincentian groups. The working sessions of the forum will take place in the Motherhouse of the Daughters at Rue du Bac.

St. Vincent encouraged us to "cherish and respect each other as brothers and sisters whom Our Lord has bound together in unity by his love" (SV XIII, 562). He tells us that unity is our strength (SV IX, 96). It is the source of the success of our works (SV X, 201) and the foundation stone of peace (SV IX, 97). My prayer, as we begin Lent, is that the Lord will strengthen the bonds of unity within our family, that he will give us the peace which binds us together, and that, by uniting our hearts and our energies, he will make us more effective servants of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

LEVEL OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION AND OTHER BRANCHES OF OUR FAMILY

- Results of a Questionnaire Sent to the Visitors -

The numbers below refer to provinces (i.e., 5 = 5 provinces responded in this way).

| Between the CM's and the: | High | Good | Regular | Little | Sporadic | Beginning | None |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------|
| Daughters of Charity | 5 | 15 | 6 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 2 |
| AIC | | 6 | 9 | | | 17 | 11 |
| Society of St. Vincent de Paul | | 9 | 14 | 16 | | | 6 |
| Vincentian Marian Youth Groups | | 10 | | 6 | | 4 | 25 |
| Miraculous Medal Association | | | | 17 | | | 29 |
| Other Vincentian Groups | | | | 21 | | | 24 |