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ON VINCENTIAN FAMILY

by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

It is important for the members of a family to love one another deeply. We should have a healthy pride in our relatives. In our own family, we have wonderful ancestors in St. Vincent and St. Louise. We have witnessed a long line of heroic men and women who have followed them, sometimes even to death, like John Gabriel Perboyre whose canonization we celebrated last year. But there have been many other heroes, some canonized and some not canonized. All of us have known some of them personally, perhaps a priest or brother or sister or a Vincentian lay person who inspired our vocation, perhaps a teacher, perhaps a nurse in a hospital, perhaps someone we saw visiting the sick poor in their homes. There have been thousands of heroes like that. We rejoice today to be members of the same family with Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, John Gabriel Perboyre, and all of them.

In this brief presentation, I will focus on our family under three headings:

- I. a look at the Vincentian Family itself: who are we? where do we come from?
- II. a brief reflection on the common inspiration that energizes our members;
- III. some suggestions for further cooperation among us.

I. A description of the Vincentian Family

A recent study identifies 268 institutes as constituting our family tree;¹ 70% of them (165) still exist. The criteria used for identifying these institutes are varied. Let me illustrate them briefly.

Criteria

The criteria used in this study represent the degree of affinity that an institute has to St. Vincent.

¹Betty Ann McNeil, *Monograph 1: The Vincentian Family Tree*, published by the Vincentian Studies Institute.

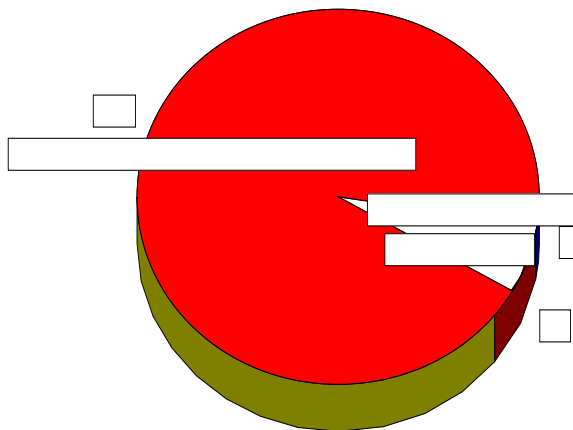
FAMILY TREE PROJECT CRITERIA

Founded by Vincent de Paul.
 Adopted the *Common Rules* of Vincent de Paul.
 Involved with St. Vincent as mentor or advisor.
 Established by CM, DC, or Vincentian laity.
 Daughters of Charity or Vincentians were mentors.
 Ongoing influence from Vincentians or Daughters of Charity.
 Honor Vincent de Paul as one of their patrons.
 Profess the same spirit as Vincentians and Daughters of Charity.
 Adapted and tailored aspects of the Vincentian charism.
 Lay associations that meet one of the criteria above.
 Non-Catholic institutes that meet one of the criteria above.

Findings

- *By Type of Institute*

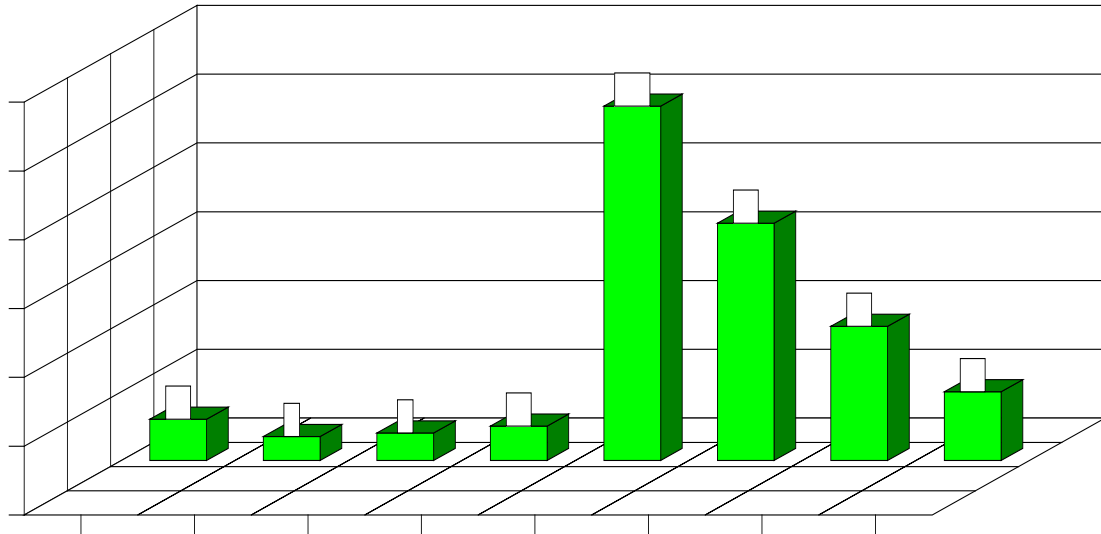
Of the 268 institutes, 239 (89%) are Roman Catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 21 (8%) are lay associations, and 8 (3%) are Anglican Congregations.



- *By Century of Foundation*

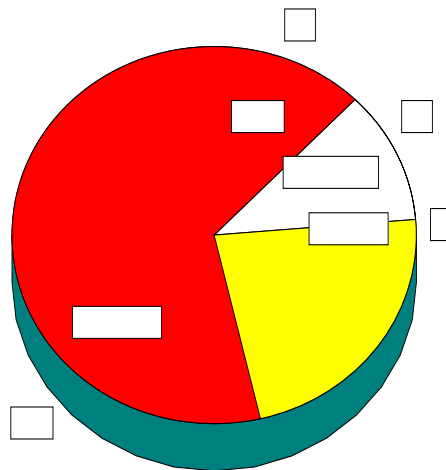
Nineteen percent were founded in the 17th century and 18% in the 18th century. The majority were founded in the 19th century, 103 in the period immediately following the French

Revolution, another 69 between 1850 and 1859. Twenty-two percent were established in the 20th century, with 39 between 1900 and 1949. Twenty are from the second half of the century.



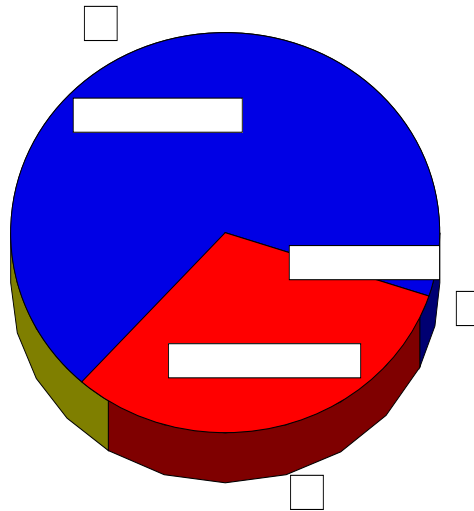
- *By Region of Foundation*

The majority (201) were founded in Europe (75%) with 193 in western Europe. Thirty-six institutes (13.5%) in the Americas (22 in North America and 10 in Central America). Twenty-five were founded in Asia (9.39%), a majority of these in China. Almost two percent were founded in Africa, and .37% in Australasia.



- *By Founders, Members of the Vincentian Family*

Fifty-eight institutes and seven lay associations were founded by 39 Vincentian priests, 16 Daughters of Charity, and four lay members of the Vincentian Family.



- *By Rule*

Seventy-nine founders chose or adapted the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity for their establishment.

- *By Patron*

Ninety-nine institutes have St. Vincent as their patron.

Some of these groups are enormous. I am especially conscious of how rapidly our Vincentian lay groups are growing today. The Society of Vincent de Paul now has more than 900,000 members. The International Association of Charity has more than 260,000 members. The Vincentian Marian Youth Groups have more or less 200,000 members with 46,000 in Spain alone and 7,000 in Mexico. There are countless members of the Miraculous Medal Association (since it has no international center, we have no accurate statistics on its worldwide membership).

II. **Our bonds _ a common heritage**

It would surely be helpful if these various groups were very conscious of being a *single* extended family, while maintaining the distinctive charisms and characteristics of each group. We have a great deal in common, even if there are differences. Our spiritual growth, our ongoing

education, and our apostolic effectiveness can only profit from strengthening the bonds of unity that tie us together, while also deepening our particular charisms.

What are those bonds? Besides the many other things that unite all Christians, our family has its own particular bonds based on:

1. A recognition of Saint Vincent as either founder or a principal source of inspiration.
2. A strong thrust toward serving the poor.
3. A spirituality based on Saint Vincent's, usually with a special emphasis on concrete, practical charity, lived out in simplicity and humility.

Are these bonds not part of the heritage of all of us?

III. What might we hope for by deepening the bonds of unity among us _ some suggestions for further cooperation among the members of our family in the third millennium

1. I would hope for greater cooperation on the level of initial and ongoing formation. We have much to share. All of us who are members of the Vincentian Family want to know more about Saint Vincent de Paul. We want to reflect together and meditate on his life and writings. We want to digest his rich spiritual teaching. We want to understand his apostolic charism more deeply, particularly as it relates to the distinctive goals of each of our groups. Surely we can help one another more in this regard. There are already wonderful examples of this in many countries. Are there books, periodicals, workshops, courses that will help us to carry out Vincentian formation better together?

2. I would hope that, through dialogue among the members of the Vincentian family in different parts of the world, we can work out a common assessment of the present-day real-life situation of the poor (their needs, their hopes, their fears) and common criteria for what are the most appropriate means of serving them. AIC does this very well at its center in Brussels. Can we work together in each country to identify the most urgent needs of the poor and the resources available to meet them?

3. I would hope for more collaborative apostolic projects among the members of the Vincentian family. There is a long tradition in this regard. Right from the time of their founder, Vincentians and Daughters of Charity worked closely together first in France and then in new mission countries. Moreover, wherever Vincentians and Daughters went, they attempted to set up confraternities of charity in which lay men and women would be actively engaged in the service of the poor. The Ladies of Charity in Saint Vincent's lifetime worked closely with the Daughters and with Vincent himself. After the Vincent de Paul Society came into existence in the 19th Century, Vincentians and Daughters of Charity often worked closely with it, both in the formation of its members and in the carrying out of apostolic works. This has been true with the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups too from the start.

What kinds of common projects might be undertaken? Let me suggest a few.

a. Concrete works of charity _ The members of our family in various countries meet the poor every day in their work. What are the most urgent needs right now in each country? Is it education, AIDS, famine, care for refugees?

b. Would it be possible to work together more in some foreign missions? Some of us are already collaborating in many countries. Would it be possible for the Vincentian lay groups, including the youth groups, to assist the people of Tanzania or Mozambique or Haiti, for example, some of the poorest countries in the world? Would it be possible for young people to volunteer a year or two of their lives in going to mission countries and working with other members of our family there? I recently met five such Vincentian volunteers in Bolivia.

c. Popular missions _ Today, when we are creating new forms of popular missions, it is extremely important that we work as a team. There have been many experiences in Latin America in which such teams are large, including priests, sisters, brothers, lay men and women who are well-prepared and work in the carrying out of the mission and in the follow-up process afterwards. Such teams can be most effective. Could there be more such collaborative efforts in various countries? I knew a team with 1000 members in Panama.

d. Dissemination of the Vincentian charism _ I want to encourage a cooperative effort in this regard too. I have asked the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, wherever they work, to organize and work with the various Vincentian lay groups, men and women. These groups are growing very rapidly. Can we continue to share our charism with friends, with associates, and especially with young people? Can we encourage others to breathe the spirit of St. Vincent?

e. Pray together _ Are there occasions when the whole Vincentian Family can pray together? Is there a spirituality which unites us and which leads us to pray simply as St. Vincent taught us? Last year I invited all the members of the Vincentian Family to pray together on September 27 that the Lord might give us unity, apostolic zeal, and new vocations in the service of the poor. The response was very enthusiastic.

I want to express publicly how happy I am at the renewed impetus toward collaboration that is growing within our Vincentian Family. The needs of the poor are enormous. The Lord calls us to respond to them together. St. Vincent was deeply conscious of the communal dimension of gospel service. He knew that by channeling our energies and growing in unity we can be a more effective instrument in meeting the concrete needs of the poor. "To this end," he wrote to Hugues Perraud on October 15, 1651, "we should help and support one another and strive for peace and union among ourselves. This is the wine that cheers and strengthens travelers along this narrow path of Jesus Christ. I recommend this to you with all the tenderness of my heart" (SV IV, 262).