

7-1998

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Emeric Amyot d'Inville C.M.

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Recommended Citation

d'Inville, Emeric Amyot C.M. (1998) "The General Secretariat: Correspondence - Councils - Publications of the General Curia," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 42 : No. 4 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol42/iss4/9>

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The General Secretariat Correspondence - Councils - Publications of the General Curia

*by Emeric Amyot d'Inville, CM
Secretary General*

I have been asked to make a presentation on the work of the General Secretariat. I will begin by stating that it is a team of people at the service of the Superior General and of the whole Congregation. There are, in fact, two Daughters of Charity, one from the United States and one from Spain, as well as two Italian laywomen working with me.

My role, as Secretary General, is, on the one hand, that which is set out in Statute 61: preparation for Councils, participation in them, writing up the decisions taken there as well as writing letters. On the other hand, my role is also to direct, coordinate and supervise the work of the secretariat team whose various members have their own areas of responsibility.

I have chosen to touch on certain more important aspects of the work of the General Secretariat, without going into too much detail, or touching on other peripheral aspects of my work: like my journeys and visits to the provinces, or my duties centred on the work of SIEV or the Vincentian Month, etc. I will, therefore, concentrate on the following three points:

- 1) Correspondence
- 2) Councils
- 3) Publications of the Curia General.

I. Correspondence

You write to us, and we to you, a great deal. There are between 4,000 and 4,500 letters, faxes or e-mails arriving at, or emanating from, the Curia each year, concerning life in the Congregation or the Vincentian Family, without counting the numerous letters of good wishes or greetings or messages of secondary importance, which are not lodged in the Archives. As a comparison: we have 3,126 letters written by St. Vincent or addressed to him, gathered together in the first eight volumes of Coste. If, one day, it was decided to publish the complete correspondence of our Superior General, Robert Maloney, who is the main author and recipient of all this correspondence, a new Coste would have to plan on editing a great many more volumes!

Furthermore, we note an overall increase in the volume of letters which come from the Curia: from 1993 to 1997, to take the two years at either end of the six-year term of office, it has increased by 50% (!) and it seems to me that in all cases the volume is greater than in the preceding six-years. By contrast, the volume of letters arriving at the Curia has stayed at pretty much the same volume throughout the term of office. It seems to me that, if the volume of letters from the Curia has increased so much, it is due to the fact that the present Superior General has a great many, and ever more, initiatives which he must set-up, follow-up, provide for, encourage (for example, the new missions, CIF, the various commissions, the Vincentian months, the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca and of the new Visitors in Rome, the Instruction on the Vows, the Practical Guide for the Visitors, etc.). This increase in post from the Curia is a sign of dynamism but it is also a sign of the work of the General Secretariat which, although the number of secretaries has increased, still keeps us constantly occupied.

A large part of the correspondence, in the broad sense, directly involves the General Secretariat. It is concerned with all the notifications (taking vows, ordinations, nominations to provincial offices and deaths) that the Visitors have to send to us. It also involves information with regard to corrections to the *Catalogue* and the annual statistics. For all of that, the secretaries who have to deal with the information are very grateful when you use the reply sheets which we have sent you, when you fill them in following the directions given and when you send them in by the required deadlines. All of this saves a lot of time.

Letters about the Congregation, both those arriving as well as those sent out, are recorded at the General Secretariat, photocopied for the different files which involve them, and filed in the archives of the Secretariat, in the provincial files, the personal files or the files on various issues.

When you write to the Curia, your letters are sent to the recipients, but the vast majority are for the Superior General. If the letters are of lesser importance, each replies to his own letters personally, within the shortest space of time, if he is not travelling. If the letters are of greater importance, they are sent to me so that I can put them on the agenda for the Council.

II. The Councils

The Council normally meets on a Tuesday morning, but there are numerous exceptions on account of the travels of the Superior General or the other members of the Council.

Each year we have an average of 35 to 40 Councils, of which four are *tempo forte* which take place over a week, with one meeting in the morning, the afternoon being used to make useful contacts in order to expedite certain matters and to write up the letters that follow on the decisions of the Council.

I give out to the members of the Council all the documentation that will be used at each meeting, which adds up to a total of about 2,200 pages a year, divided into an average of 350 to 450 questions. Each question is discussed, a decision is taken and each member of the Council, depending on his languages, is asked to prepare for the Superior General a reply which will communicate the decisions taken.

Now we come to our last point, the Curia publications, for which I am responsible and in which various members of the Secretariat collaborate.

III. The Curia Publications

For the past five years, I have been in charge of the editing of *NUNTIA* and, for the past four, I have looked after the direction of *VINCENTIANA*. I have the advantage of being able to count on the collaboration of the various secretaries, benefiting especially from the variety of languages that they speak.

1. *Nuntia*

This information bulletin, a link between the Curia and all the provinces, seeks to be a means of communication, exchange of experiences and, thus, of communion, between us.

Apart from the news from the Curia, and that sent from the '*Nuntia* correspondents' (some are very active, others less so), we glean news by reading, with the different secretaries, the provincial bulletins. With this harvest, I do a first edition of the bulletin in French, which is discussed with Frs. Lauro Palú and Italo Zedde, who make up the *NUNTIA* board. Then, the text is translated into English and Spanish by the secretariat. Finally, one of the secretaries puts it together on the page.

Over the years, we have tried to improve the content and style of the bulletin, in order that the confreres will enjoy reading it. I have tried to include news that is more substantial and concrete, without making it too long. The inquiry which I did among the Visitors at Salamanca in June 1996 shows that *NUNTIA* is well received and has also allowed me to make some improvements.

2. *Vincentiana*

When the Superior General placed me in charge of the direction of the journal *VINCENTIANA*, it was with the mission of doing so along new lines and of publishing it in three languages (French, English and Spanish) in the hope that, as it directly links with nearly 70% of the confreres, it would be more accessible and, thus, read more.

The newest aspect of the journal is firstly, at the level of its content which is normally divided in an issue in the following way:

- *The official part*, from the General Curia, with the letters of the Superior General, nominations, statistics of the Congregation, official documents, etc.

- *The Feature* (theme) which is the principal new aspect of the journal, and whose title appears on the cover. It allows us to deal with a particular theme in each number, in various articles which deal with our missionary life and our Vincentian spirituality.

- *The Studies*, which gather together various articles, often on Vincentian spirituality, chosen for their quality.

- *The Vincentian Bibliography*, in which a brief synopsis is made of all the books on St. Vincent, Vincentian spirituality, and the life and history of the Vincentian Family; all of which shows the importance of sending on to the Curia all the Vincentian books which come out. There follows a General Bibliography with only a reference to books written by confreres, but which are not of a Vincentian nature.

I am assisted by the editorial board, made up of two Curia members, Frs. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza and Rolando Delagoza. We meet from time to time to choose the themes we want to deal with and the people from whom we will commission the articles. Equally, if articles are sent to us unsolicited, we study them and decide if we will publish them. We look for subjects which will serve to enrich the understanding and reflection of the confreres at the spiritual, apostolic or community level, as well as about Vincentian sources and life in the Congregation today. When we have received the articles, we send them to the translators, then we check the texts, according to language, at the secretariat and a secretary prepares it on floppy disc for the printer. The inquiry which I did among the Visitors in Salamanca showed that they were happy with the new formula.

We have moved from a single edition in various languages to three editions (in French, English and Spanish). We produce six numbers a year, with one double number during the summer, usually fairly large, like that of the Summer of 1996 on the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca (220 pages), or of last summer on the Vincentian Month on the Popular Missions, which was a 250-page book. We have edited 1,600 pages in each language in three and a half years, which makes a total of 4,800 pages in all the languages together.

As well as the automatic subscription of each canonical house, we have offered Visitors the possibility of taking out a subscription for certain people or works in their provinces and we have suggested individual subscriptions to confreres, as well as, in a

limited way, to members of the Vincentian Family. We have gone from 550 to 830 subscriptions and I would like to see it increase still more.

We are well aware that three languages are not enough for all the Congregation. Unfortunately, it is hardly possible, in view of the limited number of confreres in the Congregation, to increase that number, because it is not easy to find translators, means even more work and would cost a great deal more.

3. Other publications

Finally, I would like to mention some other Curia publications which involve a considerable amount of work at the secretariat. There have been, in particular, the *Instruction on the Vows* and the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*. On top of that, I undertook to edit the French edition of Fr. Maloney's last book; *Seasons in Spirituality* and the reprint of *Letters of John Gabriel Perboyre* (but that did not take much work, since Paris supplied me with the floppy disc).

Finally, I would like to mention an annual publication which does take up an amount of time at the secretariat; I refer to the *Catalogue*. We have reworked the presentation in order to make it clearer and more practical, especially with regard to the information about each house. The Visitors, when consulted in Salamanca, welcomed it favourably. As far as possible, we have taken account of their suggestions.

These are the principal aspects of the work of the General Secretariat that I have chosen to present to you and through which we try to be of service to the Congregation and its mission.

Translated by Eugene Curran, CM