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Visits to the Provinces and Vice Provinces

by Italo G. Zedde, CM

In this brief presentation, I can only make a few references. We all know that the visitations of the Superior General, or his delegate, were already considered very important in the time of St. Vincent. In his words, the visit is an occasion sent to us by God to maintain the unity of the Congregation and the apostolic activity proper to it, but it is above all an occasion for spiritual renewal, all ideas that have entered into our *Constitutions and Statutes*.

St. Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, Superior at Richelieu, on 26 August 1640. "In this moment here [at St. Lazare] we are having visitation. Never as now have I realized how important it is for us to use this time for our spiritual growth. Providence has given us the visitation for this purpose" (SV II, 96-97).

With the publication of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, we need to look at nn. 318-324, which speak of the visitation of the Superior General to the provinces or the vice provinces. Here we recall briefly two points:

I. Reason for the visitation

Throughout our history the nature of the visitation has undergone a revealing evolution. In this moment the *Constitutions and Statutes* regulate it. The only explicit reference is in the *Statutes*, which say:

Besides the faculties granted him by universal law or by special concession, it is the function of the Superior General: ... 2_ without prejudice to his right to make a canonical visitation whenever one is needed, to visit the provinces and vice-provinces at least once during his time of office, either personally or by a delegate, in order to animate them and be informed about how their members are doing (Statute 51, 2).

Instead, articles 101-103 of the *Constitutions* give the juridical base (though not the complete one) of the general governance in the Congregation by the Superior General. These articles include, among the other tasks of the Superior General, the visitation of the provinces and the vice-provinces as a privileged means to bring life to individual communities, to maintain and make grow the spirit of St. Vincent, and to preserve the unity of the Congregation.

II. How the visitation takes place

Given the contents of the *Constitutions and Statutes* just mentioned, the visitation of the Superior General has two fundamental purposes: 1. bring life to the provinces and vice-provinces in all the aspects of our life in such a way as to reinforce the unity of the Congregation; 2. facilitate reciprocal communication of the confreres and the province with the Superior General and the General Curia. Usually, though not always, the Superior General assigns the visitations to the Assistants General, keeping his own visits to the provinces, vice-provinces and missions of a more pastoral type, in which the Daughters of Charity and the other members of the Vincentian Family are involved.

Once the Superior General has fixed the program of visitations, the Assistant communicates the decision to each Visitor so he can prepare the schedule. At the beginning of the visitation, the Provincial Council meets, to give the best information possible on the state of the province; there is a second council meeting at the end of the visitation, in the presence of the Superior General or his Assistant to hear the observations and the recommendations proposed at the conclusion of the visitation.

Usually during the visitations of the individual houses or communities, the Superior General or his Assistant has a personal dialogue with each confrere; there is a community meeting when possible; particular attention is paid to the houses of formation; the provincial project is examined, the project of each individual house, and in general everything that helps the good working of community and apostolic life.

After the visitation, the Assistant General writes a report for the Superior General and his council, in which the positive and negative elements gathered during the visit are revealed. After this, the Superior General sends two letters: one to the province in general, and one to the Visitor and his council, for questions that require greater discretion, or that belong to the council's job.

I thank, with all my heart, in the name of the whole General Council, all of you for your availability, brotherhood, and cooperation during the visitations we have done, hoping that with these visitations we have worked well together for the good of all the confreres.

(Translated by Robert Stone, CM)