

3-1999

On Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation of the Mission

Robert P. Maloney C.M.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maloney, Robert P. C.M. (1999) "On Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation of the Mission," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 43 : No. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol43/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentiana by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact wsulliv6@depaul.edu, c.mcclure@depaul.edu.

On Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation of the Mission

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

I. Status Quaestionis

In its Provincial Assembly, held October 20-24, 1997, the Province of Toulouse addressed a postulatum to the General Assembly of 1998 and another to the Superior General. Both postulata asked that we reflect on how married deacons might have some juridical bond with the Congregation of the Mission.¹

The General Assembly did not address the substance of this question. Rather, it passed it on to the Superior General and his council, leaving them complete freedom to do as they saw fit. Since the subject interested all the members of the council very much, we decided to carry out the study. Over a period of several months we discussed this theme in four lengthy council meetings while consulting canonists, confreres, superiors general, twelve religious communities,² and members of two dicasteries of the Holy See.

It became immediately evident that the issue is much larger than the possible linkage of married deacons with the Congregation of the Mission. Requests for some type of bond with the Congregation of the Mission come to us frequently from many lay groups and individuals, both male and female, of differing backgrounds and interests. This study will treat the broader question of associating various groups and persons with the Congregation of the Mission; in that context, it will also respond to the postulata of the Province of Toulouse.

Actually, the Congregation of the Mission has a long history of varied forms of linkage with many groups: the Daughters of Charity, the Ladies of Charity, the Miraculous Medal Association, the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, etc. The

¹ The postulata read as follows:

1. To the General Assembly

Un bon nombre de diacres mariés, dont certains sont des Conférenciers de Saint Vincent de Paul, manifestent le désir d'un rattachement plus étroit à la Congrégation de la Mission.

L'Assemblée Provinciale demande à l'Assemblée Générale de prendre ce désir en considération et d'y réfléchir.

2. To the Superior General

L'Assemblée Provinciale demande au Supérieur Général de faire étudier par des Confrères engagés dans divers ministères et par des canonistes éprouvés, Lazaristes ou non, les modalités pratiques qui permettraient à des diacres mariés d'être unis par quelque lien juridique officiel à la Congrégation.

² I am very grateful to the members of the General Curia, who visited these communities and conducted interviews, using a questionnaire that we had devised beforehand.

juridical models used in the past in relationship with these groups can provide light for future possibilities.

The reflections that follow are not merely juridical, nor are they merely theoretical. All those consulted attest that it is important to learn from contemporary practice and that there is much fluidity in regard to this question at present. This study, therefore, offers norms and suggestions gleaned from current experience within the Church.³

II. Some Presuppositions

1. This document does not treat "affiliation," which is used in the Congregation as a means of acknowledging our gratitude towards certain persons or groups and of assuring them of our spiritual union with them. "Affiliation" creates no juridical bonds between the Congregation of the Mission and other groups or persons. In recent years we have "affiliated" many individuals, some married couples, and a number of groups (e.g., 14 congregations of Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul).
2. The new Code has a well-developed section on "Associations of Christ's Faithful" (Canons 298-329) and other canons related to linking associations with Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Among the most important canons influencing the theme of this document are: 303, 311, 677, 725.
3. The canons make it evident that both groups and individual persons can be associated with a congregation by some form of bond (cf. Canons 677 § 2 and 725). The law speaks of associations "aliquo modo unitis" (Canon 311) and also of persons and associations who are united with us "aliquo vinculo determinato" (Canon 725).
4. While juridical bonds with the Congregation of the Mission, usually through linkage with the Superior General, have an important place in the functioning of many groups, such bonds are not essential for having a "Vincentian identity." The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, for example, has no such bonds; nor does the present-day International Association of Charities (AIC).
5. What is written below focuses mainly on the association of groups with the Congregation of the Mission. It is applicable, however, to the association of individuals, *mutatis mutandis*.
6. This study treats the association of new groups with the Congregation of the Mission. It is, of course, very important that relationships between the

³ With so much rapid development in regard to this question, there are many *quaestiones disputatae* today in regard to Church law concerning associations. The Holy See has mandated a study regarding such questions (e.g., the erection of private and public associations).

Congregation and already-existing groups within the Vincentian Family be continually strengthened. In recent years a renewed sense of "family" has developed among us, resulting in closer personal ties, common prayer, frequent meetings, cooperative planning, and collaborative projects in the service of the poor. Strengthening the common bonds that unite the various groups in our family, while preserving their distinctive charisms, is crucial for the vitality of the charism of St. Vincent.

III. Some Theological Roots

The 20th century has witnessed a renewed emergence of the laity in the Church. Three theological developments have played a crucial role in this regard:

- a. Reflection on the Church as the "people of God" has highlighted the co-responsibility of all its members for the life and vitality of the Church.⁴
- b. In that context, the universal call to holiness has received new emphasis.⁵
- c. Likewise, because of a recognition that *mission* is not merely an activity of the Church but part of her very essence, contemporary theology has placed a renewed accent on the involvement of every Christian in the Church's mission.⁶

Numerous conciliar⁷ and post-conciliar documents⁸ have treated these three themes.

Actually, during the history of the Church, lay groups and religious institutes have had a profound mutual influence upon one another. Early forms of religious life sprang from the desire of lay persons to live Christianity radically. The eremitic life, the monastic life, and the mendicant life all had significant lay roots.⁹

On the other hand, religious life has given birth to numerous lay groups, from the long-existing third orders to the many contemporary apostolic and missionary lay

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 9-17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 71-74.

⁷ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2-4; *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 2-7.

⁸ *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 1, 18; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15, 59-60; *Christifideles Laici*, 16, 51.

⁹ Cf. Marcello Zago, "Laici Associati Nell'Odierno Contesto Ecclesiale" in *La Vita Consacrata* coll. "Studi e Saggi su: " (Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori: Roma, 1997) 201-215.

associations. There have been various models of linkage between lay associations and different religious families.¹⁰ For example,

- a. The older male and female religious institutes often founded lay third orders approved by the Church. Their membership became quite numerous. Such groups focused particularly on the spirituality of the founders of the institutes. Notable among these are those of the Franciscans and Carmelites.¹¹
- b. Institutes whose goal is the mission *ad gentes* have, especially in more recent years, often founded lay associations that collaborate in mission countries. The institutes offer lay missionaries a program of formation prior to being sent out and a period of service in a foreign country. The lay missionaries work in close relationship with or are even inserted within the community itself, and agree to a clear set of norms (even a contract) governing their life, mission, and material needs. Notable among these would be Maryknoll's lay volunteer groups. MISEVI (Misioneros Seglares Vicentinos) is another example.
- c. Teaching institutes or other communities with very precisely defined apostolic goals, like health care, have formed associations of lay collaborators that share in the vision, the spirituality, and the charism of the founder; they also participate in the institute's particular apostolic work. The Jesuits, for instance, have a large association of alumni from their schools.
- d. International apostolic institutes with many "relatives" (groups living in the spirit of the same founder) have emphasized a sense of "family." The members of the family share the spirituality of the founder, participate in a similar apostolic vision, join in concrete missionary projects, and develop forms of shared formation and mutual support. Among these, besides our own Vincentian Family, are the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Pallotines.
- e. A fifth group of institutes have, flowing from their charism, a continuous history of lay formation and collaboration with lay groups. The Salesians are perhaps the clearest example, having close links with lay associates right from the time of Don Bosco, who composed a rule for them himself.
- f. Today "new Foundations"¹² exist, sometimes composed of clerics and lay persons, of men and women, of married couples and celibates. Such groups have a variety of juridical configurations. Their commitment to the evangelical life takes different forms and is usually characterized by an intense focus on community, prayer, and simplicity of life. The members, including the married couples, are in some instances offered the opportunity to pronounce the vows

¹⁰ For abundant bibliography on this question, cf. Gian Franco Poli, "Religiosi e laici: osare la svolta" in *Vita Consacrata* XXXIII (n. 6; Novembre/Dicembre 1997) 648-653. Actually, every issue of *Vita Consacrata* contains information on new forms of community living.

¹¹ There are many other third orders; e.g., Dominicans, Augustinians, Minims, Mercedarians, Servites, etc. Cf. *Vita Consacrata*, 54.

¹² Cf. *Vita Consacrata*, 62; also, 12, 54-56.

of chastity, poverty, and obedience in forms appropriate to their state of life.¹³ At times, other vows are added.¹⁴ Examples of such "new foundations" are Verbum Dei founded in Spain in 1969,¹⁵ the Community of the Beatitudes founded in France in 1973,¹⁶ and the Oasi della Pace founded in Italy in 1985.¹⁷

IV. Lines of Convergence

Examining the various forms of linkage between lay associations and religious institutes or Societies of Apostolic Life, certain lines of convergence emerge.

1. Various studies¹⁸ attest that young people, in associating themselves with institutes, seek three things in particular:
 - a. *Spirituality.* They long for a world-view that makes sense and is comprehensive and life-giving.
 - b. *A sense of belonging.* They want to face the challenges of the future *with others.* This *communitarian dimension* shows itself in different ways in the relationship between lay associations and religious institutes. Sometimes it is expressed in team work, with the members of the lay association working side by side with members of the institute. At other times, it takes the form of regular meetings, praying with one another, sharing meals from time to time, or even living together.
 - c. *A well-defined apostolic mission.* They seek a mission that involves a concrete response to dire human need.
2. The particular *charism* of the institute plays a crucial role in all linkage.¹⁹ At times, varying aspects of the charism come to the fore; e.g., the spirituality of the founder, his missionary approach, a style of life he proposed, etc. For instance, in the relationship of a lay association with a missionary institute, the emphasis might lie on collaboration in missionary works. Contemplative institutes and their lay associates might focus more on prayer. Mendicants and

¹³ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 62.

¹⁴ Members of the Oasi della Pace, for example, take a vow "to be peace and to intercede for peace."

¹⁵ Juan Martínez Saez, "Fraternità `Verbum Dei'" in *Vita Consecrata* XXXIV (n. 1; Gennaio/Febraio 1998) 87-97.

¹⁶ "La Comunità delle Beatitudini compie 25 anni" in *Vita Consecrata* XXXIV (n. 6; Novembre/Dicembre 1998) 647-657.

¹⁷ "Comunità mariana `Oasi della Pace'" in *Vita Consecrata* XXXIV (n. 2; Marzo/Aprile 1998) 181-196.

¹⁸ D. Nygren and M. Ukeritis. *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States* (Praeger Press; Conn., 1993) 251; Albert di Ianni, "Religious Vocations: New Signs of the Times" in *Review for Religious* 52 (#5; September-October, 1993) 745-763; cf., Catherine Bertrand, "Common Threads _ Are We Weaving Or Unraveling?"; Marcello Zago, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 54-56.

their third orders might accent lifestyle. Groups associated with the Jesuits have often stressed the Ignatian Exercises and a method of discernment.

3. Today there is considerable emphasis on *families*, whose different branches _ male and female, lay and religious _ complement one another in underlining the importance of spirituality, communion, and mutual cooperation in concrete projects. Our own General Assembly of 1998 placed great emphasis on this theme. The Pallotines, who held their chapter shortly after ours, focused on the same topic.
4. The *lay* character of most such associations is continually reaffirmed today. It is essential that lay associations not be "clericalized" or dominated by the religious institute. As lay members seek to share in the charism of a religious founder, it is very important that the founder's spirituality and insights be translated into forms that are applicable to the life of a lay person.
5. There is strong emphasis, gleaned from experience, on the need to respect the *autonomy* of both the lay association and the religious institute. Each has its own statutes, its own leaders, its own decision-making process, etc.
6. All stress that *economic* questions must be treated clearly in the statutes of the lay association and in whatever documents define the linkage between the association and the religious institute.
7. The *formation and admission* of associates must be a serious process. There should, therefore, be a carefully designed period of formation²⁰ and some type of official request for admission that is evaluated and approved by some person or group. In the case of married persons, the consent of the spouse is utterly necessary. If contracts are involved, then they should clearly stipulate matters like the period of time for the person's service, economic arrangements, etc.
8. The *organizational structure* of associations is very varied. Sometimes they are restricted to a local area, sometimes to a country, and sometimes they are international.

²⁰ The spirituality of an association linked with the Congregation of the Mission might rest, typically, on these pillars:

1. The following of Christ as Servant and Evangelizer of the poor.
2. Concrete, effective charity lived out in simplicity and humility.
3. A well-defined commitment to daily prayer (e.g., some vocal prayers accompanied by a period of mental prayer, with a method of meditating).
4. Mutual concern for and support of one another.

The formation program of such an association might include instruction in regard to basic New Testament spirituality (Jesus and the proclamation of the Reign of God, the call to conversion, mission, practical charity, forgiveness of others, faith, trust in providence, dedication to truth, mortification, etc.) and instruction in, and experience of, the Vincentian charism. It would offer to others a Vincentian apostolic spirituality as the foundation for serving the poor well and an understanding of the social teaching of the Church.

There would ordinarily be a well-defined process of formation before formal entrance into the Association. Normally this would take place over an established period of time, at the conclusion of which members would be formally admitted.

9. A *statute* or *rule* is eventually formulated, describing the goals, the spirituality, the process of admission, the commitments of the members, the apostolates, and the organizational structure of such groups. Many groups such as those associated with the Salesians, the Pallotines, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Spiritans, the Society of St. Paul (Paolini), and the Society of African Missionaries (SMA) have statutes that are already approved or in the process of approval.²¹

V. Some Principles for Linking Groups or Persons with the Congregation of the Mission

One might envision three cases: a) uniting an already existing association "aliquo vinculo determinato" to the Congregation of the Mission; b) creating an association and then uniting it to the Congregation; c) linking an individual person or several persons to the Congregation of the Mission "aliquo vinculo determinato."

1. In all three cases, it is important to verify that the association or person has:
 - a. a well-defined Vincentian spirituality;
 - b. a clearly defined mission to the poor, either through direct service or through some other form of material or spiritual support;
 - c. some form of clearly defined means for communal support, through prayer, meetings, team work and other social interchange;
 - d. a local point of contact (e.g., a local Vincentian advisor, or a relationship with a center at or near a house of the Daughters of Charity or the Congregation of the Mission, etc.);
 - e. the possibility of various kinds of participation; e.g. part-time or full-time, single or married;
 - f. a clear understanding of the distinction between membership in the association and membership in the Congregation of the Mission, each group having its own juridical identity;
 - g. clear norms in regard to financial sustenance (e.g., defining how needed funds are raised).
2. Members of such associations, or individuals, might make basic commitments:

²¹ Cf. Canons 312-314.

- a. to the service of the poor (e.g., a certain amount of time weekly);
 - b. to daily personal prayer, and perhaps to some defined times of prayer together with other members of the group;
 - c. to meetings for communal support, ongoing formation, and decision-making in regard to works among the poor.
3. Further optional commitments might be encouraged, if individuals should wish to engage in them (e.g., a private vow of service to the poor, a private vow of chastity, etc.). Such private vows might be annual and could be dispensed by a confessor.
 4. It is also possible to envision, especially for young people, temporary commitment to some form of common life.

VI. Formulation of Statutes

Eventually an Association formulates statutes that are approved by some authority within the Church, as outlined in Canons 303 and 312. In distinctively Vincentian associations, this authority is initially the Visitor, for his own province, and ultimately the Superior General.

The members of an Association are not in any way juridically "members" of the Congregation of the Mission. There should exist, however, strong bonds between the members of the Congregation of the Mission and those of the Association. The Vincentians might assist the Association by:

1. helping in the initial and ongoing formation of their members;
2. offering counsel at their meetings;
3. providing service opportunities within the context of our works;
4. praying with the members of the Association;
5. sharing other moments of life with them.

VII. Putting These Reflections into Practice

1. Much will depend on the creativity and hard work of those engaged in the initial dialogue concerning this question (e.g., a particular confrere and the group of lay people who wish to be associated with the Congregation of the

Mission). Many Superiors General attest that people often express a desire for some form of union, but frequently the desire remains vague and nothing happens because of a failure to work at the question perseveringly and concretely.

St. Vincent offers a good example of perseverance and concreteness in such matters. He wrote careful statutes for the confraternities of charity that he founded. Through patient labor he gained approval for the rather revolutionary rule of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

2. The first step is to sit down with the person or group of people who express a desire for some type of bond with the Congregation of the Mission and to ask the question: Precisely what is it that you are seeking? Do you desire to be united with us in our apostolate? in our prayer? through some type of participation in some aspects of our community life? if the latter, what aspects? how often? etc.

All of this should be written down very clearly and specifically. Whatever is ultimately done must have as its starting point the actual desires of the people who want to enter into some form of bond with the Congregation.

3. It is important, from the start of the dialogue, to avoid confusing two distinct realities: a) the association (or person) that is linked "aliquo vinculo determinato" to the Congregation of the Mission; and b) the Congregation of the Mission itself.
4. All financial responsibilities must be clearly described in writing. Lay associations should have their own way of financing their activities. The Congregation of the Mission must not be envisioned as being responsible for their finances nor liable for the actions of their members or the families of the members.
5. A good recent example of how the four steps outlined above might be implemented can be found in the Statutes of MISEVI.²² This association, which provides the opportunity for lay Vincentian missionaries (single or married) to work in various countries over a period of years, had its statutes approved, after much dialogue, on July 5, 1997. It now functions effectively, with a distinctively Vincentian spirituality and with well-defined bonds to the Vincentian Family.
6. Among the possibilities at times suggested is that a Vincentian lay associate would take vows; e.g., a vow of service to the poor. If one examines this possibility with a group or an individual, then it seems best to speak of a

²² Cf., "Statutes of MISEVI" in *Vincentiana* XLII (n. 3; May-June 1998) 141-149.

private vow. There should be a very concrete description of what such a vow involves, its duration, and how it can be dispensed.

7. One of the ways of linking associations with the Congregation of the Mission, without confusing the two realities, has been through the person of the Superior General, who has served as the Director General of the association. This is the model already used in many groups; e.g., the original Ladies of Charity (though the juridical status of AIC is now different), the Miraculous Medal Association, the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, MISEVI, etc. Analogously, St. Vincent and St. Louise used a similar formula in linking the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission, both Societies of Apostolic Life, as members of a family with many common ties.

VIII. The Linkage of Married Permanent Deacons with the Congregation of the Mission

Much of what has been said above throws light on the postulatam addressed by the Province of Toulouse to the Superior General asking him to promote a study investigating the ways in which married deacons might be united by some juridical bond with the Congregation of the Mission.

Actual requests for such linkage have been relatively few up to the present, but could increase in the future. When a missionary receives such a request, the following steps are appropriate:

1. He should dialogue with the deacon or group of deacons and ask questions such as those described in the preceding section (cf., VII, 2). The results of this conversation should be written down. Without careful dialogue with a view toward discerning precisely what the married deacon (or group) desires, the process will go nowhere.
2. When a clear statement has been drawn up expressing what the married deacon desires concretely in terms of linkage with the Congregation, then this should be presented to the proper authority; e.g., to the Visitor and perhaps later to the Superior General, so that a statute might be carefully formulated describing the kind of linkage being sought and the mutual rights and responsibilities of the married deacon and the Congregation of the Mission. While a married deacon may not be incorporated as a member of the Congregation of the Mission, other forms of linkage are quite possible. For incorporation, the vows of the Congregation are necessary (C 57), as well as a commitment to community life (C 21).
3. Since permanent deacons are incardinated into a diocese, the mutual responsibilities of the bishop, in whose diocese they are incardinated, and the

Congregation of the Mission, with which they seek some form of bond, should be utterly clear.

4. As mentioned above (IV, 7), the consent _ and preferably the encouragement and support _ of the deacon's spouse is a prerequisite.
5. For linkage of *individual deacons*, a clear contract should be drawn up describing the rights and obligations of the individual and those of the Congregation of the Mission, and the time-frame for the agreement. Such a contract might touch on such matters as formation, apostolate, prayer, communal support, meetings, relationship to authority, and economic arrangements.
6. If the number of married deacons seeking some type of bond should grow significantly, one might think of creating an association with an international statute that could be applied within different countries. Such a statute could be developed out of the experience of actual instances of linkage in various countries over a number of years.

Ix. Future Possibilities

St. Vincent was both creative and well-organized, mobilizing the energies of many persons and groups in the service of the poor. In concluding this study, I encourage the members of the Vincentian Family to engage in similar inventiveness.

Below, I suggest a few possibilities. There are surely many others that readers might envision.

1. Thousands of lay men and women work at the side of Vincentians and Daughters of Charity in educational works that are directed to students of all age levels, from pre-school children right up through the university. Recently many materials have come across my desk that relate to these persons and institutions. In October 1997, a meeting at Curitiba in Brazil focused on the topic: "Educadores Vicentinos No Contexto Mundial." In 1997, Sr. Louise Sullivan, D.C., published a work entitled "The Core Values of Vincentian Education."²³ The confreres at St. Stanislaus' College in Bathurst, Australia, formulated in 1996 a document entitled "Vincentian Philosophy of Secondary Education." The Vincentians and Daughters of Charity of Spain have circulated a brochure entitled "Propuesta Educativa de los Centros Educativos Vicencianos." Our Vincentian universities also have documents describing the meaning of Vincentian sponsorship of those institutions. Could an association be formed for our collaborators in education, offering them a Vincentian spirituality, apostolic goals, prayer forms, etc.?

²³ This study was published by DePaul University, 1 East Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60604-2287.

2. A huge number of lay men and women, including many doctors and nurses, work side by side with Daughters of Charity in health care institutions. Many of these institutions have written eloquent statements about their Vincentian mission. These same institutions often struggle to be faithful to that mission in an era where health care legislation has increased the danger of bureaucratic and impersonalized hospital procedures. Could one envision a group of "Vincentian Health Care Associates" that would see the sick-poor with St. Vincent's eyes, love them with his heart, and serve them in his spirit?
3. MISEVI, mentioned above (VII, 5), provides a workable model for sending volunteers (men and women, single and married) to foreign missions. Its statutes were approved for Spain. Could other countries adopt similar statutes and provide lay men and women with the opportunity to serve from three to five years in a mission country in the Vincentian spirit?
4. In various countries, the Congregation of the Mission has centers for training lay leaders (e.g., the Centro Hector Gallego in Volcán, Panama, where a large number of pastoral ministers are formed). They are often the principal pastoral agents in villages or in Basic Christian Communities. These leaders sometimes have no formal tie with a diocese or with any other group. Could an association be formed called "Vincentian Pastoral Agents" that would offer such lay men and women a Vincentian spirituality, pastoral perspective, etc.?
5. In some countries, both in the past and in the present, some lay men and women have lived in our houses for a period of time, even their whole lives, and performed generous service without aspiring to become formally "members" of the Congregation of the Mission or of the Daughters of Charity. Various names (e.g., *los donados* in Spain) describe such persons. Recently I received a letter from India asking whether a group of women like these could be more formally linked with the Daughters of Charity. Could some kind of statute be drawn up for such persons?
6. With some frequency, a single person or a married couple present themselves and are eager to give a significant portion of, or all, their time to the service of the poor. Could a statute be drawn up, entitled "Vincentian Associates," which would state, *mutatis mutandis* in different countries, what might be offered to such individuals or couples and what might be expected from them? The statute could, ultimately, be written in the form of a contract for the individual person or the couple.
7. Today lay men and women, single and married, often cooperate with us in the giving of popular missions. Could such persons be linked more formally with the Congregation of the Mission, offering them the opportunity to share more fully in our spirituality?

8. Sometimes employees, alumni from our schools, and former seminarians remain closely united with the Congregation and express a desire to have closer bonds. Could some form of linkage be offered to them?

Of course, when possibilities such as these are raised, one might immediately think of many problems. The civil law today often creates complications, particularly in the area of liability. This makes the careful drafting of statutes and the obtaining of good legal advice indispensable, so that the Congregation and those linked to it are adequately protected under civil law.

Financing the life and mission of lay associates is surely also a very delicate consideration.

Such problems might discourage us initially, but it is helpful to note that St. Vincent faced similar difficulties. In his day, the canonical obstacles might have seemed almost insuperable as he attempted to form the Daughters of Charity into an apostolic society, especially since his friend Francis de Sales had recently failed in his efforts to free the Visitation nuns from the cloister. But with patience, St. Vincent worked out a viable legal solution. He also worked out solutions for the financial support of the many works that he undertook.

I hope that we can be similarly creative today!