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**THE APOSTOLIC WORKS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE  
MISSION  
(Constitutions 10-18; Statutes 1-12)**

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**CONSTITUTIONS (10-18) AND STATUTES (1-12)**

The final article of the chapter of the Constitutions dealing with the Congregation's apostolic works, puts before us the figure of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37), a source of inspiration for St. Vincent who gave effective help to the poor and abandoned. In the light of this example, "*...provinces and members should earnestly strive to serve those rejected by society and those who are victims of disasters and injustices of every kind. We should also assist those who suffer from forms of moral poverty which are peculiar to our own times. Working for all of these and with them, members should endeavour to implement the demands of social justice and evangelical charity*" (C. 18).

The text of article 18 makes explicit mention of some particular elements. For example, it speaks of the charity which makes us concerned for all forms of suffering and causes us to seek effective means of remedying them; it mentions in particular, the way we are to work with, and for, the poor, because they are the principal agents, the prime movers and those most responsible for their human development, their evangelisation and their salvation, as Paul VI declared in the Apostolic Exhortation *Populorum Progressio* (n. 15). But there are other elements, too, that are evoked by the figure of the Good Samaritan and the intentions that Jesus had in mind when he told this parable. The story of the Good Samaritan is told in response to the lawyer who asked Jesus what he should do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied that the man needed to obey the law and the commandments. The lawyer knew these by heart: "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.*" Jesus praised him, saying: "*You have answered right, do this and life is yours.*" But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, "*And who is my neighbour?*"

In reply to this question, Jesus did not define the term "neighbour" but gave the example of someone who showed himself a neighbour to a man who had been stripped by bandits and robbed of all he possessed: this happened on the very road where a priest and a Levite had earlier passed him by. In our own case, we will be judged on our love, and what is fundamentally important is not that we should know the identity of our neighbour but rather that we should be a

neighbour to those in need. It will be the same at the Last Judgement: we will be saved, not because we knew that the person in distress was Christ, but because we helped the unfortunate people who were suffering, hungry, sick, lonely and abandoned. What would lead to our condemnation would be that we had not gone to the aid of these suffering people.

Perhaps the priest and the Levite were in a hurry to get to the temple, to “fulfil” their religious duties. For this reason, Jesus replaces religious structures with charitable service that is in line with the teaching of the prophets. Isaiah speaks in the name of God, and cries out, “What are your endless sacrifices to me? says Yahweh. I am sick of holocausts of rams and the fat of calves. The blood of bulls and of goats revolts me. When you come to present yourselves before me, who asked you to trample over my courts? Bring me your worthless offerings no more.... When you stretch out your hands I turn my eyes away. You may multiply your prayers, I shall not listen. Your hands are covered with blood, wash, make yourselves clean. Take your wrongdoing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow” (Is 1:11-12, 15-17). “Is that the sort of fast that pleases me, a truly penitential day for men? Hanging your head like a reed, lying down on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to Yahweh? Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks – to break unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the unjust go free, and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked and not turn from your own kin” (Is 58:5-7).

We can read similar denunciations in Micah (6:6-8), Hosea (6:6), Zecharia (7:5, 9-10). We have to let ourselves be touched by the ardour and the vehemence of the prophets’ social message if we are to understand the charity that St. Vincent de Paul found so urgently compelling: “The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us on.” (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). The Book of Ecclesiasticus uses very strong terms to declare: “The sacrifice of an offering unjustly acquired is a mockery; the gifts of impious men are unacceptable. The Most High takes no pleasure in offerings from the godless, multiplying sacrifices will not gain him pardon from sin. Offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is as bad as slaughtering a son before his father’s very eyes. A meagre diet is the very life of the poor, he who withholds it is a man of blood. A man murders his neighbour if he robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee’s wages” (Si 34:18-22).

This is the spirit that should animate all our apostolic activity. Our task as Vincentians is set out in articles 10 and 11 of our Constitutions: we are called to evangelise the poor. Like all the members of the Church we can declare that this is our grace, our special vocation and the most fundamental element of our

identity (cf. EN 14). So it is precisely our insertion in the mission of the Church, which gives added importance to our vocation. The Church is conscious of sharing in Christ's divine mission. Christ presents this to us in his merciful, compassionate love which is the source of all our apostolic activity and which urges us "to make the Gospel effective." (SVP, XI, 391). Evangelisation has this objective in mind: that all people, through conversion and through the sacraments, may adhere to the Kingdom, that is to say, to the "new world," to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates" (EN 23).

According to the definitive teaching of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "to evangelise is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit; to bear witness that in his Son God has loved the world – that in his Incarnate Word he has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life" (EN 26).

The words of Jesus "unveil" the secret of God, his designs and his promises, and so they have the power to change men's hearts and their destiny. But Jesus also proclaims salvation through many signs that leave the crowds awe-struck( ): sick people are cured, water is turned into wine, loaves are multiplied, the dead are raised to life, and more importantly than all these, is his own resurrection. And among all these signs there is one to which he attaches great importance: the humble and the poor are evangelised, become his disciples and gather together "in his name" in the great community of those who believe in him" (EN 11-12). Through the death of Jesus, paschal freedom destroys every form of slavery and the resurrection creates all the good things that come with liberty. This is not a question of "private" liberation since it has a social and political dimension. Christ did not want to adopt a temporal-political stance, he resisted the temptation to take power, and he refused to allow the people to make him king and lead them in the struggle against domination by Herod or the Romans. Jesus was against all forms of privilege and inequality because God is the same Father for all people. He called the poor and the marginalised to become part of the Kingdom. For this reason, all authentic liberation in history, every striving for justice, every option for the poor and the most abandoned, always refers back to Christ. (cf. Segundo Galilea, *Teologia da Libertação. Ensaio de Síntese*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., São Paulo: Paulinas, 1979; 57-60)

In answer to the Baptist's questions, Jesus validated his mission by pointing to his works, the very works that Isaiah had foretold (61:1-2): "the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life" and he adds "**the Good News is proclaimed to the poor**" (Mt 11:2-6).

Article 12 of the Constitutions lists the fundamental characteristics of the evangelisation works undertaken by the Congregation. The text is perfectly clear so I will only highlight three aspects: preference for the poor, attention to the realities of present-day society, and the evangelising potential of the poor.

1. We Vincentians have no need to make a preferential option for the poor because our option is even more pressing. We inherit from St. Vincent the option that the saint himself made, **a fundamental option for the poor**. This means that our option for the poor is fundamental and radical; that is, it should be at the root, it should be the basis of everything that we do, every choice we make, all the works we undertake. For us it is a matter of seeing the poor, of finding out where they are, or where they are hiding themselves, and then going out to them. For Jesus, the poor meant the sick, the marginalised, those discriminated against because of race, social status or religion; those who, like the lepers, were obliged to live apart, those who, were reduced to mere objects of pleasure or the subject of condemnation, such as the prostitutes, the humiliated, the poor and those who had been “made poor” by invaders or dominant powers in the country. For St. Vincent, the poor were the men and women of the poor country areas who had been abandoned by the clergy and religious, children, especially the foundlings, girls who were victims of the soldiery, peasants whose lands were devastated by the troops, old people with no family, families without shelter or anywhere to live, men condemned to the galleys, the starving, men who were wounded in the war, the soldiers and even the nobility when these became “the bashful poor,” and all who were “made poor,” those reduced to poverty by different adverse and tragic circumstances of history.

At Puebla, the bishops of Latin America gave us a picture of the suffering face of Christ in our times (cf., 30-39). In this context it is always necessary to emphasise the part played by systems, or rather, to point out that these poor people are in this situation because of sinful structures, of poverty-inducing mechanisms, international exploitation, uncontrolled industrialisation and an alarming growth in urbanisation. St. Vincent told us that we have to **turn the medal over** (cf., SVP XI, 725), so that we can look beyond these human appearances.

In Santo Domingo (1992), the Latin American bishops made this declaration: “We need to extend the list of suffering faces that we spoke about at Puebla; faces disfigured by hunger, terrified by violence, grown old through living in subhuman conditions, worn out with the worry of providing for a family. The Lord is asking us to be able to discover his own countenance in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters” (cf., 179d).

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI referred to all “the peoples engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which

condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism.” The Pope went on to add: “The Church ... has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children – the duty of assisting at the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelisation (30).

In our times there are new categories of poor people who, paradoxically, are the fruit of a civilisation that enjoys advanced technology, and for whom Paul VI told us at our General Assembly of 1974, “You continue to be the hope of the poor.” (*Vincentiana*, 1974/6, 463; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19-IX-1974). We may think, for example, of those on drugs, drug addicts, immigrants, illegal immigrants, AIDS victims, those who have been kidnapped, the victims of terrorism, etc.

2. A second feature that should characterise our apostolic work is **attention to present-day realities**. We find an echo of this and some concrete proposals as to its implementation in Articles 8 and 9 of the Statutes of the Congregation, which ask us to foster inter-provincial meetings for the purpose of deepening our knowledge of the vocation of missionaries and of those pastoral methods which more effectively meet the actual conditions and changes of situations and people. They ask us to establish Provincial Norms governing social action and to determine concrete means for hastening the coming of social justice; similarly, they ask us to cooperate with associations that are concerned with the defence of human rights and the promotion of justice and peace. Obviously, such tasks are very difficult because of the complexity of the realities in which we live and work.

Theology teaches that there is unity and continuity in God’s designs for the world between creation and salvation; that is to say, between the task of building the world (history, society) and salvation, or in other words, between the struggle for liberation and the actions that bring us salvation. Paul VI tells us in EN: “With regard to the liberation which evangelisation proclaims and strives to put into practice, one should rather say this: — it cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute; — it is therefore attached to a certain concept of man which it can never sacrifice to the needs of any strategy, practice or short-term efficiency” (33).

3. **The evangelising potential of the poor:** St. Vincent often taught us that we should learn from the poor. One of the distinctive marks of our Congregation is that we are to allow the poor to evangelise us.

Puebla had some very trenchant comments to make about the evangelising power of the poor. Santo Domingo put this idea before us once again, this time in the wider context of solidarity even though the bishops did not sufficiently emphasise here the role of the poor as **agents** of evangelisation: “To evangelise is to do what Jesus Christ did when he declared in the synagogue that he had come “to evangelise” the poor (cf., Lk 4:18-19). “He was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty” (2 Cor 8:9). Christ challenges us to give, as he did, an authentic witness to evangelical poverty by our lifestyle and in our Church structures.

This is the basis for our commitment to a gospel-based preferential option for the poor, the firm and irrevocable, but not exclusive or excluding, commitment so solemnly pledged at the Bishops’ Conferences in Medellín and Puebla. Following the example of Jesus, we will make this preferential option the inspiration for all our works of personal and communal evangelisation. (cf., SRS 42, RH 14; John Paul II , Inaugural Discourse 16). It is with the “evangelising potential of the poor” (P 1147), that the Church which is also poor, wishes to inspire the evangelisation of our communities” (SD 178 a, b).

It is in this context that we should interpret the chapter on the Apostolic Works of the Congregation and it is in the light of these declarations that we should be looking at our works, especially those described in Articles 14 (popular missions), 15 (formation of the clergy and the laity), 16 (missions “ad Gentes” and other similar missions) and 17 (helping the Daughters of Charity and collaborating with them). And it is in this same context that our works have to be incorporated into the pastoral activity of the local Church (C.13). We are particularly called to evaluate our parishes according to the criteria set down in Article 10 of the Statutes.

In our reflections, in our encounters with the poor and with the Evangeliser of the Poor, we would do well to ask ourselves: “Are the sufferings of the poor ‘our burden and our sorrow’ as they were for St. Vincent? How do we rate our works and our pastoral endeavours before the judgement seat of the poor?”

### **WHICH WORKS SHOULD WE BE TAKING ON?**

Even in St. Vincent’s day, the Congregation had different types of foundations. Historians classify them in three groups:

- a) **Foundations for mission work:** Toul, Aiguillon, Richelieu, Troyes, Alet, Annecy, Crécy, Montmirail. b) There was also the work of **preparing ordinands** in Aiguillon **retreats for ordinands and for the clergy** in Richelieu (diocese of Poitou), work with ordinands and retreats for the clergy at Troyes, an unsuccessful project to open a seminary in Alet, and the first seminary, that functioned in Annecy. c) **Seminaries** were the main objective of the foundations made at Cahors, Marseilles, Saint Méen, Tréguier, Agen, Périgueux, Montpellier and Narbonne (cf., Luigi Mezzadri and José María Román, *Historia de la Congregación de la Misión*, Vol. 1, Madrid: La Milagrosa, 1992; 37-38).

There is no absolute parallel between the works of the Congregation of the Mission in St. Vincent's time and the works of the Congregation today. Sometimes we criticise a work on the grounds that it is not Vincentian. Most criticism is directed at our parishes and, to a somewhat lesser degree, at our schools and colleges. Many people also complain that we have to give good (and sometimes many) confreres in the provinces to the work of being Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity.

### **What are the criteria for judging whether an apostolic work is Vincentian?**

These criteria are to be found in Article 13 of the Constitutions and in the corresponding Statutes.

Article 13 has this to say: *“The provinces themselves will decide the forms of apostolate to be undertaken so that, faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent, their apostolate may be incorporated into the pastoral activity of the local Church in conformity with the documents and instructions of the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, and the diocesan bishops.”*

#### **1. The Provinces themselves will decide the forms of apostolate to be undertaken.**

The Provinces, not the Congregation. So the list of works and the reasons for doing them is to be found in the Provincial Norms (PN) rather than in the Constitutions. The PN have to be drawn up during a Provincial Assembly (PA) and be approved by the Superior General with the consent of his council, in conformity with Articles 143, 1° and 107, 12° of the Constitutions and Article 93 of the Statutes.

We know that it is the responsibility of Provincial Assemblies to undertake the revision of works and we know how this carried out. We are not always very objective in our evaluation of “our” works and those of our confreres. As a result, there are norms that reflect the ideological conflicts that arose during the PA. At the General Council, the Superior General and his



Assistants compare the Provincial Norms with the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation while at the same time keeping in mind the directives of Canon Law and other Church documents, etc., as stated in Article 13.

2. In deciding which forms of the apostolate they are to retain, the provinces have to remain **faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent**. Our primary loyalty is to the roots and the tradition of the Congregation, but also to the dynamism of the Vincentian spirit, the Vincentian charism, which is a grace that God gave to the Church in the person of St. Vincent and in his foundations.

In St. Vincent we find **the example**, the works he undertook and which he committed other pastoral workers from among the clergy and the laity to do. We also find **the spirit of St. Vincent**, the spirit that animated him and brought him to accept other works which did not seem to fulfil the conditions he himself laid down. For example, St. Vincent wanted us to be missionaries and not to be thinking of parishes. But he also talked quite calmly about the parishes he had accepted. What criteria did St. Vincent use here and what was his intention in accepting a parish?

In some provinces parishes were accepted after seminary work was abandoned and in order to find work for (to occupy) confrères who had retired from the seminaries (or whom the bishops had dispensed). In many cases this was done without a process of reflection, without opting for the poorest areas, and without giving the confrères adequate training for their new ministries and for integration into the pastoral work of the diocese, etc. One began one's work as curate or as parish priest in the way that one had worked as a professor, with the knowledge and experience one already had — or did not have.

The solution is not to abandon the parishes we have at present, but rather to include parishes in the list of our other works to be revised.

We know that time passes very swiftly and that changes come whether we want them or not. For this reason, nobody should be surprised or scandalised if the criteria presented in the Constitutions and Statutes are still inadequate or incomplete, and if we do not find them very clear.

After the Constitutions were drawn up at the General Assembly of 1980, we had the 1986 Assembly which gave us the **Lines of Action 1986-1992**, the 1992 Assembly that \* gave us the **Letter to the Confreres**, the commitments concerning New Evangelisation, New Men, New Communities; and the 1998 Assembly that gave us the document: **With the Vincentian Family, We Face the Challenges of the Mission at the Threshold of the new Millennium**. In addition, from 1980 until the present day, we have had meetings and activities which produced final documents dealing with the points we are discussing. At

the Visitors' Meeting in Bogotá (1983) the topics for special study were popular missions and the formation of the clergy; the Visitors' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1989) saw the revision of the Lines of Action for 1986-1992, and proposals were prepared for the Superior General and his council with regard to animation of the provinces. The General Council wrote the annual reflection document of 1988 on the subject of animating the laity in their formation. At the Meeting of Visitors in Salamanca (1996), the Superior General, Fr. Robert P. Maloney, presented criteria to be used in evaluating the Vincentian character of a parish. These texts contain a whole list of criteria that can give us guidance in revising, planning and reassessing works if we wish to be "faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent" (cf. *Vincentiana*, 1996/4-5, 220-227; 1997/2, 105-116; 1997/3, 165-185).

3. Article 13 of the Constitutions presents a further requirement: that of **incorporating our apostolate into the pastoral activity of the local Church**. The first reason for doing this is that we are **sent** on mission: we do not have the monopoly of mission work; we do not own this apostolate. A second reason is that we lack the appropriate training and so we have to learn from others. The third reason is that we have to work at a Church apostolate, not "our" apostolate, and certainly not "my" apostolate.

4. We have to work in conformity with **the documents and instructions of the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, and the diocesan bishops**. This will help us in two ways. In the first place, we will avoid the problems created by certain bishops who have their own, very individual ideas, which they would like to impose on all diocesan priests or religious working in their diocese. The general guidelines given by an Episcopal Conference are usually very valid and inspiring. We might think, for example, of these Conferences at Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), and Santo Domingo (1992). Secondly, it will help us to have a better understanding of our exemption from the jurisdiction of the bishops and put this into practice. There are some confreres who do not obey the Visitors or keep to provincial guidelines because they say they have to be part of the diocesan programme of apostolic works. But neither do they obey the bishop or implement his guidelines because they say that they have to follow the norms and the guidelines of the Congregation. They do this so as to avoid making their annual retreat.

5. Finally, **those who benefit from our apostolate**, according to Article 18 of the Constitutions, are **people who are rejected by society** (today we would say they are excluded from society, either as individuals or as a social class or as a category of people that are universally rejected), **victims of disasters** (and sometimes victims of people who come to help but then exploit them), **victims of all kinds of injustices**, and **those who suffer from various forms of moral poverty**.

6. Article 2 of the Statutes adds some important elements to this list of criteria or guidelines. It points out that *“In the modern world, **atheism and materialism** strongly challenge our faith and the traditional methods of evangelising. Therefore, members should carefully **study the causes of this phenomenon**, realising that in this situation they are called upon to **give witness to a stronger personal faith in the living God** and also to seek out **new ways of fulfilling their vocation to evangelise.**”*

I have highlighted four points in Article 2 of the Statutes that could help us to fulfil our apostolate better. In the context of these reflections, and with regard to the injunction to seek **new ways** of exercising our ministry, we should mention Pope John Paul II’s call for a new evangelisation. He made this appeal in passing, and later repeated it as though the most profound statement he could have made was to say that evangelisation calls for new ardour, new methods and new ways of being expressed.

However, we are fortunate in having other things that can lead us to a renewal that will help us to truly evangelise the world in its different dimensions. The Superior General, for example, wrote, in an article on the new evangelisation: “The new evangelisation demands a new way of being a missionary. Your ministry will be characterised by building up community, by the active participation of all, by sharing out functions, by the resurgence of new ministries and charisms, by solidarity with the oppressed.” In a footnote to that page, Fr. Maloney mentions that he took these ideas from Leonardo Boff’s book, *Nova Evangelização: Perspectiva dos Oprimidos* (Fortaleza: Vozes, 1990) 122-126. He goes on to say: “In this interesting work, the author also mentions the new **content** of this new evangelisation: a new form of spirituality, the Church’s new relationship with the world. As regards **method**, special emphasis is put on the role of the poor, as **agents** of evangelisation.”

## MISSIONS AND MISSION

**We are the Congregation of the Mission**, we are not a missionary congregation. What distinguishes us from others is not that in some countries we preach (or that we are still able to preach) **missions**, but that we have **a mission to be evangelisers**. Our mission is defined in Article 1 of the Constitutions. Article 14 of the Constitutions makes reference to **popular missions**: *“Popular missions, so dear to the heart of our Founder, are to be earnestly promoted. Therefore we should undertake the work of the missions according to circumstances of time and place, searching for all possible means to give this work new vitality, both to renew and build up a true Christian community and to awaken faith in the hearts of unbelievers.”*

There are many questions we should be asking ourselves with regard to popular missions. “What do we mean by ‘popular missions’? What is their objective? What sort of missions do they include? What methods are used? How long do they last? What subjects do they deal with? Who gives these missions?”

Article 16 of the Constitutions has a reference to the missions *ad gentes*: “Among the apostolic works of the Congregation, the foreign missions and missions to people in a similar stage of evangelisation, have an honoured place. In building up a new ecclesial community, missionaries should pay attention to the ‘seeds of the Word’ which may be found in the cultural and religious practices of the people (cf., EN, 53).

We should be asking ourselves some similar questions about the mission “ad gentes.” “Which countries would we describe as mission lands? How long do we continue to think of somewhere as a mission country? When does a country go back to being a mission country? Why was there such an outcry when Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel published the book: *France, a mission country?* (Lyons, Paris, 1943)? What does the term ‘ad Gentes’ mean today? Where are pagans to be found these days?”

And again, “what are the ‘similar stages’ referred to in article 16 of the Constitutions? Which of our provinces are in mission countries? Which of our missions could be classified as ‘missions ad Gentes’? Are Eritrea and Ethiopia in the category of missions ‘ad Gentes’?”

In the Apostolic Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II wrote about “new worlds,” “new social phenomena” and “the cultural areas or modern areopagi” where we should be going to preach the Gospel (37-38). Where should the Church be going to preach the Gospel in our times? And what are the means we should be using?

With regard to what are known as popular missions, which are generally of short duration, we have the proposals that the Visitors suggested to the Superior General and his council, at the close of the Bogotá Meeting in 1983 (*Vincentiana*, 1983/2, 183-193). These indicate **the basis of the mission, a description of a popular mission, its content, the organisation and dynamism of the mission, those who are to participate as missionaries the formation of missionaries, and finally, they give an evaluation of these missions.** Many of these proposals were taken up by Fr. Richard McCullen in his letter of 24 April 1983. He spoke first of all about the **missionary vocation of the Congregation** and then went on to examine the **statistical data with regard to the apostolic works of the Congregation**, before posing many **questions** as to why there are

so few missionaries and missions at present: he then described **some of the features of our missions** and their **content** (*Vincentiana*, 1983/2, 209-217).

The biggest problem for the Congregation at present is to know how many missionaries are working on the missions. According to the statistics I consulted, there are provinces in places like Madagascar, Mozambique and Congo which are, in essence, missionary countries, and yet there is no record of a single missionary working there. According to the 1997 statistics concerning ministries, out of the whole Congregation there were only 128 priests and one brother engaged in the work of giving popular missions. Out of a total number of 3,552 members in the Congregation, that would be the equivalent of 4%. If we add to this, 178 of the parishes that are classed as mission sectors, that would bring the total to 9.6%. In the parishes there are 883 priests, 1 permanent deacon and 19 brothers, a total that represents 28.5 of the Congregation's membership.

In fact, in order to provide information about the different areas of our apostolic activity, we would need to list members of the Congregation who give short missions, those who spend three or more years on the missions, on missions "ad gentes," those who work in parishes that are described as "mission areas" and those who, even though they work in parishes, colleges and seminaries, or are engaged in administration, nevertheless preach short missions during the holidays, in Holy Week, during the Christmas novena period, etc.

### **MISSION PARISHES**

The greatest number of confreres throughout the world and in nearly all the Congregation's provinces work in parishes. The subject of parishes should be studied alongside that of missions.

There are short popular missions that go on for a few days or several weeks. There are also longer missions that last for one, three or five years. The distinguishing feature of missions should be that they are transitory and that missionaries are sent there: once the mission is over we move on. But people often talk about mission parishes. This term does not simply apply to parishes in mission countries or provinces. It is particularly used to indicate the whole way of "running" a parish, that is to say, the way that the parish services are organised, the "choice" of people we will be working with and the pastoral methods to be used.

It is often said that parish ministry is not a Vincentian work. St. Vincent spoke out strongly against working in city parishes where there were plenty of priests and religious at a time when the poor country people had no religious support of any kind. But St. Vincent had no difficulty at all in speaking about the parishes that he had accepted and had sent his missionaries to work. We know

that today the outlying areas of many of our big cities correspond to “the country parts” in the time of St. Vincent. The important thing is that we should **work in parishes as Vincentians**, we should **make a parish Vincentian, that is to say, missionary**. Here, briefly, are **some of the features that might characterise a mission parish**:

- We make the effort to go out and look for the poor, without waiting in the church for people to come to us: we make the effort to seek out those who are most alienated from the Church, those who do not come to the parish, those who know nothing about the parish. In many provinces, the people who live in the suburbs have been displaced from the towns; they have moved from “the country” and, on leaving their familiar surroundings have been uprooted from their social, cultural, economic and religious milieu. In some countries, people move out of rural areas because they are afraid of guerrilla activity or because they are attracted by the big cities with their promise of paid employment and easy money.
- A mission parish helps all people who come to the churches and chapels and, at the same time, it devotes itself to forming new Christian communities in deprived districts, particularly the poorest places, and to seek out and train lay leaders who can exercise the ministries that are needed in the Christian communities.
- A special feature of mission parishes is the style and content of the preaching there: this is always a message of liberation, and as well as denouncing injustices, the preachers speak of God’s plan that we, as communities, should bring to fruition in Jesus Christ, through his Spirit.
- In a mission parish, the sacraments celebrate the faith of the people and the commitments they make concerning the service of the poor, in the love of Jesus Christ.

These considerations, of course, go much further than the statements contained in the Statutes of the Congregation. This is what Article 10 §1 has to say: *Parishes are included among the apostolic works of the Congregation, provided that the apostolate which the members exercise there is in accord with the purpose and nature of our Institute, and provided also that the small number of pastors requires it. § 2 These parishes of the Congregation should consist, for the most part, of the really poor, or should be attached to seminaries where confreres give pastoral formation.*

Some observations need to be made.

- There needs to be a revision of all the parishes of the Congregation.

- We always need to have contracts with the bishops so as to determine the missionary objectives of the Congregation's presence in such or such a place, and the date when our work in such parishes will come to an end. Without these elements it is practically impossible to make a real evaluation of the service and the work as a whole.
- We need to choose places that are priority areas for a Vincentian (preferably, places where nobody else wants to go) and we should be going to the most abandoned and alienated people.
- We need to be trained to work in parishes just as we used to be trained for teaching in seminaries.
- We need to join with the other members of the diocesan clergy in carrying out projects, in making evaluations, and in a truly integrated apostolate.

### **THE CLERGY, THE LAITY, THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY.**

We often speak about **formation of priests and helping the clergy**. The distinction is a good and valid one because it frequently happens these days that for various reasons we are no longer called to work in seminaries and yet we can still help the clergy. These days there are very few seminaries run by the Congregation and these are only in a few countries: Colombia, Poland, the United States, etc. Up to the time of the Second Vatican Council there were many seminaries in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro Province), Ecuador, the United States, (Provinces of St. Louis, Philadelphia and Los Angeles), France, Italy, etc.

The General Assemblies of 1980, 1986 and 1992 had nothing very significant to say about ways of serving the clergy. In 1980, we just mentioned, as in Article 15: spiritual help for their ongoing formation, support for them in their pastoral zeal and giving them encouragement in their service of the poor. In 1986, the chapter on the evangelisation of the poor described the current situation and noted as a positive element "the renewed efforts, both in seminaries and outside of these, to continue giving effective help in the formation of the clergy, to be cordial towards them and give them fraternal guidance" (Lines of Action, n. 5). On the negative side, mention was made of "the lack of interest in creating new forms of helping the clergy" (ibid., n. 6). In this section of the document we are presented with the following line of action in Article 11, 2°, "Depending on circumstances, the initial and ongoing formation of the clergy will be one of the chief concerns of the provinces. Over the next six years, the provinces will strive to find more up to date means of ensuring that the ministry to clergy which St. Vincent considered to be "almost equally" binding as the work of giving popular missions (CR, XI, 12) will be given new vitality." At the General Assembly of

1992 very little was said on this point: “In the formation that we give to the clergy and the laity we will put special emphasis on dialogue and collaboration with the people of our time, in the light of the Church’s social teaching, in order to foster, in a creative way, solidarity with the poor who are thirsting for liberation and happiness”( New Evangelisation, Commitment n. 3).

The final document of the 1998 General Assembly does not deal with the formation of diocesan clergy. In his presentation of the state of the Congregation, the Superior General said that in the previous six years we were doing more for the formation of diocesan clergy and that some of our missions had precisely this objective. The Congregation directs seminaries in Italy, Ireland, Poland, Mozambique, Australia, Brazil and, above all, in Colombia. We collaborate with others in the formation of diocesan clergy in the United States, Fiji, Nigeria, Poland, Belorussia, France, Mozambique, the Philippines and other countries. Some of our members teach in universities in the United States and Brazil where seminarists or diocesan priests are studying.

In the final document of this General Assembly, references to the formation of the clergy are to be found in the first commitment (to collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family), the second (to respond together to the cry of the poor), the fourth commitment (international missions) and the fifth (new means of communication) but the most important reference is in the third commitment (to collaborate in formation).

In the General Council’s document, The Visitors at the Service of the Mission, 25 January 1990, there were some questions that the confreres were asked to reflect on in community. Three of these questions concerned the formation of the clergy. (*Vincentiana*, 1990/1, 31, questions f, g, h.) helping the clergy and the laity, (*Vincentiana*, 1983/2, 189-193), and the Superior General used some of these questions in his letter to the confreres (*ibid.*, 213-216).

On the question of working with the **Daughters of Charity**, Article 17 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission has this to say: “*Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together.*”

It was the founders of the Company of the Daughters of Charity who insisted on this cooperation and help. So this has continued for three and a half centuries and has obviously borne fruit. This collaboration has to continue.



A good number of missionaries have some apostolate connected with the Daughters of Charity: Provincial Directors whose time is almost completely given to this service; the missionaries who give annual or monthly retreats; those who in one way or another collaborate in the work of formation, in youth or vocations ministry: spiritual directors, chaplains, confessors, etc. It often happens that we are not able to respond to all their calls on us and all they would like us to do.

The Daughters of Charity continue to look on the missionaries as the most appropriate people to help them to fulfil their Vincentian vocation (cf., C. 2, 13; S. 23). In order to collaborate more effectively and respond to what they request and expect from the Congregation of the Mission, we need to know about their Vincentian spirituality and the Company's identity within the Church. We have to help them to live in dynamic fidelity this common inheritance, while respecting their own particular identity.

In their turn, the Daughters of Charity collaborate with the missionaries in apostolic and social works, in our parishes, on popular missions, in schools, dispensaries, and projects that promote women and children, etc.

The primary beneficiaries of this mutual collaboration will be the poor. It is they who constitute our common heritage.

(Traduction: SISTER JOYCE HOWARD, DC)