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## The Visitors' Conferences

by José María Nieto, C.M.  
Secretary General

### 1. Introduction

I ask your pardon for my lack of knowledge. I admit honestly that I am not acquainted with the reality of the Visitors' Conferences and have prepared this talk rather quickly. I participated only once in the European Conference. The Assistants General and you Visitors are the ones who really know them. Anyway, I will attempt to do what the Preparatory Commission has asked of me.

I would like to present a short and partial report on the Conferences of Visitors. Surely each of you has more and greater detailed information than I. Therefore, I offer a short outline of the different Conferences of Visitors.

My sources of information are all public (CLAPVI bulletin, provincial bulletins and periodicals and a few reports edited by provincial secretaries for their own province members). Some "internal" reports were also available, which were sent to the Secretary General with information about different Visitors' meetings. Many published articles (especially from CLAPVI) have come to us also, which we will not resume for you. We have very little published data from other conferences. If anyone would like more information from these conferences you would do well to approach them personally.

### 2. "Synod" is the name of the Congregation. The Conferences of Visitors: expression of interprovincial collaboration

Our Constitutions and Statutes state nothing about the creation and organization of Visitors' Conferences. The Constitutions say simply that the Congregation of the Mission is divided into provinces and vice-provinces by their own right (C 120-121).

*The Constitutions say little about relations between provinces. N° 102: "The superior general, the center of unity and coordination of the provinces, should also be a source of spiritual animation and apostolic activity." Mutual relationships between provinces has not been constitutionally established and is left to the discretion of the provinces themselves."*

Nevertheless interprovincial collaboration is a reality which has been practiced for some time. I mention a few recent examples. A good number of provinces and vice-provinces have been started and developed thanks to the help

of others. Interprovincial collaboration in the apostolic area, formation, economic help, are not new, but have existed in the Congregation for some time. We have heard of this in this very meeting. Also different Visitors in the same country or in neighboring countries have set up national or regional groups of collaboration over the past 25 years (USA 1973, Italy and Spain 1970, Southern Cone of Latin America, etc.).

The 1986 General Assembly document was “Unum corpus, unus Spiritus.” It treated the theme of unity. This has been deepened and complemented by the document on “interprovincial relations.”

The last two General Assemblies (1992 and 1998) studied interprovincial collaboration and have encouraged it. The final document of the 1998 General Assembly states: “The reflection of the 1992 General Assembly, which has animated our convictions and commitments for six years, has committed the entire Congregation to interprovincial collaboration.” (GA 1998, With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the Threshold of the new Millennium. Introduction.)

Visitors’ Conferences are clear and important expressions of this interprovincial collaboration, of collaboration between confrere Visitors, and between members of provinces on the same continent. The Conferences have arisen fundamentally, not “from above,” but “from the base.” They arose out of necessity, the desire for mutual acquaintance, and from a common communitarian and apostolic problematic, from the need for reciprocal aid, from a search for more global and efficacious solutions.

Another element, begun “from above,” has helped in the growth and development of the Conferences. General Assemblies and the international Visitors’ Meetings have also furthered the climate for the birth of these Conferences. CLAPVI (1971) appeared shortly after the 1968-1969 General Assembly and in response to its own needs. CEVIM (Europe) was conceived in the international meeting of Visitors in Rio de Janeiro (1989). In 1994, perhaps responding to the 1992 General Assembly, APVC and CEVIM started. The Superior General, writing to the Conferences of Visitors (April 1999), placed significant challenges before each Conference.

The fact that we live in a more interconnected world, more communicative and “reunited,” has been a motivating force for our own “intercommunication” within the Congregation.

Finally, the reality and experience of a “Synodal” Church and the existence of national and continental bishops’ conferences, as well as conferences of religious, I believe has been a more or less implicit factor in the

appearance of our own Visitors' Conferences. "Synod is the name of the Church," said an ancient Christian author. We can say in the same way: "Synod (walking together) is the name of the Congregation of the Mission."

In other words, our Visitors' Conferences are a "Synodal" expression of the Congregation, an important expression of interprovincial collaboration.







### 3. Chart indicating the Conferences of Visitors

(I comment on the chart, except on the sections: Activities and Projects).

	<b>APVC</b>	<b>CEVIM</b>	<b>COVIAM</b>	<b>CLAPVI</b>	<b>CUSAV</b>
<b>Name</b>	Asian Pacific Visitors Conference	Conférence Européenne Visiteurs Cngr. Mission	Conférence des Visiteurs en Afrique et Madagascar	Conferencia Latinoamericana Provincias Vicentinas	Conference of USA Visitors
<b>Region</b>	Asia, Pacific, Oceania	Europe, Middle East	Africa, Madagascar	Latin America	United States
<b>Place / Year Foundation</b>	Sydney (Australia) April, 1994	Paris, 1990	Kinshasa (Congo) June 1994	Santandercito (Colombia) September 1971	1973
<b>Statutes</b>	Sydney, 1994	Graz, Austria, 1991	Kinshasa, 1994	Rules: Colombia, 1971 Statutes: Funza, 1983	2000
<b>N° Provinces</b>	6	20	6	14	5
<b>Provinces</b>	Aul, Ids, InM, InS, Phi, Sin	Aus, SCM, Par, Tol, Ger, Hib, Bar, Cae, Mat, Sal, Hol, Hun, Nea, Rom, Tau, Lus, Pol, Slk, Sln, Ori	Aet, Cng, Mad, Moz, Nig, SJJ	Aeq, AmC, Arg, Chi, Col, Cos, Cub, Cur, Flu, For, Mex, Per, Por, Ven	Mer, Nan, Ocn, Occ, Orl
<b>Publication</b>				1. Magazine: CLAPVI: # 107, Sept. 1973 2. Bulletin "En contacto"	Conference News Newsletter (2000)
<b>Principal Activities</b>	1. Annual meeting. 2. For. Formators: Philippines, 1996 Indonesia, 1998 Orissa, India, 2000	1. Annual meeting 2. Mtg. Formators: Berceau, 2000.	1. Annual meeting 2. Formation Committee 3. Mtg. Formators: Addis Ababa, 1997, Maputo, 1999 Nairobi, 2000	1. Gen Assemblies (10) 2. Renewal Courses (6) 3. Interprov. Mtg. (25) 4. Mtg. Formators (3)	1. Restructuration of Provinces: Aug. 1998 2. Mtg. Visitors and Councils: April 2001
<b>Projects</b>	1. Vincentian Center (Adamson Univ, Phi) 2. Asian Vincentian Forum		1. F. Formators: Kenya, 2001 2. Internal Sem: Nigeria – Cameroon	1. Planning 2000-2002	1. F. Formators (June 2001) 2. National Convocation (January 2002)



#### **4. Common aspects of the Visitors' Conferences:**

a. Juridical Statute

Each conference has a "Statute," a norm for its function, open to modification.

b. Similar objectives:

We can list the following principal objectives of the Conferences:

- Mutual knowledge of the reality of the confreres.
- Interprovincial cooperation, collaboration, and fraternal assistance.
- Realization of common projects for the development of the mission.
- Promotion of initial and ongoing formation.
- Internal renewal of the Congregation of the Mission, its missionaries and works.
- Inculturation of the Vincentian charism.

c. Principal activity:

Besides meetings, usually annual, of Visitors, up to the present, formation seems to be the chief concern of all the Conferences. All, in one way or another, promote initial, ongoing, and especially, apostolic formation. The ultimate concern is for the formation of formators.

#### **5. Initiatives — most important achievements of the Conferences:**

##### **CLAPVI**

- Publication of the Bulletin: *Revista CLAPVI*. One of the most important publications of the Congregation. It first appeared in 1973, and since then has published over 100 issues (No. 107 is on the way). It contains information from all CLAPVI meetings. There is also the *En Contacto* Bulletin.
- Since 1981, CLAPVI has held ten General Assemblies; between 1974 and 1979, six courses on "Vincentian Spiritual Renewal"; and more than 25 Interprovincial Meetings, open to the Daughters of Charity and lay Vincentians, on many different themes.
- CLAPVI has an extensive program of activities for 2000-2002, notably meetings of formators. Also: Educational Pastoral (April 2000), Pastoral for Indians (November 2000), Parish Mission Pastoral (October 2001), Service to the Clergy (April 2002), Meeting on Popular Missions (November 2002).
- Bibliography on CLAPVI:

- “La CLAPVI, para qué?” Its paper on the 1980 General Assembly, in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 27, abril-junio 1980, 93-100.
- “Mini-historia de la CLAPVI” in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 30, enero-marzo 1981, 55-63.
- “Historia de CLAPVI (1980-1989)” in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 63, abril-junio 1989, 94-98.
- “Breve Historia de CLAPVI” in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 93, octubre-diciembre 1996, 357-366.
- “Estatutos de CLAPVI 1999” in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 193, julio-diciembre 1999, 126-135.
- “La revista “CLAPVI” en sus primeros cien números” in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 100-101, septiembre 1998-febrero 1999, 87-105.

### **APCV (Asia - Pacific)**

- Already realized: three meetings of formators (cf. the summary chart), lasting two weeks every 18 months.
- Worthy of note for the newness, two projects for the future.
- A Vincentian Center at Adamson University (Manila): a center for service to the Vincentian Mission in Asia Pacific. At its commencement stress will be placed on Vincentian material resources and on service to the members of the provinces.
- Asian Vincentian Forum. To promote an annual meeting of Vincentian themes, open to all members of the Vincentian Family. Its objective: to help people reflect on the Vincentian charism in an Asian context.

### **CUSAV (United States)**

- The “Reconfiguration” process of the United States Provinces is of interest not only to the United States, but to the rest of the Congregation. This process and its results are a reality which may well take place within a few years in other provinces.
- Two projects are underway: Formators (2001) and the National Convention (January 2002) on “Vincentian Evangelization in North America.”

### **COVIAM (Africa)**

- I apologize for this Africa report, since it is the region I am least acquainted with. The six African provinces operate in special situations: they are young, in continual growth, in permanently difficult circumstances (poverty, hunger, war, etc.). They all have good numbers of “foreign” confreres. Many problems arise from these facts. It seems to me that COVIAM has two fundamental tasks: the solid Vincentian formation of the confreres and inculturation in our charism. The next Internal Seminary course will include Nigeria and Cameroon. They have in existence for several years a Formation Committee.

### **CEVIM (Europe)**

- The fall of the Berlin Wall, the widening of the European Union, the growing number of immigrants are indications of the new face of old Europe. As I see it, CEVIM has not accomplished anything very great. Nevertheless, in spite of many different languages and the aging of the provinces, CEVIM is faced with the fascinating job of reinventing-refounding the Congregation on the European soil where it was born 400 years ago.

## **6. Unity and inculturation of our charism**

Conferences of Visitors are a way of promoting and constructing the “continental unity” of the Congregation. We are used to thinking of unity in “universal” terms, like “the unity of the whole Congregation.” “Continental unity,” we could say, is “intermediate.” However, today it is very useful, and doubtlessly will further global unity.

In a complementary way, Visitors’ Conferences are a means of promoting “diversity” in inculturating our charism. The Congregation, following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor, is called on to incarnate this charism in different cultures and situations. The Superior General has recently written about the “Five Faces of Jesus Christ” and the “Five Faces of Mary.” The Visitors’ Conferences now have the important task of constructing the “five faces of the Congregation”: the five (possibly more on some continents) inculturations of the Vincentian charism.

*I take this opportunity, the first time I have been with all of you together, to let you know that I am at your disposition, and that of your provinces, for anything I can do for you as Secretary General. Also, I thank you, in my own name and in that of all who work in the secretariat, for your collaboration with us, begging at the same time your continued and so necessary cooperation. Thank you very much.*

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M. translator)