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Practical Guide for the Local Superior: Congregation of the Mission: Rome, 2003

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Practical Guide for the Local Superior

Congregation of the Mission

Rome, 2003

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May 8, 2003

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I am very happy to present to you this *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*. I hope that it will be helpful both in the formation of superiors and in their everyday service to the confreres in our houses.

In fact, this *Guide* speaks of more than just the superior. It emphasizes the role of all the members of the local community in promoting its life and ministries. I trust that it will be useful to the whole Congregation as we strive, together, to create life-giving, supportive, service-oriented communities.

I ask that this *Practical Guide* be used in the initial and ongoing formation of our superiors and that the members of our local communities use it too, from time to time, to reflect on and concretize the various aspects of Vincentian life together, particularly as they formulate their community plan.

May our local communities be living bodies where we are “of one mind and one heart” (Acts 4:32) in the evangelization and service of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,



Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

October 6, 1640

Our good God wishes to make use of you in Luçon as Superior of our little Community. I ask you, Monsieur, to accept the responsibility for it, trusting that, by proceeding in the spirit of gentleness, humility, patience, and zeal for the glory of God in the Company — and through it, in the souls of our good lords and masters, the good country people — His Goodness itself will lead you, and your family through you. And because I see that your dear heart will groan and will say to me upon reading this letter: *Ah, ah, ah, Lord, I do not know how to speak* (Jer 1:6); and, how can you give me this duty? To that, I have nothing to say except *The grace of God is sufficient for you* (2 Cor 12:9), that you try to act as you have seen others do, and that you get all the advice you can from M. Cuissot¹ whom we are sending to La Rose as Superior. Well now, Monsieur, have great confidence in God, really give yourself to Him, so that He may direct you and be Himself the Superior. Obey Him well and He will see that what you command is done. Have a particular devotion to the way the Blessed Virgin guided Our Lord, and all will go well. Write to me often and greet Messieurs Soudier and Thibault. They will find here the very humble entreaty I make them to excel in the good example they will give the whole Company by their union and submission, and Our Lord will bestow upon them a thousand blessings.

(St. Vincent to Jacques Chiroye, in Luçon, SV II, 122-123).

¹ His predecessor at the head of the house in Luçon.

Practical Guide for the Local Superior

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Practical Guide for the Local Superior

Introduction

1. The Congregation of the Mission forms itself particularly in the individual local communities, and the superior is the center of unity and the animator of the life of these communities (C 129).
2. The figure of the local superior has held a place of great importance in the life of the Congregation from its origins. An indication of this is the rich, extended teaching of St. Vincent about the office and mission of the local superior (cf. Appendix V). The Codex of Sarzana (1653) contains the first version of the Common Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. In it are found the rules of the “particular” superior, divided into eight chapters whose contents are quite detailed.²
3. The final version of the Common Rules (1658) mentions the local superior on more than 60 occasions as the point of reference for the confreres as they live out their daily life and ministry and as they seek to discern God’s will.
4. On various occasions Superiors General have updated the Rules and Directories of the Local Superior; an extensive revision was issued, for example, in 1850³. In 1901, Fr. Antoine Fiat published the *Manuel des supérieurs* of the Congregation of the Mission.
5. The last revision was published in 1961, during the generalate of Fr. William Slattery. These Rules for the Local Superior soon became outdated because of the changes that took place within the Church with the Second Vatican Council, the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1983, the approval of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission in 1984, and on account of other historical and cultural changes that have affected the lifestyle and apostolic works of local communities.
6. At the General Assembly of 1998, a postulate requesting the publication

² Cf. *Codex de Sarzana*, VI. Regulae Superioris Particularis, 83-99:

Caput 1. De ijs quae ad eius personam, et totius Domus administrationem pertinent.

Caput 2. De ijs quae ad Superiorem ad bonam administrationem iuuabunt

Caput 3. De Cura nostrorum in Spiritu

Caput 4. De literarum studijs

Caput 5. De ordine domestico

Caput 6. De ijs quae ad res temporales spectant

Caput 7. De auxilio animarum, communicatione cum externis, et gratitudine erga Fundatores et Benefactores

Caput 8. De ijs, qui admitti petunt, ad Domum diuertunt, aut foras mittuntur

(*Vincentiana* [1991] 307-406, especially 379-393).

³ *Regulae Officiorum, C.M. a conventu generali revisae*. Parisiis, 1850, t. II, 1-65.

of a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* was narrowly defeated, but, at the meeting of all the Visitors in Dublin in June 2001, the publication of a *Practical Guide for Local Superiors* was considered once again and, in light of the Congregation's positive experience in the use of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, was supported by the vast majority of the Visitors. The Superior General, with his council, then asked Fr. Christian Sens, the Visitor of the Province of Toulouse, to compose a first draft. With the input of a group of Visitors and the members of the General Council, this draft then underwent revision. The final version was approved by the Superior General and his council on May 8, 2003.

7. The fonts from which this *Practical Guide* flows are many: our Constitutions and Statutes, the general law of the Church, the writings of St. Vincent, various Rules and Guides for local superiors in our Vincentian tradition, the decrees of the General Assemblies, the letters of the Superiors General, and a rich bibliography, which can be found at the end of this work.

8. As is evident, this *Practical Guide* cannot envision all the different situations which exist in the Congregation. It must be adapted to the circumstances of each province and even to each local community, since communities vary significantly in regard to their mission, the number of confreres residing within them, whether they labor in a common apostolate or in diversified ones, and in many other ways.

Chapter I

Foundation Stones for Good Practice

THE ROLE OF AUTHORITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Authority as a God-given trust

9. In the letter to the Romans, Paul formulates the basic principle that “there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God” (Rom 13:1). Authority in the Church, on whatever level it resides, is a trust from God. No one can arrogate it to himself. Ultimately human authority’s goal is to search for the will of God and to promote its fulfillment.

The authority Jesus receives from his Father

10. Jesus teaches and acts with authority. He is Lord of the Sabbath. He commands the wind and the sea. But the authority that he exercises and that strikes his contemporaries comes to him from the Father. “Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18). Jesus’ deepest desire is the glory of his Father and the accomplishment of the redeeming mission he has received from his Father. He does not impose his authority on others. “You know how those who exercise authority among the Gentiles lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you. Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest, and whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all. Such is the case with the Son of Man who has come, not to be served by others, but to serve, to give his own life as a ransom for the many” (Mt 20:25-28). Through the symbolic act of washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus reveals himself to them as a servant. He becomes a servant even to death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8).

The authority Jesus shares with his apostles: mission and service

11. Jesus shares with his apostles the authority that he has received from his Father: “He who hears you, hears me” (Lk 10:16). The authority received by the apostles, and in fact all authority in the Church, is a mission. It must always be understood and exercised as a service in the following of Christ, the Lord and Master who takes on the role of servant (cf. Lk 22:27 and Jn 13:1-17). The meaning of the authority that Jesus exercises and communicates to others as service and mission is revealed especially in the passion narratives where Jesus forms his apostles in their servant-role, just as they would later form servant-communities. Authority as envisioned by the gospels is never the exercise of

dominion over other persons, groups, or communities. It is a mission and a service that aids persons and communities to live and grow in fidelity to the gospel, to search for the will of God, and to carry it out in obedience. The ultimate criterion for obedience is, therefore, not the personal will of a superior, but the will of God.

The pastoral dimension of authority in the New Testament

12. Authority in the gospels has a clear pastoral dimension, after the example of the Good Shepherd who watches over his flock, who knows them all by name and cares for them (cf. John 10). Such pastoral authority involves a relationship with the community as a whole and with each person in particular. God's love for the community and for each person within it is the root of this authority. Its goal is to foster deep charity among the members of the community.

13. The Pauline letters, in speaking of the fundamental gift of the Spirit that every believer receives in baptism, describe various particular gifts and charisms (1 Cor 12:4-11; Rom 12:4-8). These manifold gifts exist for the building up of the community (1 Cor 12:12-26; Eph 4:4-7). Among these, the charism of authority receives emphasis precisely because of its relationship with unity (1 Cor 12:27-31; Eph 4:11-13). In the Pauline letters, it is evident that authority has a charismatic ministerial character, as does the whole Church. One of its principal functions is to direct the various other charisms toward communion.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERIOR IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. VINCENT

The local superior, an important responsibility

14. St. Vincent frequently mentions the office of the local superior. The list of references in the Index (Volume 14) to the Correspondence, Conferences and Documents is impressive. In the Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, the "superior/subject" relationship appears in 63 of the 142 articles. The local superior intervenes directly in many aspects of daily life:⁴ in assigning work,⁵ in distributing economic goods,⁶ in regulating matters concerning members' spiritual life and even their conscience.⁷ But Vincent recognized that such interventions on the part of superiors would be effective only if accompanied by good human communication; otherwise, they would appear quite meddlesome.⁸ The letters that Vincent sends to superiors provide us with interesting insight into

⁴ CR V, 11-14; VI, 4; VIII, 5; IX, 5-7, 11-15.

⁵ CR II, 10; V, 8-10; XI, 2-4, 8-11.

⁶ CR III, 3-6, 9.

⁷ CR II, 16-17; IV, 4; VIII, 8; X, 8, 11, 13, 15, 21; XII, 4, 9, 14.

⁸ Robert Maloney, "As Friends Who Love One Another Deeply" in *Vincentiana* 4-5 (July-October), 2000, p. 341.

the meaning of this function, its spiritual dimension as a service, and the qualities required for exercising it well. In these letters Vincent frequently refers to the gospels and the witness of Jesus. He also emphasizes the importance of good human relationships.

The office of superior, a mission within a fraternal apostolic community

15. In speaking of community, Vincent refers to the Trinity, the Mystical Body, the apostolic community, and the first Christian community as theological sources. For Vincent, as for the gospels, being a superior is a mission and a service. The superior receives a mission to animate the community in order that it might follow Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor faithfully.

The office of the superior is not an honorary title

16. Vincent warns those who are ambitious to become a superior, or who seek this office as an honor, or who like to command:

Yes, my brothers, the place of Our Lord is the lowest place. Someone who desires to rule cannot have the spirit of Our Lord (SV XI, 138).

I have also learned from experience that a person who holds office and ... desires to rule has never been either a good subject or a good superior (SV XII, 50).

The office of superior, a service to be accomplished with humility

17. The local superior should not impose his own style or his personal ideas on the community. Otherwise, he would be exercising a type of personal power that does not contribute toward the building up of the community. St. Vincent in 1656 writes to Antoine Durand, sent to be superior at 27 years of age in the Seminary of Agde:

I do not share the opinion of a person who said to me some time ago that it is essential for a man to show that he is a superior if he is to rule properly and maintain his authority. O my God, Our Lord Jesus Christ never spoke like that. He taught us the contrary by word and example, telling us that he had not come to be served but to serve others, and that he who wishes to be master should be the servant of all (SV XI, 346).

The superior, a man of faith

18. The advice that St. Vincent gave to Antoine Durand (SV XI, 342-351) merits being read in its entirety (cf. Appendix V). It emphasizes the spiritual, evangelical dimension of the superior's role. To accomplish the mission of being a superior:

It is essential that Jesus Christ be intimately united with us, or we with him; that we operate in him and he in us; that we speak like him and in his Spirit, as he himself was in his Father and preached the doctrine taught him by the Father. That is what Holy Scripture teaches us. It is therefore essential for you to empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ ... to reach that stage it is essential that Our Lord himself should impress his mark and character upon you (SV XI, 343-344).

The superior, a man of good relationships and of profound charity

19. The relational dimension of the superior's role appears frequently in the letters which St. Vincent wrote. The superior should establish a good fraternal relationship with the community as a whole and with each individual confrere. In describing such a relationship, Vincent speaks of simplicity, humility, cordiality, respect, gentleness, patience, prudence and charity. It is precisely this type of relationship that he recommends to Antoine Durand:

Live with your confreres so cordially and simply that no one, on seeing you together, may guess who is the superior (SV VI, 66).

The superior, a man who seeks the advice of others

20. A superior should not live in isolation, struggling to carry alone the whole weight of the community and its missionary objectives. For that reason St. Vincent recommends to Marc Coglée that he seek counsel:

For temporal affairs, we consult a lawyer or some laypersons who are knowledgeable about them; for internal affairs, we discuss matters with the consultors and other members of the Company... (SV IV, 36).

The superior, a respectful man

21. On one occasion a superior wrote to St. Vincent stating that he would prefer to lead animals rather than men. Shocked at his lack of respect for the confreres, Vincent decided to relieve him of the office of superior and wrote to him:

What you are saying is true of those who want ... everything to go their way, people to obey them without comment or delay, and, in a manner of speaking, to be adored. This, however, is not true of those who love contradictions and contempt, who consider themselves the servants of others, who govern in the light of how Our Lord governed. He put up with the boorishness, rivalry, and lack of faith of his companions, etc., and said that he had come to serve and not to be served. I know ... that you have only used these terms to express your difficulty better and to persuade me to relieve you of your office. We shall try, therefore, to send someone to replace you (SV IV, 174-175).

22. Our context in the 21st century is certainly quite different from that of the 17th century. Authority is no longer exercised in the same way as it was in St. Vincent's time. But many of the suggestions that he made to superiors remain quite relevant. He proposed basic evangelical principles and human attitudes that remain fundamental for carrying out this service well.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SUPERIOR WITHIN A MODEL OF COMMUNION

The foundational role of the local community

23. The documents of Vatican II emphasize that the Church is the people of God,⁹ moved by the Spirit to live in communion. Authority in the Church today is exercised in a consultative, interactive mode, with emphasis on dialogue and co-responsibility. Its goal is to create "a communion of life, love and faith."¹⁰ In this context, the Constitutions and Statutes of 1984, in presenting the role of the local superior, emphasize participation, good communication, interchange of ideas, and co-responsibility. The community as such is primary. Roles and responsibilities within the community are for its up-building. The Congregation of the Mission really lives and grows if its local communities live and grow (cf. C 129 §1).

Stimulating the active participation of all

24. Within this perspective, one of the primary responsibilities of the local superior is to stimulate the active participation of all. "All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its

⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

government. Consequently, members should cooperate actively and responsibly in accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects, and carrying out commands” (C 96).

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SUPERIOR WITHIN A COMMUNITY “FOR THE MISSION”

Leadership in an apostolic society

25. Since the Congregation of the Mission is a Society of Apostolic Life, a local superior exercises his authority in a community “for the mission.” All our basic decisions are made in light of our nature as an apostolic society. For that reason, the structures of community life should always remain flexible so that we might be able to respond to the urgent needs of those we serve.

Basic structures of community

26. But community structures should not be so flexible that they cave in. Our Vincentian goal of deep communion with the poor will be best realized when we live in deep communion with one another in the Lord. The local superior, with the confreres, should identify and concretize the basic structures that support our life together and our prayer by carefully developing the Community Plan, as described in Chapters III and IV below.

Chapter II

The Local Superior: Nomination, Formation, Term, Job Description

Nomination

27. The local superior is named by the Visitor, with the consent of his council (C 125, 4°), after consultation with the members of the house (C 130 § 1). The Visitor or the Provincial Norms can determine the mode of consultation: through personal interview, letter, or some other means. The Visitor should communicate to the Superior General the names of the superiors he has named (C 125, 4°).

28. The Provincial Assembly can establish another mode of designating the local superior (C 130 § 2).

Requisites for nomination

29. In order to be named superior, a confrere must have passive voice and therefore have been incorporated into the Congregation for at least three years and be 25 years of age (C 61).

30. Since the local superiors have the power of jurisdiction both in the external and internal forum (cf., N° 36-38 below), they must be in Sacred Orders (C 100). This condition is, nevertheless, not absolute. With the permission of the Holy See brothers can and have been named superiors of local communities.

Formation

31. It is recommended that the Visitor assemble the local superiors for several days in the course of each year in order to assist them in their initial and ongoing formation as superiors and in order to consult them about major questions concerning the life and mission of the province. In this context, an additional day might be dedicated to the formation of new superiors, perhaps using this *Practical Guide*.¹¹

32. Each local superior, recognizing that he himself has the primary responsibility for his own formation, shall participate in appropriate workshops, courses, and other similar programs that will aid him in the exercise of his office.

¹¹ Cf. *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, 270, 4°.

Term

33. The local superior's mandate lasts for three years. He can be reappointed for a second three-year term. If after the second three-year term, there is a need for him to continue, the Visitor should have recourse to the Superior General (C 130 § 1).

34. The local superior can be removed if the Visitor, with the consent of his council and the approval of the Superior General, judges that there is a just and proportionate cause for taking this measure (C 133). It sometimes happens that the local superior does not complete his mandate because the Visitor, with this council, calls him to another mission, which he accepts. In this case, recourse to the Superior General is not necessary, since he is not being "removed" in the juridical sense.

Role

35. The local superior is at the service of the community as a whole and of each confrere. He exercises his role *with* the confreres of the house (S 79 § 1). As animator of a community for the mission, he "promotes the ministries of the house" (C 129 § 2). As animator of a community of persons bound together "like dear friends" (CR VIII, 2), he is "concerned for the personal development and activity of each confrere" (C 129 § 2). His principal role is to assist the community as a whole, and its individual members, in fulfilling the purpose of the Congregation and the objectives described in the Constitutions and Statutes, the Provincial Norms, and the Local Community Plan.

Rights and duties

36. The local superior has ordinary power in the internal and external forum for members and other persons living in his house day and night. He can delegate this power to others (C 131). Matters concerning the mission of the house and its community life belong to the external forum. Matters of conscience belong to the internal forum.

37. The superior's power in the internal forum is limited. He cannot insist that a member of the house confess his sins to him or come to him as spiritual director (Canon 630 §§ 1 and 5). But on the other hand, if a member of the community requests him to do so, the local superior can hear his confession or serve as spiritual director (Canon 630 § 4). There is a delicate tension in the general law of the Church. While it forbids a superior in any way to induce the members to make a manifestation of conscience to himself, nonetheless it encourages members to approach superiors with trust and to open their minds freely and spontaneously to them (Canon 630 § 5). This presupposes an authentic

climate of confidence and discretion within the local community. Otherwise the members will not feel free to be open in speaking with the superior and to share with him their personal problems and difficulties.

38. The local superior's power in the external forum is very broad. It extends to decision-making in regard to all aspects of the life and ministry of the community. This power is to be exercised in communion with the members, as noted above in number 35.

39. Statute 78 provides a succinct list of the superior's rights and duties:
- to keep the Visitor informed about the state of the house entrusted to him;
 - to assign to members of the house those tasks and offices the assignment of which is not reserved to major superiors;
 - to convoke and direct the domestic assembly;
 - together with his community, to work out the common plan for his house and present it for the approval of the Visitor;
 - to keep the archives and the seal of the house;
 - to inform members about decrees and news of the Congregation;
 - to see to it that Mass obligations are fulfilled.

The carrying out of these functions involves dedicating sufficient time to administrative matters, mindful of their pastoral scope.

Relationship with members not living in the house

40. The superior should maintain close ties with confreres attached to the house who, for motives of apostolate or other legitimate reasons, do not habitually live within it. He should visit them, invite them to the house for meetings, celebrations and other occasions, and make sure that they receive information about the house, the province and the worldwide Congregation.

Chapter III

Practical Guidelines Concerning Ten Important Relationships of the Local Superior

With the Visitor and his council

41. Smooth collaboration and good communication between the local superior and the Visitor and his council are crucial, both in the animation of the house and in the implementation of the Provincial Plan (cf. C 123 § 2).

42. The local superior has the duty to keep the Visitor informed about the state of the house entrusted to him (S 78, 1°). The superior can do this informally, through frequent communication, and more formally during visitations. It is recommended that he also do this, from time to time (e.g., once a year), in writing.

43. Our Constitutions encourage the Visitor to visit the houses frequently and oblige him to make an official visitation at least every two years (C 125, 6°). The local superior should facilitate such unofficial and official visits and inform the confreres of the house about them so that they will have the opportunity to speak with the Visitor. St. Vincent valued such visits highly. He wrote: “In a word, it can be said that visitations, made well and exactly, do what the sun does: they give light ... Just as the sun spreads its influence over all creatures, it can also be said that the visitation benefits the entire family visited” (SV II, 616).

With the local community “ad instar Consilii” (S 79 § 3) or with the house council (if one exists)

44. Our Constitutions and Statutes envision two different situations:
- a. *Houses where no council is named.* This is the usual situation envisioned by the Constitutions and Statutes, particularly in houses where the number of confreres is not too large; that is, there is no formally appointed house council. Rather, the local superior meets frequently with all the members of the house “ad instar Consilii” (S 79, § 3).
 - b. *Houses where the Visitor, with the consent of his council, judges it necessary to constitute a house council* (C 134, § 2). Various reasons might lead the Visitor and his council to this conclusion; e.g., the size of the house, the frequent absence of its members for the sake of the mission, the special nature of the house (a house of initial formation, a house for the infirm, etc.). In such cases, the house consultants, who help the local superior in the animation,

government, and administration of the house, are designated according to the Provincial Norms. Practice in the provinces varies: sometimes the consultors are appointed by the local superior, sometimes they are elected by the confreres of the house, sometimes they are named by the Visitor.

45. In either case, the local superior should dialogue with all the members of the house or with the members of the house council about all important matters related to the life and mission of the community and should make his decisions in light of the reflections offered. Some matters (e.g., certain expenditures) require the formal consent of the house council, whether the council is of the type described in a or b above.

46. The local superior should prepare councils well. A written agenda should be distributed to all the members of the house at least a day ahead of time, along with any relevant documentation, so that the confreres might prepare for the meeting. During the meeting, all should have the opportunity to speak and all should listen well, especially the superior.

47. Final decision-making authority rests with the local superior, after he has listened to the confreres. A wise superior will work hard at incorporating into a final decision, as much as possible, the ideas emerging from the discussion.

48. While a local community cannot impose its judgment on the superior or force him to act if he should be unwilling, nonetheless Canon 127, § 2, 2^o offers sage advice; namely, that the superior should not act against the vote of his council, especially if it is a unanimous one, unless he has what is, in his judgment, a serious overriding reason.

49. Sometimes, when little or no consensus is reached in discussions about important matters, it is desirable to delay a decision, unless it is urgent, and take the matter up for discussion again at a future council meeting.

50. After meetings of the house council, the Acts, recording all important decisions, should be distributed to the members of the local community so that they might have a written account of what was decided. Besides guaranteeing a record of decisions made, this is also helpful for good communication, especially when members of the house are absent from meetings.

51. In a letter of November 21, 1642, St. Vincent tells the impetuous Bernard Codoing: “I have always recognized in the two of us this fault of pursuing our new ideas too readily and becoming at times too strongly attached to them. This has made me impose on myself the yoke of doing nothing important without seeking advice. That is why God gives me new insights every day on the

importance of acting this way, and more devotion to doing nothing except in this way” (SV II, 313).

With the domestic assembly

52. The domestic assembly is distinct from the house council. It is a formal gathering held in preparation for the provincial assembly. Our Constitutions describe it as follows (C 147):

§ The domestic assembly is convoked by the superior of the house or by the assistant who is exercising the total office of superior, and is held to prepare for the provincial assembly.

§ All those having active voice are to be called to the domestic assembly.

§ It is the function of the domestic assembly to deal with those things which the house wishes to propose to the provincial assembly as well as those things which the preparatory commission for the provincial assembly has proposed for discussion, and to deliberate about proposals.

53. This assembly, like other meetings of the members of the house, should be very well prepared, with a written agenda distributed (or sent to confreres attached to the house but living outside it) in ample time before the meeting in order to allow all the confreres (including those attached to the house) to read and reflect on all the materials sent by the Preparatory Commission and to formulate proposals to the provincial assembly.

54. It will often be necessary to have several sessions of the domestic assembly in order to treat the preparatory materials thoroughly.

55. A member of the house should be chosen as a secretary. The Acts of the domestic assembly should be carefully drawn up and approved by the members of the assembly itself. They should then be forwarded to the Preparatory Commission.

With the assistant superior

56. The Assistant aids the local superior in the animation, government and smooth running of the house (S 79 § 1).

57. In the absence of the local superior, the Assistant takes over and has full authority in accord with the norms of our own law and the law of the Church (S 79, § 2).

58. The Assistant is named in accord with the Provincial Norms (S 79, § 1).

Practice varies in the different provinces: at times he is named by the local superior, at times he is elected by the local community, at times he is appointed by the Visitor. The duration of his office also depends on the Provincial Norms.

59. A good relationship and good communication between the local superior and the Assistant is very important for the spirit of the local house. In 1656, St. Vincent emphasized to Antoine Durand the importance of the Assistant: “Do not settle any business matters, however unimportant they may be, until you have first sought their (the confreres’) advice, especially that of your Assistant” (SV VI, 66).

With the local treasurer

60. The local treasurer administers the goods of the house under the direction and vigilance of the local superior with his council (S 102). He is named according to the Provincial Norms (S 79, § 1). Practice varies in the different provinces: at times the local treasurer is named by the local superior, at times he is elected by the local community, at times he is appointed by the Visitor. The duration of his office also depends on the Provincial Norms.

61. Our Constitutions offer a number of important principles that are useful for local superiors and treasurers to reflect on frequently. Among these are (C 154):

- § Administrators should remember that they are only stewards of the goods of the Community. Consequently, they should expend these goods only for uses suitable to the status of missionaries. Moreover, they should always act according to just civil laws, as well as according to the norms and spirit of the Congregation.
- § Administrators should provide willingly for the needs of members in all matters which concern their life, particular office, and apostolic work. Such a use of goods is an incentive for members to promote the good of the poor and to lead a truly fraternal life.
- § These administrators should, in addition, observe equity in the distribution of goods because they ought to promote community life among the members. They should provide for the individual needs of members according to the norms enacted by the provincial assembly.

62. The treasurer should communicate well with the local superior and the confreres of the house about all matters affecting the administration of the community’s goods. Our Constitutions emphasize (C 134 § 1): “Under the guidance of the superior, and with the help of the members in dialogue and common concern, the treasurer administers the goods of the house according to the norm of universal law and the law of the Congregation and the province.”

63. Before the beginning of the fiscal year, the local treasurer should present the year's budget to the local community for its discussion and for the approval of the local superior and his council. At the end of the fiscal year, he should present an account of the receipts and expenditures for the examination of the local community and for the approval of the local superior and his council.

64. The treasurer should present to the local superior a monthly account of the receipts and expenditures of the house and a report on its patrimony. The superior should affix his signature to this account and report after he has examined and approved it. The treasurer should also keep the members of the local community informed about the administration of the house's goods (S 103, § 1); this can readily be done at house meetings.

65. He should be especially alert that laws regarding work, just wages, insurance, social security, and in regard to persons working in the houses and works of the Congregation, are exactly observed (S 107, § 1).

66. With the local superior, he should make sure that obligations connected with Mass stipends are fulfilled and that gifts and grants are used in accord with the intention of the donor.

67. If members of a local house are entrusted with a special work, they should submit an account of its receipts and expenditures, as well as its patrimony, to the proper superior, who may be either the local superior or the Visitor, depending on the case (cf. S 103, §§ 3-4).

68. St. Vincent offered much sage advice to local superiors and treasurers about the administration of the goods of their houses. Excerpts can be found in Appendix V (cf. N° 1, 2, 5).

With the members of the house as individuals

69. St. Vincent calls us to live together like brothers who care for one another deeply (CR VIII, 2). As the local superior attempts to animate a community which engages in common apostolic projects, lives together joyfully, prays together faithfully, shares its goods, and relaxes together (C 25), he should be attentive to the personal development and activity of each confrere (C 129 § 2). He should communicate with each individual frequently. Much healthy interchange can take place in relaxed times together such as meals and recreation.

70. Besides these informal conversations, the superior should, from time to time, have a more structured, lengthier conversation with each confrere. While carefully respecting the privacy, particularly in the internal forum, that the common law of the Church and the particular law of the Congregation guarantee

to all members, the superior should show his concern for the overall welfare and growth of each particular confrere. In fact, a good human relationship, personal attention and concern are irreplaceable.

71. Such a more structured conversation, traditionally called a “communication,” is very appropriate at least once a year. During the conversation, the superior’s role will often consist mainly in listening to the confrere as he shares his successes and failures, his hopes and fears, his efforts and struggles in living out our Vincentian vocation. In that listening context, a superior can often make suggestions that will be helpful to the growth of a confrere.

72. A whole series of themes might be touched upon, some at one time, some at another: apostolate, community life, prayer, the vows, vocational stability, physical health, leisure and relaxation, ongoing formation, spiritual direction, friendships, other relationships and appropriate boundaries in them, as well as other matters pertaining to the confrere’s growth.

73. In their contacts with individual confreres, local superiors should be continually mindful that they must be at the same time leaders and members; truly fathers, but also brothers; teachers of the faith, but mostly fellow-disciples of Christ; masters of perfection, but witnesses also by their personal holiness (cf. *Mutuae relationes*, 9d).

74. Confreres need the permission of the local superior for the use and disposal of the goods of the Congregation and of their own personal goods according to the Constitutions (C 34-35) and Statutes (S 17-18) and the Provincial Norms. The tradition of the Congregation, its law, and its practice in this regard are explained at length in the fourth chapter of the *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission*¹².

75. The local superior should be especially concerned about the ongoing formation of the confreres, encouraging them to find courses, programs, and other means for developing their aptitudes and personal gifts in the service of the poor.

With the poor

76. While he animates the life of the local community, the superior is also called to promote the ministries of the house (C 129, § 2). The houses of the Congregation should be noted not just for their ministry of evangelization, but also for their practical concrete service to the poor. In his conference of December 6, 1658, St. Vincent stated (SV XII, 87): “If there are any among us

¹² In *Vincentiana*, January-February 1996.

who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the gospel to the poor but not to comfort them, to supply their spiritual but not their temporal wants, I reply that we ought to assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others ... to do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works.”

77. Among the characteristics of the evangelization work emanating from our houses, the Constitutions list these (C 12, 1°-4°):

- § clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5);
- § attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;
- § some sharing in the condition of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;
- § genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation.

With the members of the Vincentian Family

78. In recent years the Vincentian Family has grown remarkably, and solidarity among the branches has increased. The local superior should promote contact with and service to the various groups in the Family.

79. Our Constitutions state (C 17) that our members should be willing to assist the Daughters of Charity when asked, especially in giving retreats and offering spiritual direction. The Constitutions also urge us to show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in the works that our two Communities undertake together.

80. In regard to our lay groups, Statute 7 states:

We should have a special concern for the lay associations founded by St. Vincent (the Ladies of Charity, begun in 1617, which are today the International Association of Charities) and those which are inspired by his spirit (e.g., the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, begun in 1833), since they have the right to our presence and our support.

- § All members should be willing to undertake this work and some should be specially prepared for it.
- § Our animation of these groups should have a spiritual, ecclesiastical, social and civic dimension.

81. Recent General Assemblies, particularly that of 1998, and other documents also encourage us to initiate and animate other Vincentian lay groups,

such as JMV, MISEVI, and the Miraculous Medal Association. The local superior, with the members of the community, will designate who will be the local advisors and animators of such groups.

With guests

82. The local community should receive confreres, priests and other guests in our house with warm hospitality (S 15 § 2).

83. In receiving guests into our houses, at times it may be necessary to find a *via media* that balances various values: hospitality toward those who are our guests, coworkers, relatives and friends; the need of the confreres of the house to have private space and a peaceful atmosphere that will favor work, prayer, and rest (C 24, 4°).

84. It may also be necessary for the local superior, with the members of the community, to decide on some general norms as to overnight guests. In formulating such norms, much will depend on the availability of space, the privacy of the confreres, and other prudent considerations.

With the local ordinary and the local clergy

85. The works of the houses of the Congregation should be integrated within the pastoral activity of the diocese, in close cooperation with the local bishop, with the diocesan clergy, with religious institutes and with the laity (S 3). Our Constitutions state (C 3, § 2): “The Congregation of the Mission, according to the tradition set forth by St. Vincent, carries on its own apostolate in close cooperation with the bishops and diocesan clergy. For this reason St. Vincent often said that the Congregation of the Mission is secular, although it enjoys autonomy which has been granted either by universal law or by exemption.”

86. Concern for the formation of the diocesan clergy is an integral part of the purpose of the Congregation (C 1, 3°). Our Constitutions urge (C 15) that we “afford spiritual assistance to priests both in the work of their ongoing formation and in promoting their pastoral zeal.” We should also “encourage in them the desire of fulfilling the Church’s option for the poor.” Likewise, efforts should be made to join diocesan priests in other social and apostolic activities and help in promoting bonding and a community relationship within the local presbyterium.

87. Our Vincentian presence in a diocese should be characterized especially by:

- § works among the poor and most abandoned;
- § the creation and animation of the various Vincentian lay groups;
- § a simple style of living and preaching;

§ hospitality to the local clergy and availability for their formation;
§ formation of the laity, leading them to a fuller participation in the evangelization and service of the poor.

Chapter IV

Practical Guidelines Concerning Seven Key Moments in the Life of the Local Community

Some preliminary considerations

88. Though many historical and cultural changes have occurred affecting the way we understand and exercise both authority and obedience, the role of the local superior remains quite important. A group without authority easily splinters into small pieces, each member becoming self-sufficient in regard to his own person and mission. In such groups one member often assumes power not because it has been entrusted to him as a mission but by the force of his personality. Such power can be all the more dangerous in that it is not clearly named or recognized as such.

89. The way in which local superiors exercise authority will not always be uniform. Communities are very diverse. The exercise of authority in a large community is different from that in a community of three or four confreres. Likewise, the way in which authority is exercised in a community where all engage in a common work is different from the way it is exercised where the confreres' missions are quite diverse (e.g., where, because of their apostolic work, they are dispersed for much of the week or even longer). Similarly, the role of the local superior in a community where confreres come from diverse cultures is different from that role in a setting where all come from basically the same culture. Still, local superiors should be alert to several key moments that are crucial in the life of every community.

90. Sometimes the ministry of the house or the variety of responsibilities within it require the smooth interaction of various authorities, including the local superior, within the same setting; e.g.,

- local superior/rector of major seminary
- local superior/director of internal seminary
- local superior/pastor of the parish.

In such cases, good communication is fundamental. It is also very helpful to draw up, in writing, and review together from time to time, clear, concrete job descriptions delineating the responsibilities of the various authorities.

91. Local communities within a defined territory are united as a province (C 122). The superiors, with the members, should foster contacts and cooperation among the houses of the province, especially those close to one another, in a wide variety of forms: common pastoral activities, ongoing formation, retreat

days, celebrations of feasts or anniversaries, visits to aging confreres or to those in formation, etc.

Key moments in the life of the local community

Apostolate

92. The service of the local superior is not limited just to community living. In fact, in an apostolic society, there should be no juxtaposition between community and apostolate, since we are a community for the mission.

93. The superior should encourage the community to grow in awareness of the real life-situation of the people to whom it is sent and among whom it lives, especially the poor of the area and the causes of their poverty. Their real life-situation should be the point of departure for the local community plan and should also help shape the lifestyle of the confreres of the house.

94. At times it may be necessary for the local superior, with the community, to question the mission of the house or of a particular confrere within it and begin to reflect with the Visitor about whether this mission is really in conformity with the end of the Congregation of the Mission and the orientations of the Provincial Plan.

95. The superior should encourage, within the local community, a deepened awareness of the communal dimension of our mission. The members of the community should regularly share about what they are experiencing in their mission: their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their discoveries, their questions, the challenges they face.

Prayer

96. The local superior, with the confreres, will organize the times and manner in which the community will pray together. Just as prayer lies at the heart of the Christian experience, so too does it lie at the heart of community life, whether it be the celebration of the Eucharist (C 45 § 1), or the Liturgy of the Hours in the morning and evening (C 45 § 3), or mental prayer in common (C 47 § 1), or faith-sharing (C 46). The style and the rhythm of community prayer will not be identical in all communities because of differences in the number of confreres and their apostolates. Nonetheless, a community must pray together, no matter what its size or shape.

97. In speaking of prayer, our Constitutions place special emphasis on the word of God (C 46), as did St. Vincent (CR II, 1; SV XII, 114f). In this, they echo the long tradition of the Church encouraging *lectio divina*. Some local

communities use this method to aid in the common preparation of the Sunday homily.

98. The superior, with the members of the community, should be creative in regard to the style and rhythm of its prayer, deciding not only on an order of day for its daily prayer but also, for example, scheduling a periodic community concelebration of the Eucharist, or a monthly day of recollection together, or two or three days every few months for a more prolonged time of prayer and faith-sharing. It is important that busy schedules and a wide variety of commitments do not become obstacles to the community's finding time to pray together. A community cannot live without drinking from this source.

99. In an ongoing way, the superior, with the members of the community, should seek to understand and live out more deeply the spirituality that is particular to the Congregation of the Mission, with its special focus on Christ as the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.

Meals

100. Especially in communities where confreres have schedules that conflict with meal times or where they are dispersed, the superior, with the members of the community, will fix times when all commit themselves to being together for meals. In community life, meals are a privileged moment for listening, conversation, sharing information, and for real communication. Meals eaten too quickly, and with almost no conversation, lose their human dimension and become merely a time for consuming food. On the contrary, meals should provide a space in the course of the day where we share genuinely with one another as brothers.

101. The superior, with the community, should welcome at table its collaborators, friends, relatives, and members of the Vincentian Family.

Meetings

102. Since meetings are an important time for conversation, communication, and fraternal relationships, the superior should be alert to giving everyone the chance to express himself and to be listened to. For that reason it may sometimes be necessary for him to restrain the verbal zeal of one confrere or to encourage another more reserved confrere to speak. A community where the confreres' liberty to speak or their capacity to listen are at a low ebb is not really a fully living body.

103. Our meetings should not merely focus on deciding upon an order of day or dividing up tasks to be done. The superior should also arrange meetings which

involve faith-sharing and a periodic evaluation of our community life and apostolic commitments. Such meetings will heighten our consciousness of being together for the mission and enable us to search together for ways of building up a genuine community for the mission.

104. It would be a mistake for a local superior to dream about living in an ideal community without tension. He should not ignore the existence of conflicts. If they remain latent and unaddressed they may one day explode violently. The superior should invite the community to address conflict in order to arrive at a resolution. He can be a mediator, helping confreres to deal with conflicts and calling those involved to speak with one another and seek reconciliation. Our local communities, in fact, should be places where pardon and reconciliation readily take place both in the form of face-to-face forgiveness (C 24, 3°) and in the form of sacramental reconciliation (C 45 § 2).

105. In the spirit of St. Vincent (CR II, 17), the superior and all members of the local community should be disposed to help one another through fraternal correction (C 24, 3°). Such correction should be offered gently and humbly. Constructive help offered to a confrere at the right time can be a great gift, assisting him to overcome inappropriate behavior.

106. Our decisions will be enriched if we search for the truth with one another and openly express our varied points of view. The confreres of a house have the right to play an active role in the decision-making process, and should also be active in carrying out what is decided. Within this context, the ultimate decision pertains to the local superior, especially when reflection within the community does not issue in a clear consensus.

Relaxation

107. The superior should encourage the community to be creative in finding ways of relaxing together, since this is one of the ways in which we create community. Of course, not everyone relaxes in the same way. But relaxing together, speaking during or after a meal, conversing in the evening, arranging an outing — all these can be factors in maintaining balance and creating unity in our life together. Communities where laughter and good humor do not exist will surely be sad communities.

108. If the superior himself is distant or depressed, the community will not readily be a place of joy and warm fraternal relationships. If the superior is close to the confreres and attentive to each, respects them profoundly, knows how to listen, dialogues openly, and spends relaxed moments with them, he will be able to create an atmosphere of confidence and joy

Nurturing new life

109. The superior and the members of the local community should concretize how they will promote vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood (S 36) and help in the formation of candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. Mindful of the corresponsibility of all the members of the province in this regard (C 93), the local community plan should specify matters such as:

- how the confreres will search out and encourage vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood in the Congregation (S 37 § 1);
- how they will provide ongoing guidance and support to interested candidates (S 37 § 2);
- who, among the members of the local community, will have a special responsibility for coordinating vocational promotion;
- when the community will pray together for vocations (Mt 9:37; cf. S 36);
- how interested young people might participate and be accompanied in the mission of the local community (S 36 and S 37 § 1);
- how, if the Visitor should send to the local community some of those who are already in initial formation, they will be integrated into and accompanied in our life and mission.

Formulation of the Local Community Plan

110. With the local superior, all confreres have the right and also the obligation to collaborate actively in the formulation of the local Community Plan. All are also responsible for putting it into practice. On occasion, the superior, with the members of the community, may wish to seek the help of a facilitator skilled in assisting others in the planning process.

111. Its content is outlined clearly in our Constitutions and Statutes:

- Each community should work at developing a community plan, according to the Constitutions, Statutes, and the provincial norms. We should use this plan as a means of directing our life and work, of fulfilling the recommendations we receive, and of examining periodically our life and activities (C 27).
- The community plan which each community draws up for itself as far as possible at the beginning of its work year, should include all of the following: apostolic activity, prayer, the use of goods, Christian witness where we work, ongoing formation, times for group reflection, necessary times for relaxation and study, and an order of day. All these should be revised periodically (S 16).

112. The plan should not be merely an order of day. On the contrary, it should express a vision, define concrete realizable objectives, describe the means for realizing these objectives, and state who is responsible for carrying out the various steps.

113. While, as it formulates its local plan, the community should be mindful of the gifts of each confrere, individual members of the house should adjust their personal initiatives to the overall community plan which is decided upon (C 22).

114. Several other paragraphs in the Constitutions and Statutes refer explicitly to the local Community Plan:

C 32 §1	Confreres' work responsibilities
S 19	Acts of piety
S 69, 5 ^o ; 78, 4 ^o	Approval by the Visitor
S 78, 4 ^o	Formulation by the local superior together with the community

115. Still other paragraphs provide relevant background for better understanding the plan:

C 23	Proper autonomy of local community
C 25	Need for local community to renew itself
C 129	The Congregation forms itself particularly in individual local communities
S 79 § 3	Frequent meetings should be held

116. Many other paragraphs suggest matter that might aptly be included in a community plan:

C 17	The service of the local confreres to the Daughters of Charity
C 152 § 1	The use of the house's temporal goods for the support of the province and other poorer houses
C 152 § 2	The use of the house's goods for the support of the indigent
S 3	Cooperation with the diocesan clergy, with other religious institutes, and with the laity
S 7	Our cooperation with the lay groups within our Vincentian Family
S 9 § 2	Our promotion of justice and peace
S 18	How we will observe evangelical poverty in the local community
S 37 § 1	How the local community will encourage vocations to the

Congregation of the Mission and other branches of the Vincentian Family

117. A typical outline might be as follows:

1. **The real life situation of the local community**
 - describe the concrete reality of the place where the community and its members are carrying out their mission;
 - describe the reality of the members of the community itself: their number, whether their mission is a common one or diverse, whether it is in a large institution or a small one, whether it is a parish, a popular mission, etc.;
2. **Apostolic activity**
 - the community's priorities: what apostolates should be emphasized and what apostolates might be phased out;
 - meetings that should be held periodically for an evaluation of the community's apostolic life, in light of the end of the Congregation.
3. **Prayer**
 - establish the times for common prayer and how we might make it simple and "something beautiful for God and attractive to the young";
 - how we will celebrate the Vincentian feasts;
 - when and how we will make mental prayer in common;
 - when and how we will engage in faith-sharing (repetition of prayer);
 - when and how the community will engage in more extensive times of prayer, such as a monthly day of recollection;
 - when and how the community will celebrate the Eucharist in common (once a week, once a month, etc.);
 - the annual retreat;
 - the invitation of lay people to join with us in times of prayer.
4. **Community life**
 - the lifestyle we adopt, in light of our mission, and how we are going to concretize it;
 - the practice of poverty: specify and evaluate how the community will use its common goods, how the personal needs of the confreres will be taken care of (clothing, books, expenses at vacation time);
 - the scheduling of periodic meetings for evaluating our life in community;

- if the community is dispersed because of missionary engagements, a description of when and how all its members will come together;
- relaxation: when and how the community will come together for resting and enjoying one another's company;
- the ongoing or specific formation of the members: courses, books to be read, discussions within the community;
- the naming of confreres for various responsibilities within the local community: local vocational promoter, local advisor to the Vincentian lay groups, secretary at house meetings, librarian, contact person for sending news items to the provincial bulletin, etc.

5. The order of day

- fixing the times for common prayer, meals, and other activities;
- publishing a schedule, along with other useful information, for visitors in the house.

118. The Local Community Plan is not a definitive work. The local superior, with the community, should evaluate and revise it at the beginning of each year. Experience of the past year and the transfer of confreres into and out of the house will necessitate modifications in the plan, further precisions in the objectives, the formulation of new means, and other choices. Some objectives, of course, will remain in the plan over a period of years, since the time frame for their realization will be long-term.

119. In Appendix II are found three models which may be helpful to the local superior, with the local community, in formulating the house plan.

Appendix I

A LIST OF ALL THE REFERENCES IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND STATUTES TO THE LOCAL SUPERIOR

- C 129: Description of role and duties.
- C 130: Appointment.
- C 131: Authority in internal and external forum.
- C 132: His council.
- C 133: Removal.
- C 134: Responsibility in regard to administration of goods.
- C 147 § 1: Convocation of the domestic assembly.
- C 24, 2°: Co-responsible with others.
- C 34: Confreres must ask permission of the local superior when using or disposing of goods
- C 35: We should use our own goods, with the permission of the local superior, for works of charity and also for our members, while avoiding distinctions among us.
- C 37 § 2: Has final decision-making authority in the local community.
- C 38 § 1: Confreres owe him obedience.
- C 66, 2°: Every house or group of confreres constituted as the equivalent of a house has a superior.
- C 74 § 3: Expulsion of a member from the house in grave, urgent cases.
- C 96: Right of all confreres to participate in government of local house.
- C 97, § 1: Superiors should consider themselves servants.
- C 97, § 2: While retaining authority to decide, they should dialogue with members.
- C 98: While preserving unity of government, matters which can be decided on the local level should not be referred to higher levels
- C 100: Superiors must be in sacred orders, having jurisdiction in the internal and external forum.
- C 107, 8°: Possibility that a house and local superior might depend directly on the superior general.
- C 125, 4°: Appointed by the Visitor with the consent of his council, having consulted the members of the house.
- C 144 § 2: Before convoking an extraordinary provincial assembly, the Visitor must consult the local superiors.
- C 146: Unless otherwise provided for in the provincial norms, he is a member of the provincial assembly.
- C 153 § 2: The local treasurer administers goods under the direction and vigilance of the superior.

- S 78, 1°-7°: Rights and duties.
- S 54: He continues in office until replaced by his successor.
- S 69, 5°: He prepares the community plan with his community.
- S 80: Duty to prepare for assemblies, participate in them and observe their norms.
- S 96: If he is impeded from going to the provincial assembly, the assistant replaces him.
- S 103 § 1: Local treasurer must give him an account of his administration.
- S 103 § 2: Once a month he should sign the treasurer's report.
- S 103 § 3: Members of the house entrusted with the administration of special works should give him an account of receipts and expenditures.
- S 103 § 4: He should also receive an account about goods entrusted to the Congregation for management.
- S 104: He can act in the name of the Congregation only within the limits of his office and the norm of law.
- S 105 § 3: He can make expenditures within the limits determined by provincial norms.
- S 106: He must not allow debts to be contracted unless it is certain that repayment of the principal and interest can be paid.
- S 107 § 2: He should act with prudence in accepting pious foundations with long-term obligations and must not accept obligations in perpetuity.
- S 107 § 3: He should not make gifts from the goods of the community except in accord with the Constitutions and Statutes.
- S 107 § 4: He should respect the intention of donors in accepting gifts which come to the house.
- S 107 § 5: He should be sure that employees have social security and that the house is adequately insured against danger of various kinds.

Appendix II

SOME MODELS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY PLAN

MODEL I

(It is recommended that this model be used by community houses that are beginning the planning process. While taxing, it has the value of helping the local community come into fuller contact with the Constitutions and Statutes and can draw it into reflective discussion of what they demand of us.)

Community Plan of the Vincentians at _____

I DESCRIPTION OF THE REAL-LIFE SITUATION

This section might describe the place where the confreres minister, the socio-economic environment, and the concrete needs of the people. It might also describe the make-up of the local community of confreres (how many there are, their age, whether they engage in a common work or in diversified ministries, etc.).

II APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY (S 3, S 9 §2, S 16, C 17, C 23, C 24 2º, C 25, C 96, C 129).

This section might treat the apostolic priorities of the house.

III PRAYER (S 16, S 19, C 25)

This section might treat our daily exercises of prayer, a weekly sharing of the word, periodic times of reflection, the annual retreat, etc.

IV COMMUNITY LIFE (C 23, C, 24 2º, C 25, C 129)

This section might treat the means that the local community chooses for fostering its life together (perhaps these are already treated in other sections of the plan).

V CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE PLACE WHERE WE WORK (S 16, C 20, C 24, C 33, C 44-45, C 49, S 36, S 100).

This section might treat those aspects of our lives that the local

community plan sees as its most important witness in its place of work.

VI ORGANIZATION (S 16, S 78 4º, S 79 §1 §3, C 24 2º, C 96, C 134 §2)

This section might treat the organizational structure of the local community (e.g., how often it meets, how decisions are made, etc.).

VII ON-GOING FORMATION (S 16)

This section might treat the means the local community will take for its ongoing formation; (e.g., attendance at workshops, study, meetings and discussions in the house, retreats, guest speakers, etc.).

VIII PROMOTING VOCATIONS (S 36, S 37 §1)

This section might treat the plan of the local house for fostering vocations (how will the local community find young people who will carry on this apostolate in the future).

IX RECREATION (S 16)

This section might treat daily common recreation, the need for periodic time off (balancing work and leisure), annual vacation time, etc.

X USE OF MATERIAL GOODS (S 16, C 25, C 33, S 18, C 149, C 152)

This section might treat how the local community plans to use its material goods, how it will seek to live simply, how it makes decisions in regard to spending money or using its resources, etc.

XI ORDER OF DAY (S 16)

This section will give the order of day.

XII EVALUATION AND REVISION OF PLAN (S 16, S 78 4º)

This section might treat how, when, and by whom the plan is evaluated and periodically revised.

MODEL II

(This model presumes that the local community has already worked out many of the issues involved in the

first model. It helps it to situate itself within a larger context, articulate its special Vincentian mission, and covenant some goals for the coming year.)

I DESCRIPTION OF THE CONCRETE SITUATION

This section would describe the concrete situation where the confreres of the house minister (e.g., the number and type of people in the parish or school; the resources available; the needs of the people; etc.)

II MISSION STATEMENT

In this section, the confreres of the house would formulate a statement describing the specifically Vincentian mission which they carry out.

III COVENANT FOR THE COMING YEAR

This section might treat any number of the matters listed in the first model above.

MODEL III

(This model aims at situating the house within the present context and plan of the province and at developing goals in that light. It also assigns specific responsibility and provides for periodic evaluation.)

I REFLECTION ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PROVINCE AND HOUSE

After prayerful reflection on the Constitutions and Statutes, the Lines of Action, and the Provincial Plan, the members of the house might in this section describe what they see as their principal concerns as a house.

II SPECIFIC GOALS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

In this section a limited number of goals will be formulated and agreed on (e.g., carrying out a home visitation in the entire parish; meeting every Thursday at 4 p.m., followed by evening prayer and supper together; organizing a day of recollection together four times during the coming year; agreeing on a book to be read and discussed once every two months, as a form of on-going formation; making some systematic contact with young people in the parish or school with a view toward vocational promotion; etc.). Specific responsibility for reaching the goals would be

assigned to various individuals or groups, as well as a time frame.

III EVALUATION

A method for periodic evaluation of progress toward the goals would be stated here.

Appendix III

BOOKS AND FILES KEPT IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Constitutions and Statutes say little about the books and records of the local community. Some provinces, by custom or by provincial norm, require that the local superior, either by himself or with the help of others, keep certain books and records up-to-date: the Acts of the house council, the recommendations made at the time of visitations, the Book of Mass Intentions, pertinent biographical information about the confreres of the house, etc.

In a circular letter addressed to superiors shortly before his death, St. Vincent urged them¹³ to “keep the letters written to you and to the members of your house, no matter from whom they may come, whenever they contain any noteworthy details that may be important or may be instructive for the future.” In the same letter, he instructs the superiors to a) keep different files, arranged according to subject matter or according to the year in which the letters were received; b) make note throughout the year of the most important spiritual and temporal affairs that occur in the house and during the missions given outside the house and inform him about these once a year; c) if persons in initial formation live in the house, keep a file containing their evaluations and with the dates and documents regarding their pronouncing vows and receiving orders; d) when a confrere in the house dies, inform the major superior and provide pertinent information about that confrere.

Experience teaches that the following books or files are essential, or at least useful, in a local community house:

Books

1. Book containing the Acts of the house council
2. Book containing the recommendations made during visitations by the Visitor
3. Book of Mass intentions
4. Books of the treasurer
5. For the sake of history, it may be helpful to have a book in which the significant events in the history of the house are recorded, or perhaps some type of diary.
6. For the sake of history, it may also be helpful to have a book recording the names of all confreres who have served in the house from its beginning, their date of arrival, their duties, their date of departure, etc.

¹³ SV VIII, 388

Files

1. Documents attesting to the ownership of the land and buildings where the house resides and also of the land and buildings where any of the works connected with the house reside
2. Documents attesting to the ownership of all the furnishings within these buildings and any other material goods used by the community (vehicles, etc.)
3. Documents regarding insurance coverage of the confreres (health insurance, life insurance, etc.), of the buildings, and of any other material goods pertaining to the community (automobiles, furnishings, objects of art, etc.)
4. Documents pertaining to current projects undertaken by the local community
5. All the official correspondence of the superior, the assistant, the treasurer, and other members of the house
6. In case of emergencies, it is very helpful for the local superior to have a current information sheet concerning every confrere living in the house with biographical data (name, parents' names, date of pronouncing vows, date of ordination, names of brothers and sisters and other relatives, places and phone numbers where the confrere can be contacted during vacation, etc.).
7. It is also very useful for the local superior to have a file in which a copy of the Last Will and Testament of confreres, in a sealed envelope, is placed.

Archives

For the sake of history, the local house should have an archive where documents from the past are carefully stored and preserved.

Library

For the ongoing education of the confreres, some type of small library may be very helpful, depending on the size of the community and the availability of other resources nearby.

Appendix IV

PROFESSION OF FAITH AND OATH OF FIDELITY

Canon 833, 8°, prescribes a profession of faith for those named as superiors in Societies of Apostolic Life, as below:

Profession of Faith

I, N., firmly believe and profess each and everything that is expressed in the Creed, namely:

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate: he suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

With firm faith I believe also all that is contained in the Word of God, whether written or handed down in tradition, which the Church, either in solemn judgment or by its ordinary and universal teaching authority, sets forth for our belief as revealed by God.

I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church concerning its teachings on faith and morals.

Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of intellect and will to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of bishops enunciate in the exercise of their authentic teaching authority, even if they do not intend to

proclaim those teachings by a definitive act.

Oath of Fidelity

I, N., on assuming the office of [...] promise that in my words and actions I shall always preserve communion with the Catholic Church.

With great care and faithfulness I shall carry out the duties which bind me to the Church, both universal and particular, in which I have been called to serve, according to the requirements of the law.

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety, I shall faithfully hand it on and expound it, and I shall avoid any teachings opposed to that faith.

I shall foster the discipline common to the whole Church, and I shall urge the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, especially those contained in the *Code of Canon Law*.

I shall follow with Christian obedience what the sacred pastors as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith declare, or what they as rulers of the Church prescribe. I shall also — with due regard for the character and purpose of my institute — faithfully assist the diocesan bishops, so that the apostolic work to be exercised in the name and by the mandate of the Church be carried out in the communion of the same Church.

So help me God and these His holy Gospels, which I touch with my hand.

Appendix V

CITATIONS FROM ST. VINCENT ABOUT THE LOCAL SUPERIOR

1. *In 1656 Vincent appointed Antoine Durand superior of the seminary in Agde; Durand was 27 years old. According to Louis Abelly, Vincent briefed him as follows.*

Well, Father, now that God has called you to this work of guiding men in their relationship with him, what are your views on it and how important do you think it is? How do you rate this ministry of the Priests of the Mission, who are entrusted with influencing and guiding men's minds, when only God knows what is going on there? *Ars artium, regimen animarum* [The guiding of souls is the supreme art]. This is what the Son of God did on earth; this is why he came down from heaven, why he was born of a virgin, and why every moment of his life was a dedication, ending in a very painful death. That is why you must have a great appreciation of what you are getting into. So, how are we to carry out this assignment of guiding men towards God, of setting ourselves in opposition to the flood of contemporary vice, or to slackness in a seminary? How are we to ignite a feeling for Christian and clerical virtue in the men whom Providence will give you, so that you can help them towards their salvation, or in their relationship with God? Well, Father, you can take it as certain that there is nothing merely human in all this. We are not dealing with a man's work, but God's. *Grande opus* (a sublime work). This is to continue Jesus Christ's ministry, so that a man can do nothing but spoil it if God does not take a hand. You know, Father, philosophy, theology, lecturing, do not have any effect on men's relationship with God. Jesus must involve himself with us, or we with him. We have to work in him and he in us. We have to speak like him and with his way of thinking, just as he was in his Father and preached the doctrine which the Father had taught him; that is what sacred scripture says.

So, Father, that is the way it is; you have got to empty yourself of yourself so that you can put on Jesus Christ. You will know, of course, that ordinary causes produce effects according to their nature; a sheep produces a sheep, etc., and a human being another one. In the same way, if someone who is guiding others, moulding them, speaking to them, has a merely human approach, that is what will be picked up by those who see him, listen to him and try to model themselves on him; they will become men with a merely human outlook. No matter what he says, no matter what he does, all that he will pass on to them will be the appearance of virtue, not the reality. He will pass on to them what he himself has. We know that teachers instil their

principles, their own kind of behaviour, into the minds of their pupils.

But, then, look at this the other way round. If a superior is filled with God, if he is full of the principles of Jesus Christ, everything he says will have its effect, a power to build up; and everything he does will be like a series of helpful instructions, of benefit to anyone who comes in contact with them.

Now if you are to get to that stage, Father, our Lord himself must put his mark on you, his brand. We see how a wild bush, which has a cultivated shoot grafted on to it, will produce the fruit of the graft. In the same way we ourselves, poor creatures, are nothing but flesh, hay, thorns. However, if our Lord puts his mark on us and, so to speak, gives us the sap of his spirit and his grace, and unites us to him like the branches to the vine, we will do what he did on earth; I mean we will perform divine actions. St. Paul was full of this spirit and, like him, we will bring forth children for our Lord.

There is one important matter of which you must never lose sight: close contact with our Lord in prayer. That is the source from which you will draw all the help you will need to cope with the assignment you are beginning. When you run into some problem, turn to God and say: "Lord, you are the Father of Lights, so enlighten me as to what I am to do in this situation."

I am telling you this not just for the more difficult problems, but also to learn directly from God what you have to teach. Be like Moses; he used to tell the people of Israel what God had inspired him to say: "*Haec dicit Dominus*" (The Lord says this).

More than that, though, you have to turn to God in prayer if you are to retain your sense of awe towards him, and experience his love. Unfortunately, Father, I have got to tell you, and you have got to realise it, that a man can go astray himself while guiding others towards salvation. That is certainly what happens in the case of an individual who neglects himself because he is too busy with others. Saul was thought to be a suitable man to be king, because he was well behaved in his father's house. However, after he had ascended the throne the wretch lost God's favour. St. Paul kept control of himself, because he was afraid that, even though he had preached to others, and shown them the way of salvation, he himself might be rejected.

Now, if you are to avoid the fate of Saul, or Judas, you have got to stay close to our Lord. Focussing your mind and heart on him, say: "Do not let it happen, Lord, that I should make a mess of my own case while trying to help others. Be my shepherd yourself, and do not let me miss out on the graces which you channel to others through me, and through the way I carry out my ministry."

And there is another thing: you must pray to our Lord for the needs of those men who will be entrusted to you. You can be absolutely certain that you will do more good that way than by any other means. Jesus Christ must be your model as a leader. He was not someone who just preached, worked, fasted, and who even shed his blood and died. In addition to all that, he prayed. He did not need to, so that it was for us that he prayed so many times, to teach us to do the same. He wants us to pray for what concerns ourselves, but also for those whose salvation we are working for along with him.

And there is even something more. I want to recommend to you our Lord's humility. Keep saying to him: "Lord, what have I done to be given such an appointment? What have I done already to fit me for the load now being placed on my shoulders? My God, I will ruin everything if you yourself do not monitor each thing I say and each thing I do." Let us always keep an eye on what is human and imperfect, so that we can see plenty of reasons for being humble. That will keep us humble in the sight of God, but also in the eyes of others, and when we are with those who have been placed in our care.

Above all, do not have the constant urge to let it be seen that you are the superior, or the master. I do not agree with a man who told me a few days ago that to be able to manage things well, and maintain your authority, you have to make sure that people see that you are the superior. My God, our Lord Jesus Christ did not speak that way. By word and example he taught the exact opposite. He said that he had not come to be served, but to be of service to others. He also said that anyone who wants to be master should be everyone's servant.

Get into that frame of mind, then, and behave towards those with whom you are going to live as *unus ex illis* (one of themselves), telling them right from the start that you have not come to lord it over them, but to be of great service to them. Do this at home and away from home, and you will get on splendidly.

There is something else. We should give God the credit for any good which comes about through our efforts. On the other hand, when anything goes wrong in the community we accept the blame. Yes, bear in mind that the superior is mainly responsible for all disorders. These happen because by his carelessness, his bad example, he disturbs the smooth running of the community. It is like the way the whole body is upset if a person has a bad headache.

Humility should also prevent complacency. That is always a danger when

our work is the sort that catches the attention of others. Preening oneself that way, Father, is a poison, a danger for good work. It is a disease which ruins the holiest work, and quickly drives God out. In God's name be on your guard against this. To my mind, it is the greatest danger for us in the growth of our relationship with God.

Give yourself to God, then, so that you will be able to speak with the humble mind of Jesus Christ. Admit that your teaching is not your own, not from yourself but from the gospel. Take as your model the ordinary words and homely comparisons which the sacred scriptures show our Lord using when he spoke to people. It is extraordinary, is it not, that he could have taught marvellous things, so many secrets that he had from the Divinity and from his own supreme gifts, since he was the eternal wisdom of the Father! But you see that he spoke so that he could be understood, using comparisons that would be recognised. He spoke of farm workers, of men who worked in vineyards. He would mention a field, a vine, a mustard seed. That is what you have got to do if you want to get through to the people to whom you are explaining God's word.

Then there is another thing to which you must pay special attention. You must be absolutely open to the promptings of the Son of God. What I mean is, that when there is something that you have to do you should ask yourself: "Is this in line with the teaching of the Son of God?" If your answer is "yes," you should say: "Right, let us get on with it." If your answer is the opposite, say: "I will have nothing to do with it."

In addition to that, when there is question of doing some good work, say to the Son of God: "If you were in my place, how would you react to this situation? How would you get through to these people? How would you comfort this patient, who is suffering in body or mind?"

This sort of reliance must include giving in to those who are our Lord's representatives as far as you are concerned, being your superiors. Take my word for it that their experience, and the grace of office which our Lord in his goodness gives them, have taught them a lot about how to be in charge. I am telling you this so that you will not do anything important, nor take on anything out of the ordinary, without letting us know. However, if the matter is so very urgent that you cannot wait for our opinion, go to the nearest person in authority and say: "What would you do, Father, in an affair like this?" We know from experience that God blesses the administration of people who act like that. On the other hand, we also know that those who take a different line get themselves entangled in situations which not only cause trouble to themselves but even make problems for us.

There is another warning I would like to give you: Do not try to draw attention to yourself as superior. Do not do anything out of the ordinary, but always take the *viam regiam* (the royal road), which is the main road, along which you can travel safely and without blame. What I mean to say is that you keep to the rules and the holy customs of the congregation. Do not start anything new, but keep to the guidelines which have been drawn up for those who have the responsibility for the houses of the company, and also do not deviate from what is done in the same company.

As well as being faithful in keeping the rules, you are also to be firm in seeing that they are kept, otherwise everything will go wrong. You are there in our Lord's place, so, like him, you must be a lamp which throws out light and warmth. St. Paul says "Jesus is the splendour of the Father," and St. John says that Jesus is the light which enlightens everyone who comes into the world.

Experience shows us that primary causes affect secondary ones. For example, angels who are on a superior level, clarify, illuminate and bring to perfection intelligences which are on a lower level. In the same way a superior, pastor or director has to purify, clarify and bring into union with God the persons who have been given to him on behalf of God himself.

The sky sends what is helpful down to earth, and those who are put in charge of others must pass on to them the most important principles which are to energise them. To do that, you need a full complement of grace, enlightenment and good works. We see how the sun passes on to the other stars the fullness of its own light.

Finally, you have got to be like salt: *Vos estis sal terrae* (You are the salt of the earth. Mt 5:13), preventing infection gaining a hold in the flock of which you are the shepherd.

When Fr. Vincent had finished saying all the above, which he did with such zeal and charity the like of which I cannot describe, a laybrother of the community arrived to talk to him about some household matters in St. Lazare. When the brother had left Fr. Vincent took the opportunity to pass on this advice to me.

You see how it is, Father, that we have been speaking about the things of God just now, and then I have to deal with practical affairs. You can see from that that a superior has to deal with both spiritual and temporal affairs. That is because those over whom he has been put in charge have both bodies and souls, and he has to take care of both. This is following the example of God. From all eternity he was generating his Son, and the Father and Son were

producing the Holy Spirit. I am saying that in addition to these divine operations *ad intra* he created the world *ad extra*, and all the time he is actively maintaining it, and everything in it. Each year he sees to the new seeds in the ground, new fruit on the trees, etc. And the care of his adorable Providence extends even to the fact that no leaf falls from a tree unless he tells it to. He counts all the hairs on our heads, and provides food for even the smallest worm, even for the smallest bug. This seems to me to be a very strong argument to convince you that you must not confine yourself to dealing merely with what crops up under the heading of spiritual. As well as that, a superior, who in a certain way is an extension of God's power, must deal conscientiously with the smallest temporal matters, and not think that he is above things like that. So, give yourself to God so that the temporal welfare of the house where you are going is taken care of.

When the Son of God sent his apostles out the first time he told them not to take any money with them. Later on, though, when more disciples came along he chose one of the group *qui loculos haberet* (who would have the purses). This man had to see to helping the poor with food and also seeing to the needs of the group. As well as that, the Son of God also allowed some women to accompany the group for the same reason, *quae ministrabant ei* (who ministered to him. Lk 8:3). Now, when he laid down in the gospel that we are not to worry about tomorrow, that is to be taken as meaning not to have too much concern for, nor worry too much about, earthly affairs. It does not mean total neglect of the necessities of life, including clothing. If that is what he meant, then why bother sowing seed.

I will stop there, as that is enough for today. But I will repeat once again that what you are about to do is a very important work, *grande opus* (a sublime work). I ask our Lord to bless your ministry as superior. For your part, ask him along with me, to forgive all the faults which I myself have committed in the ministry in which I am engaged.

(SV XI, 342-351, N° 153, 1656)

2. I have heard that your bread was not well made. Please have it done by a baker, if you can find one, for the most important thing is to have good bread. It would also be well to vary the food sometimes ... to relieve the strain on poor nature which tires of seeing the same things all the time.

(SV I, 387-388, N° 269, 1637
[English edition, 378])

3. And because I am in a hurry to finish and cannot give you detailed instructions myself as to the leadership role you are to hold, I am asking M.

Dufestel to do this. Here is just one, which is that a Superior must be firm as to the end and humble and gentle with regard to the means, steadfast in the observance of the Rules and holy customs of the Company but gentle in the means of seeing that they are observed. And because only the Spirit of Jesus Christ Our Lord is the true director of souls, I beseech His Divine Majesty to grant you His spirit for your own guidance and for that of the Company. I am, in His love and that of His holy Mother, Monsieur, your most humble and most obedient servant.

(SV II, 300, N° 619, 24 September 1642
[English edition, 336])

4. If M... writes to me, I will take the opportunity of letting him know in my reply that he is not giving us the satisfaction he led us to hope for. I will also try to give him a hint that he should show a little more submission and indifference than he now does. However, since this is the work of the Holy Spirit rather than that of men, who can say things but not move the person, we shall pray to God for that. I ask you to do so also, Monsieur, that He may attract him strongly to the practice of the virtues, above all, of humility and condescension. Your good example will also contribute to this. His correction will probably take a long time because of the impetuosity of his age and his vivacious spirit, but be patient! These very things should cause us to bear with him gently, in the hope that the idle dreams of presumption and the force of desire usually found in young people will diminish with age.

I know well, Monsieur, how much you have to endure in your present duty, and I ask Our Lord to strengthen you in your difficulties. It is in such circumstances that we acquire virtue; where there is no suffering, there is little merit. My wish is that God may grant us great indifference with regard to duties. O Monsieur, how sure we would then be of doing His holy Will, which is our sole aspiration, and how much peace and contentment we would enjoy, or so it seems to me! I beg you to ask Him earnestly for this grace for me and for the whole Company. I often offer to Him your own soul, which is very dear to me because it is so good and precious to Our Lord, in whom I am your....

(SV III 514-515, N° 1158, 8 December 1649
[English edition, 509-510])

5. The Brothers are very wrong to object to the fact that they are being asked to render an account of their administration, for this is being done not because of any distrust but because good order and the customs of the Company require it. They themselves should offer to do so. I ask you, Monsieur, to accustom them to render an account daily to the procurator of the house, and he in turn

should do the same once a month to the Superior.

(SV IV, 75, N° 1257, 9 September 1650
[English edition, 80])

6. You ask me how you should act with quick-tempered, touchy, critical persons. My reply is that prudence should dictate this. In some cases it is wise to go along with them so as to be all to all, as the Apostle says; in others, it is good to confront them gently and with moderation; in still others, hold firm against their manner of acting. This must always be done, however, with God in view and in the way you think most conducive to His glory and the edification of your family.

(SV IV, 90, N° 1269, 4 October 1650
[English edition, 97])

7. Alas! Monsieur, it would have to be a man fully qualified to govern in the Company, if this were possible. Experience has shown us that only too many of the young people we have put in as Superiors, regardless of how much self-confidence, intelligence, or competence they may have in the spirit of the world — which is the enemy of the true servants of God that Missionaries should be... Accordingly, it is advisable for your family to work hard to acquire solid virtue, labor in the rural missions, and direct seminaries; after that — and no sooner — it will be in a position to extend itself.

(SV V, 351-352, N° 1857, 2 April 1655
[English edition, the same])

8. I strongly approve your entreaty to me not to impose on you the office of Superior, for this shows that it will find in you the basis needed for this duty, namely, distrust of yourself. Without it you would not be sufficiently careful to have recourse to God, but with it you will present yourself often to His Goodness as being powerless to carry this burden and yet submissive to what He wills. Have the hope that He will give you the strength required, and ask Him for it. Go cautiously in His Divine Presence, doing nothing without consulting Him, asking the advice of wise, competent persons, especially your Consulters, in important matters. In accordance with all that, I am asking you to take over at the helm of this little bark which Providence is entrusting to your leadership. However, I give you this piece of advice for now: do not change what your predecessors have done, without the consent of the Superior General. Because this has not been done, some Superiors have made serious mistakes and almost ruined their houses.

(SV V, 564-565, N° 2021, 5 March 1656
[English edition, 566])

9. Live with your confreres so cordially and simply that no one, on seeing you together, may guess who is the Superior. Do not settle any business matters, however unimportant they may be, until you have first sought their advice, especially that of your Assistant. As for myself, I call my men together whenever some difficult point of governance, either in spiritual or ecclesiastical questions or in temporal matters, has to be decided. When there is question of the latter, I also consult those responsible for them; I even ask the advice of the Brothers in whatever concerns their duties because of the knowledge they have regarding them. The result is that God blesses resolutions taken this way through consultation. To perform your duty well, please use these means.

If someone tries to oblige you to do things that are not in line with either the end or the custom of our Institute, respectfully give your reasons to those who are superior to you. If they do not listen, ask at least for some time to reflect and to be free to get some advice from us, so as not to do any harm. If you are pressured and cannot do otherwise, *in nomine Domini*, go ahead; in that case, it will likely be the Will of God, unless your salvation or that of others is in jeopardy. This is usually not to be feared, as long as we do not take it upon ourselves to become involved in matters in which there is any danger.

(SV VI, 66-67, N° 2129, 1656
[English edition, 77-78])

10. You should not be at all surprised that an individual may lose the trust he owes his Superior or that he have less of it than is required. Given the diversity of persons, there is always someone who is out of harmony with others, as much in important matters as in minor things. Since patience and forbearance are a universal remedy, make use of them especially with such persons to try to win them over, as you are doing.

(SV VI, 92, N° 2146, 24 September 1656
[English edition, 105])

11. I would like to think you have arrived in Le Mans, where I embrace you with all the tenderness of my heart. With that same heart I am sending you the patent for the office of Superior of that house, which I request you to fulfill, and I ask M. Molony to read it to the family. I ask Our Lord to grant you His

Spirit that you may govern in that same spirit, which is humble, gentle, firm, and vigilant. Have confidence in Him and rest assured that He will help you. It will seem difficult to you in the beginning, but grace and practice will make its continuance easy. Furthermore, since the little community is composed of very good, well-intentioned persons, it will console you by its fidelity to the Rule and by the grace God will grant you to give the example in this, as I ask His Divine Goodness to do. Your knowledge of human weakness will cause you to act with prudence, discretion, and wisdom, and with greater recourse to God. I think you know that a local Superior should never change or make any innovations in his family without an order from the Visitor or the Superior General.

(SV VI, 497-498, N° 2398, 3 October 1657
[English edition, 515-516])

12. David was the least of his brothers, but he was the most pleasing to God because he was the most humble; and he did more on his own than all of them put together because the Spirit of God dwelt in him. Have no doubt, Monsieur, that God also operates in and by you, if you have humility. Although you may be the youngest, the least learned, and — if you like — the least virtuous of your confreres, you will still be according to the heart of God and will guide in the ways of the Lord the flock He has entrusted to your care, even if you meet with contradictions in this.

You do well, Monsieur, not to resort to artifice to maintain obedience in the family. As obedience should be rendered through virtue, you must also ask for it on the same principle, that is, to prescribe the things that must be done and prohibit those from which we must abstain. Do so with simplicity, uprightness, and firmness of mind, but gently and pleasantly, as coming from a truly humble heart — or one striving for humility. We must be firm in the end and gentle in the means, using requests rather than any language that might smack of authority or commands. Admonitions that are taken badly should not make you disregard notable faults, but the love you should have for common observance and the progress of each individual obliges you to remedy any failing by public or private correction; this, however, must be done with prudence and charity.

Nevertheless, you must not expect to live among men — even if they were saints — and not see them fail; for the condition of this wretched life makes everyone subject to this. What then should be done? In truth, Monsieur, patience and forbearance are the most efficacious remedies that Our Lord and experience have taught us for leading others to virtue.

(SV VI, 613-614, N° 2463, 17 November 1657)

[English edition, 623-624])

13. I am sure that holy humility is inspiring you with the sentiments you express to me concerning your office of Superior. Since, however, God is the one who governs all things in His adorable wisdom, we have to believe that He is also guiding the Company in general and each house in particular and that they will be very well guided if we, on our part, are faithful to the practice of the maxims of the Gospel and the observances of our Institute. Doubtless, this was your disposition when you resolved to maintain in the family union and exactness, the two principal ends of good government.

You even ask me for the means of doing so, but it would take me too long to write them to you. Just let me tell you that, to preserve peace and charity among your men, you must accustom them to ask pardon of one another on their knees whenever they happen to say or do anything that might affect this charity ever so little. One day the Superior of some nuns told me that there was great union in her community. I asked her to what she attributed the cause of this. She replied that, after God, it was to the Sisters' practice of asking pardon of one another for any harsh or disrespectful words. I have noted that this remedy is, indeed, very useful among us, for I have tried to introduce the custom and to practice it myself, whenever I fall into these failings. You will see, Monsieur, that if you put this practice into use, it will be like a precious balm in your house that will soften sharp tongues and resentment of hearts.

By being exact to the Rules and practices, in addition to the good means you are planning to use, which is to give the example yourself, you will find it very helpful not to tolerate their transgression in others without calling it to their attention, even giving them some penances at times for this, especially the backsliders.

(SV VII, 245-246, N° 2649, 30 August 1658
[English edition, 259-260])

14. I will tell you two things about the uneasiness and melancholy you say you experience when things do not go well: (1) that it is not men who make things go well, but God, who sometimes allows them to go differently than the way we would like so as to make us realize that we can do nothing about them, or to try our patience; and (2) that you trust your own guidance too much when you think that, because you love good order, it is up to you to see that it is observed.

The result is that, not being able to succeed in all that, you become excessively sad, whereas if you were truly convinced that you are capable

only of spoiling everything, you would be surprised that things do not go even much worse and would remain at peace in every outcome and event that seem unpleasant or unfavourable to you, since God ordains them thus.

I ask you, Monsieur, to consider all things in the order of His Providence and, by doing humbly and carefully whatever depends on you to see that everything goes well, to be submissive in all else to the good pleasure of God, in whom I am, Monsieur, your most humble servant.

(SV VII, 375-376, N° 2729, 22 November 1658)
[English edition, 389-390]

15. You tell me that you decided during your retreat not to ask again to be relieved of the office of Superior but to be content with representing your inadequacy to God. That is what should be done, Monsieur. Value this practice and continue to govern as you have done in the past. All has gone well with God's blessing, and all will go even better with the trust you will have in His grace and the experience you have acquired. It is not that we do not need you elsewhere, but we are waiting for a greater need before taking you from Richelieu, where a wise, vigilant, gentle, regular man like you is needed.

(SV VII, 434, N° 2770, 5 January 1659
[English edition, 451])

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