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Vincentiana, novembre-décembre 2005

**CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
CPAG '04**

***Work Document*
40th General Assembly
2004**

*Our Vincentian Identity today,
having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years:
evaluation and three challenges for the future*

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission are the result of a **long process of discernment** in response to the call of Vatican II to express in a new way our own charism and to revise the juridical norms of the communities. The Extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969 drew up a first draft of the Constitutions.¹ The Assembly of 1974, besides redrafting some sections of the Constitutions, formulated some Declarations in order to enlighten, stimulate and orient the effort of the whole Congregation and of each of its members.² The General Assembly of 1980, after a thorough and delicate job, rewrote the whole text of the Constitutions.³ Once presented to and approved by the Holy See, they took effect on 25 January 1985.⁴

¹ "Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis" (1969) in *Vincentiana* (1969), 85-126.

² "Declarationes" (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 286-302. "Constitutiones et Statuta. Textus Completus Conventus Generalis anni 1968-1969 emendatus a Conventu XXXV" (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 303-345.

³ "Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis" (1980) in *Vincentiana* (1980), 193-268.

⁴ "Promulgación de las Constituciones" (1984) in *Vincentiana* (1985), 1-11. To study the whole process the Congregation used up to the promulgation of the present Constitutions, cf. M. PÉREZ-FLORES, "Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980," in *Vincentiana* (1984), 751-784. "De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984," in *Vincentiana* (1985), 84-146. C. BRAGA, "The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. Historical Notes," in *Vincentiana* (2000), 289-307.

I.
**OUR IDENTITY IN LIGHT OF THE CONSTITUTIONS
 AFTER 20 YEARS**

When he promulgated the new Constitutions, on 27 September 1984, the Superior General stated: "*Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated*"; and he expressed his fervent wish: "*The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the gospel to the poor.*"⁵

Twenty years have passed since the Constitutions were proposed to us as a light for our way. In domestic and provincial assemblies, in preparation for our 40th General Assembly (2004), we have gone over and evaluated **our life and mission in light of the Constitutions**, trying to say concretely how each missionary, each community and Province and the Congregation as a whole has expressed in its life **the Vincentian identity** designed by the Constitutions.

Together we wish **to thank God** because the Constitutions, drawing on God's word as their source and centered in the attitudes of Christ, the Rule of the Mission, and listening carefully to the calls of the Church and the clamor of the men and women of our time, have brought up to date the insights of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian tradition and are giving impulse to our life in the following of Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor.

Both in the local and provincial assemblies as well as in the General Assembly, **we have committed ourselves to make the Constitutions a permanent reference**. For we have discovered that, in the midst of our daily activities, we frequently take for granted the guiding principles of our life and hardly glance at the Constitutions, with which we should constantly confront ourselves in order to live and creatively actualize our identity.

The responses of the Provinces have reiterated the **quality of our Constitutions** as they propose our identity. But they have also pointed out the urgency we have of existentially developing in daily life, in our encounter with the face of the poor, the identity we accept on a rational level.⁶

⁵ *Vincentiana* (1985), 5.

⁶ Studying carefully the Synthesis of the responses of the Provincial Assemblies to the Consultation Document for CPAG '04, one can clearly observe the appreciation the confreres have for the Constitutions and the **achievements** attained under their inspiration; but, at the same time, the **difficulties** encountered on the way, difficulties that become so many **opportunities** to continue the deepening and grounding of the charism in our heart, our evangelizing ministry and our community life.

The question about our **identity** — who are we? — expresses itself in a new enthusiasm, in a vibrant fire, in a renewed hope, in the exodus from our own comforts towards the prophetic stance of generous self-giving, of missionary urgency.

Going back over the responses of the Provinces to the Consultation Document, preparatory to the General Assembly, we seem to perceive a cry which springs from the calmness of the **evaluation** of our 20 years of life since the promulgation of the Constitutions.

Congregation of the Mission, be who you are! Do not resign yourself to mediocrity. Transform yourself in fire. Walk passionately in the following of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor. Revive the charism, the gift which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you. Work and tirelessly extend the frontiers of the mission. Live as a witness full of conviction and transmit the vitality of your vocation!

From this **creative fidelity** we will be able to give an account of our identity and respond to new challenges in the coming years.

II.

THE CHALLENGES TO OUR IDENTITY

From the time the Constitutions were written until today, the **changes lived out** within our communities and Provinces, as well as in the ecclesial community and the entire world have been many and notable. The most recent General Assemblies of the Congregation have offered proposals for updating our vocation and mission.⁷ Following the same pastoral orientation as the recent Assemblies, the 40th General Assembly (2004) offers to all the members of the Congregation its reflection on the impact produced on our Vincentian identity by the **principal changes** which are taking place in our society and in the Church; and on the **three principal challenges** to be faced in the coming years.⁸

⁷ The General Assembly of 1986 offered "Lines of Action 1986-1992" to the whole Congregation in *Vincentiana* (1986), 549-605. The General Assembly of 1992, in its *Letter to the Confreres*, established different commitments with regard to "New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities", in *Vincentiana* (1992), 359-388. The General Assembly of 1998 promoted the collaboration of the different branches of the Vincentian Family in order to respond to the challenges of the mission: "With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium," in *Vincentiana* (1998), 384-397.

⁸ In the Synthesis of the responses of the Provincial Assemblies to the Consultation Document of CPAG '04 a more detailed enumeration of the

A. The changes produced in recent years and their impact on our Vincentian identity

1. *With regard to Values*

The majority of the provinces pointed out an erosion of traditional Christian values and a crisis of confidence in social, political, family, technological and ecclesiastic institutions. But at the same time we continue to hear, and this greatly encourages us, of cases of brave and committed individuals, moved by their faith, whose lives are outstanding for their capacity for personal sacrifice and perseverance.

These changes impact our Vincentian identity: they encourage us to define more precisely the initial and ongoing formation of the candidates and the members of the Congregation, by adopting a more critical stance towards the world's values, and by paying closer attention to the traditional practice of fraternal correction.

The implications for our Vincentian identity which spring from these changes are: the renewal of our identity by basing ourselves on the vow of stability, the apostolic character of our vows and of the five characteristic virtues, by helping and respecting one another in our community and prayer life, and by accepting the personal responsibility of living and giving testimony to our Vincentian charism.

2. *With regard to the apostolic activity of the C.M.*

In the area of our apostolic activity the majority of the provinces pointed to the disastrous effects of globalization: a growing distance between rich and poor, destruction of local cultures and the deterioration of the environment, unjust economic structures, exploitation of workers, corruption, consumerism, a growing number of refugees and migrants, and a wide variety of problems such as fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, war and terrorism, and the threat of fatal diseases. On the other hand, many groups in the Church and in society are dedicated to the cause of the poor and to the work of transforming society.

The impact of these changes on our Vincentian identity shows itself in: a growing awareness of the need to seek the help and collaboration of other groups in the Church and in society; a renewed

changes and a wider range of the challenges suggested by the Provinces can be found. Here we have brought together those which strike us as most significant and urgent.

dedication to the ideals and to the fundamental aspects of our Vincentian identity.

The implications we discover for our Vincentian identity are: to share our Vincentian identity with the other branches of the Vincentian Family; to promote volunteer programs to facilitate the sharing of our Vincentian charism; to become better defenders of the poor and marginalized; to heed the call to continued conversion by integrating ourselves more deeply in the world and the reality of the poor.

3. *With regard to vocations and the number of members of the C.M.*

Many provinces point out in their replies their diminishing numbers and their advanced age. Other provinces emphasize an impressive growth in the number of vocations and a high number of young confreres.

These changes have an impact on our Vincentian identity. For the provinces experiencing a drop in numbers and advanced age: a renewed commitment to vocational promotion, as well as a greater emphasis on the Vincentian character of our apostolic ministries and our community life. For the provinces with growth in the number of vocations: an effort to carry out long range plans, as well as a concern for the maintenance and availability of economic resources.

The implications which spring from these changes are: a new commitment to the following of Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor; an invitation to young people to share our prayer, our community life and works of evangelization; a renewed emphasis on the importance of our community life as a testimony of our vocation, of our mission and of our multicultural reality.

B. The three principal challenges for the Congregation of the Mission in the coming years

FIRST: TO REVITALIZE OUR VINCENTIAN VOCATION

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries is urged in the coming years to:

- Take our Constitutions to heart, meditate on them and dialogue about them frequently in community.
- Live as authentic witnesses of our Vincentian charism.
- To make a special effort, as an expression of creative fidelity, to express our Vincentian charism in the new

culture of our time and in the cultures of the different peoples.

- Accept gladly possible candidates and lay collaborators into our common life, our prayer and our works of evangelization.
- Give ourselves an initial and ongoing formation after the example of Christ, Evangelizer of the poor.
- Promote the branches of the Vincentian Family and be willing to form their members in the charism of our Founder.
- Deepen the knowledge of our Vincentian identity through study, provincial and interprovincial meetings, participation in the CIF courses, and spiritual exercises and retreats.

In order to do this:

? We the missionaries of (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

*

*

(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of proposes to:

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(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

SECOND: REINVIGORATE OUR APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries are urged in the coming years to:

- Use the Constitutions as the criterion for accepting new works, reducing our commitments and giving new vigor to our present ministries.
- Commit lay collaborators of the Vincentian Family, and of similar groups, to dedicate themselves together with us to the direct service of the poor.
- Collaborate with other provinces of the Congregation in the affective and effective evangelization of the poor.
- Give emphasis to the missionary and prophetic character of our Congregation in each one of our ministries.

- Promote our availability as followers of Christ and mobility in our acceptance of new works.

In order to do this:

? We the missionaries of (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

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(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of proposes to:

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(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

THIRD: RENEW OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

The Congregation as a whole, the communities and each one of the missionaries is urged in the coming years to:

- Formulate, carry out and regularly evaluate our provincial and local plans.
- Use the new document *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* as a means for reinvigorating our local communities.
- Dedicate time to prepare common prayer and take care of the details of the common life of the local community.
- Be willing to give an account of our administration.
- Form and continue supporting superiors.

In order to do this:

? We the missionaries of (Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America) commit ourselves to:

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*

(Lines of Action to be concretized in Continental groups in the General Assembly)

? The Province of proposes to:

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(Actions to be concretized in the Provincial Project)

Conclusion

*“If we invoke the Mother of God, things can only go well,”*⁹ St. Vincent used to affirm. To her, Jesus’ best disciple, we entrust our commitments on the road to identification with Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, to whom our Constitutions continually refer us.

Rome, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 2003

⁹ SV XIV, 126.