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Work Accomplished by the Preparatory Commission for the 40th General Assembly 2004

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Vincentiana, July-October 2004

Reports to the 40th General Assembly

Work Accomplished by the Preparatory Commission for the 40th General Assembly 2004

by Manuel Ginete, C.M.

Member of the CPAG 2004

5.VII.2004

Introduction

In his letter of 8 June 2002, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Robert P. Maloney, C.M., officially convoked the 40th General Assembly, to be held in Rome, from 5-29 July, with the following theme:

“Our Vincentian identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — an evaluation and three challenges for the future.”¹

In the same letter, Fr. Maloney announced the appointment of the Preparatory Commission (CPAG 2004), with the following members:

Corpus Delgado (Zaragoza)
Manuel Ginete (Philippines)
Jorge Pedroza (Mozambique)
John Sledziona (New England)
Simão Valenga (Curitiba)

This Commission worked in two sessions, the first in June 2002, and the second in December 2003. What follows is a brief account of the Commission’s tasks and accomplishment.

First Session

The Commission’s first meeting took place in the General Curia from 3-9 June 2002. The focus of this session was generally to attend to the major concerns of the General Assembly as listed in

¹ Cf. *Vincentiana* (May-June 2002) 126-127.

Constitution articles 137-142, and specifically to help the provinces prepare for the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. To accomplish these objectives we first of all reflected on the Assembly's theme, paying particular attention to possible guidelines on how to evaluate our appropriation of the Constitutions in the last 20 years and on the principal challenges the future holds for the Congregation. Secondly, we considered the points brought out in the evaluation of the immediately previous General Assembly of 1998,² such as the *Directory*, schedule, liturgy, social activities, postulates, etc.

At the end of our first session, the following had been accomplished:³

1. **Consultation Document** for the use of the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. This document consisted principally of
 - Questions concerning the evaluation of the aspects of our life (vocation, apostolic activity, community life, spiritual life, formation, co-responsibility, subsidiarity, active participation, and temporal goods).
 - Questions also on the principal changes in Church and society in the last 20 years, as well as questions on three challenges for the future of the Congregation of the Mission.⁴
 - A Suggested Process for conducting the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.
 - Finally, some practical recommendations on the transmission of the provincial responses to the CPAG.
2. All the above accompanied our **letter to the Visitors** (30 June 2002), together with two suggestions, one for the Certificate of the Election of Delegates for the General Assembly and another for the Presentation of Postulates to the Assembly.

² An earlier evaluation of the implementation of this Assembly's commitments by the provinces was made during the Visitors' Meeting in Dublin in June 2001.

³ Cf. *Vincentiana* (May-June 2002) 128-139.

⁴ Although the GA's theme speaks only about an evaluation and three challenges, the Preparatory Commission felt that we can best appreciate our attempt at living the new Constitutions since their proclamation, and understand the challenges facing us, from the framework of the social and ecclesial developments in this same period. We were well aware that reflection on these changes had been done in previous assemblies and meetings. However, it seemed propitious to put our life and future again in these contexts. Cf. Footnote no. 3 of the Consultation Document.

The other matters on the *Directory*, liturgy, etc., were, for lack of time, tabled for further study of the members, in the hope that at our second meeting, we would have more opportunity to discuss them and thus suggest possible modifications, where needed.

Thus, the Commission understood the theme of the General Assembly 2004 to consist principally in taking a close look at our Vincentian identity today, making an evaluation of it, in the light of the changes in society and the Church, with a view towards the challenges that confront us at this time in our history.

Second Session

Our next meeting took place, again in the General Curia, from 1-11 December 2003. The date was precisely scheduled after the Provincial Assemblies, from which several matters were expected. The focus of our second session was to prepare more immediately for the General Assembly and to attend to matters we had tabled from our first session. The following is what the Commission did:

1. *Drew up the list of the General Assembly's ex-officio members, elected delegates and their substitutes*, the last two from the Minutes of the Provincial Assemblies and confirmed by the respective Visitors themselves.⁵
2. *Made a synthesis of the Responses (to the Consultation Document) from the Provinces*. A copy of this was sent last April to the Visitors and delegates, by e-mail as well as regular post, which hopefully you have with you. As indicated in this document, we have (perhaps for the first time in quite a while) a perfect submission rate from 46 Provinces, and 5 Vice-Provinces and, additionally, replies also from the International Missions in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and from the Student Assembly of the Northern Zone of CLAPVI. More than simply a tabulation of data, the synthesis affords us a clear view of the hopes and joys, the aches and pains of living our Vincentian identity in this vastly changed world of ours. As I am sure you have all experienced, reading the synthesis warms our hearts at the prospect of a Congregation, struggling, yet fully committed to Vincent's charism, on behalf of the poor.
3. *Wrote a draft of the **Documentum Laboris** for the 40th General Assembly*. After reflecting on the provincial

⁵ From December 2003 up to June 2004, there have been changes in this list, primarily due to the appointment of new Visitors.

responses, the Commission set out to draft a Working Document. You also have a copy of this sent last April. At a later time this week, Fr. John Sledziona, a member of the CPAG 2004, will make a presentation on this document.

4. *Put together the postulata for the Assembly.* There are 30 postulata submitted by provinces and individual confreres. The indications we sent to the different provinces seemed to have helped since most of the postulata arrived in the appropriate form, without the need to search for these in the Minutes of the Provincial Assemblies themselves. The special Commission responsible for the postulata will make a presentation at the appropriate time during the Assembly.
5. *Revised the Assembly Directory.* As in the preparation for the 1998 Assembly, the Superior General and his council had earlier looked through all the suggestions on it from that previous Assembly and, shortly thereafter, came up with possible amendments to it. The Preparatory Commission discussed these and other suggestions. A copy of the proposed *Directory for the 40th General Assembly (2004)* was sent earlier. This same will be presented by another member of the Preparatory Commission, Fr. Corpus Delgado. For the changes introduced to the *Directory of 1998*, the Assembly's approval will be sought.
6. *Drew up a proposed schedule and agenda for the Assembly*, including the elections of the Superior General, the Vicar General, and the other Assistants General. In doing so, the Commission took into consideration the discussion of the theme, talks on specific topics by invited guests, as well as the needs of the continental groups. We have tried to balance work with leisure. We are well aware, of course, that the General Assembly, being the supreme authority in the Congregation,⁶ has the final say on how it organizes its work. Fr. Jorge Pedroza, another member of the CPAG 2004, will present the schedule later.
7. *Made suggestions on other matters like liturgy, translation, social activities, personal information sheet, etc.* A number of the recommendations from the 1998 Assembly made mention of the need to have meaningful liturgies, efficient translation, and more time for formal and informal

⁶ Cf. *Constitutions*, 137.

fellowship among confreres from different countries. Some of these are already being carried out and are now in place in the Assembly's schedule. Fr. Simão Valenga of CPAG 2004 will brief us on liturgical matters in a short while.

Conclusion

As we conclude the task entrusted to us as the Preparatory Commission for this Assembly, we wish:

First of all, to express our gratitude and appreciation to Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., our Superior General, and his council, for their confidence in our capabilities, their total availability when we needed advice, and their openness to our suggestions. Our thanks to the special commission from the Curia, composed of Frs. Józef Kapuściak, José María Nieto, and Elmer Bauer, and their staff, who collaborated with us in communicating to the provinces the documents, and facilitating the retrieval of their responses. Our gratitude as well to all the confreres at the General Curia for the warm hospitality they afforded us during our two sessions.

Secondly, we wish to recognize and express thanks for the valuable cooperation of the Visitors and the confreres of each province and vice-province for meeting the deadlines we had set and thus making our task easier and our reflection enriching.

Finally, we wish all of you fruitful work that will inspire all the confreres in the Congregation and motivate us to bring closer to reality the vision of our Father, Vincent de Paul. It has been a distinct privilege for us, members of the Preparatory Commission, to undertake this task in service of the entire Congregation. We have presented to you our work, and we trust you will find it worthy of your kind attention.

On behalf of the CPAG 2004, once again, thank you.