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## Life Behind the Numbers: Data Concerning the Reality of the Congregation of the Mission

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# Life Behind the Numbers: Data Concerning the Reality of the Congregation of the Mission

by José María Nieto, C.M.

*Secretary General*  
7.VII.2004

## I. Introductory Observations

### **Current and historical data from the time of the approbation of the Constitutions, 1980**

The Preparatory Commission asked me to give you some figures about the Congregation of the Mission, both current, 2004, and historical, from the time of the approbation of the new Constitutions (1980). By including in the formulation of its theme the expression, “after having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years,” this Assembly implied in some way a kind of historical reflection. For this, the following figures try to present the current situation and in a certain way the reality of recent decades. Nevertheless, I do not intend to offer you detailed statistical information, only some of the more meaningful data.

### **Behind the numbers there are real people**

Behind the numbers that we examine, there are individual confreres, local communities, vice-provinces and provinces. Behind them there is life and spirit, Vincentian energy and weakness, faithfulness and unfaithfulness to our charism, human and community joys and fatigue, and successes and problems in our apostolates. These complex realities cannot be expressed just in numbers, and so they should be read with realism and depth so as not to relegate them to the shade.

### **The data cannot reflect our diversity**

In addition, mere numbers cannot contain or reflect the rich diversity of the Congregation and its provinces. We have to keep in mind that the Congregation is organized into 52 provinces, vice-

provinces and regions, spread over 85 countries. Each region of the Congregation, each province and vice-province is different (in its provincial history, the median age of the confreres, its economic resources, etc.). For this reason, the figures can have a very different meaning or represent a very diverse reality in treating one province or another.

### **Selected data**

The perspectives needed to describe our reality are many and, as a result, statistics and numbers could go on forever. For practical reasons, I have chosen only a few numbers, and these are certainly limited, incomplete and partial. I might have chosen other distinct ones or even added more, and in that case, the profile of the Congregation would look a little different than what might be deduced from the data I am presenting. Although it is risky to select only some data, I hope that what I am offering you will help you to reflect on the past, the present, and the near future of our Congregation.

### **Statistics to take home**

The numbers I am presenting to you make no technical or professional pretensions. It is possible, of course, that some numbers may “wobble” when you compare one section with another. I have avoided making interpretations in these data, but I invite others to do so, keeping in mind that our history is in the hands of the Lord more than in our own.

### **Sources and bibliography**

The source of these figures is the statistical reports that each province sends in yearly to our General Curia. In the General Secretariat we draw up an annual report on the Congregation on the basis of those reports. This is published each year in *Vincentiana* and it is sent to the Holy See in the form that it asks us to use.

If you want further information on this subject, you can consult several interesting articles in *Vincentiana*, especially the following:

- JAMES W. RICHARDSON, “The State of the Congregation,” in *Vincentiana*, 1980, pp. 103-112.
- Tabula Statistica 1980-1986, *Vincentiana*, 1986, pp. 450-453.
- JOSÉ-ORIOL BAYLACH, “Evolution numérique des membres de la C.M. (1625-1989),” in *Vincentiana*, 1989, pp. 326-329.

- E. AMYOT D'INVILLE, "Statistical Report on the Congregation of the Mission," in *Vincentiana*, 1998, pp. 234-252.
- Annual Reports on the Congregation of the Mission, *Vincentiana* (various years and numbers).

## II. Our present condition: 1998-2003

In this section, in figures 1 to 8, I will try to present some answers to questions like: How many are we? Are we growing or declining? What is the rate of our increase or decline? Where are we located? What are our ministries?

### 1. Incorporated members 1997-2003 (Figures 1 and 2)

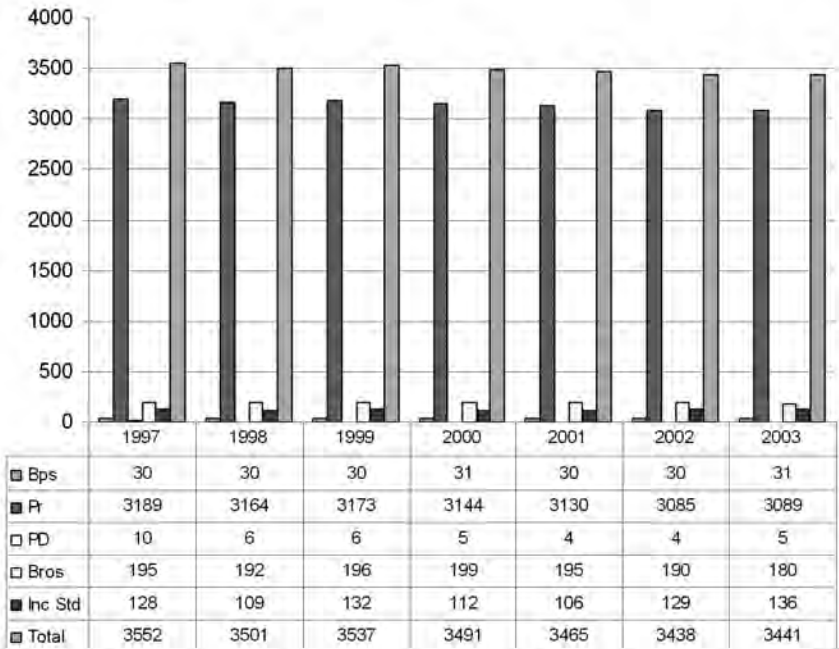
Figures 1 and 2, "Incorporated members 1997-2003," reflect the situation of the number of members incorporated during the few months before the last General Assembly (1998) up to the present. For these, I use as my reference the date of 31 December for each of those years. The title "Incorporated members" refers to all those who have **taken vows in the C.M.**, whether bishops, priests, permanent deacons, brothers or students not yet ordained priests. Allow me to make some comments on this. Perhaps you will be able to make your own.

**Overall, the Congregation keeps diminishing; however, it is diminishing at a slower rate.** In addition, as we will see, it is growing smaller in some continents, but larger in others.

During the past six years (from 31/12/1997 to 31/12/2003) we have lost, in total, **111 confreres**. This means an average reduction of 18.5 confreres yearly, that is, **0.53% a year**. This decline occurs because the number of those taking vows each year is less than the number of those who die, and or cease to belong juridically to the Congregation. Nonetheless, members who are absent, legitimately or

		Bps	Pr	PD	Bros	Inc Std	Total
31/12/97	<b>1997</b>	30	3189	10	195	128	<b>3552</b>
31/12/98	<b>1998</b>	30	3164	6	192	109	<b>3501</b>
31/12/99	<b>1999</b>	30	3173	6	196	132	<b>3537</b>
31/12/00	<b>2000</b>	31	3144	5	199	112	<b>3491</b>
31/12/01	<b>2001</b>	30	3130	4	195	106	<b>3465</b>
31/12/02	<b>2002</b>	30	3085	4	190	129	<b>3438</b>
31/12/03	<b>2003</b>	31	3089	5	180	136	<b>3441</b>
<b>Diff:</b>		<b>Tot: - 111</b>	<b>An: - 18,5</b>	<b>‰: 0,53</b>			

Figure 2: Incorporated Members 1997-2003



not, are counted in the total of the members of the Congregation. On 31 December 2003, those absent amounted to 166 (cf. *Vincentiana*, 2004, p. 78).

This total decline happened in four of the last six years (1998, 2000, 2001 and 2002); nevertheless, and this is significant, in 1999 and 2003 we grew a little.

## 2. Incorporated members by continents 1997-2003 (Figures 3, 4 and 5)

These figures show the distribution by continents or regions of incorporated members. The distribution of confreres between 1997 and 2003 is very similar; if we consider percentages. Of the five regions, there was a proportionate decline in Europe (from 44% to 43%) and the USA (from 14% to 12%); whereas other regions showed a proportionate increase: Latin America (from 23% to 24%), Asia-Pacific (from 13% to 14%) and Africa (from 6% to 8%). A little less than half of the Congregation is in Europe; about one-fourth is in Latin America; and one third is distributed among the USA, Asia-Pacific and Africa.

Figure 3 shows the increase or decline of incorporated members in the various continents. According to the data, in the last six years, the incorporated members of the Congregation grew in Africa (+ 74) and in Asia-Pacific (+ 20). On the other continents, the incorporated members declined: Latin America (- 6), USA (- 88) and Europe (- 120). These three figures might also indicate the mobility of confreres between one region and another, but this figure seems small.

Figure 3: Incorporated Members, Regions 1997-2003						
	Africa	Asia-Pacific	USA	Lat. Am.	Europe	Total
1997	196	464	494	806	1593	3553
1998	244	493	464	818	1534	3553
1999	260	449	448	824	1549	3530
2000	276	405	437	805	1499	3422
2001	260	487	422	815	1477	3461
2002	269	479	406	807	1470	3431
2003	270	484	406	800	1473	3433

Figure 4:  
Incorporated Members 1997 - Regions

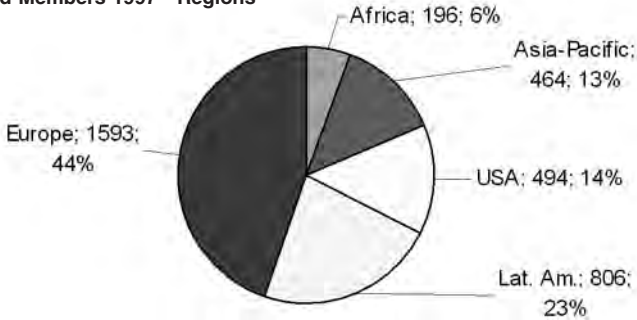


Figure 5:  
Incorporated Members 2003 - Regions

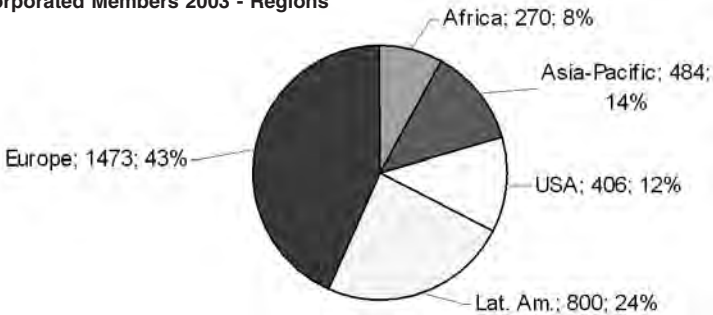


Figure 6: CM Apostolates 1997-2003

		31/12/97	%	31/12/03	%	(%+)
1.	Popular Misions	PM	129	3,81	104	3,17
2.	Missionary parishes or sectors	MP	178	5,26	200	6,10
3.	Parishes	PAR	903	26,72	886	27,06
4.	Pilgrimage shrines	PIL	72	2,13	48	1,46
5.	Seminaries and clergy formation	SEM	196	5,80	169	5,16
6.	CM Formation programs	FRM	177	5,23	201	6,13
7.	Missions Ad Gentes	AG	193	5,71	185	5,65
8.	Daughters of Charity (Directors, chaplains)	DC	135	3,99	133	4,06
9.	Schools (primary, secondary, higher, professional)	SCH	244	7,22	208	6,35
10.	Mass Media (publications, radio, TV)	MED	29	0,85	31	0,94
11.	Special Studies	STD	78	2,30	81	2,47
12.	Chaplains (hospitals, immigrants, groups, military)	CHP	202	5,97	167	5,10
13.	Chaplains: Lay Vincentian Groups (V. Family)	FAM	37	1,09	59	1,80
14.	Direct service of the poor	SER	36	1,06	43	1,31
15.	Manual work	MAN	64	1,89	35	1,06
16.	Administration	ADM	151	4,46	138	4,21
17.	Retired, ill, convalescent	RET	366	10,83	326	9,95
18.	Others	OTH	84	2,48	94	2,87
19.	Absent from the Congregation	ABS	105	3,10	166	5,07
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3379</b>	<b>99,9</b>	<b>3274</b>	<b>99,92</b>

### 3. Ministries 1997-2003 (Figures 6, 7 and 8)

The theme of our ministries could give rise to many discussions. However, I will indicate only what these figures show:

- a large diversity in ministries and works (19);
- few significant changes between 1997 and 2003;
- that some ministries and works employ a major percentage of our members: parishes (27%), retired and infirm (10%), schools (6%), formation of our own members (6%);
- an increase in the number of absent members: from 105 (3.10%) in 1997 we have grown to 166 (5.07%) in 2003.

Figure 7: Apostolates 1997

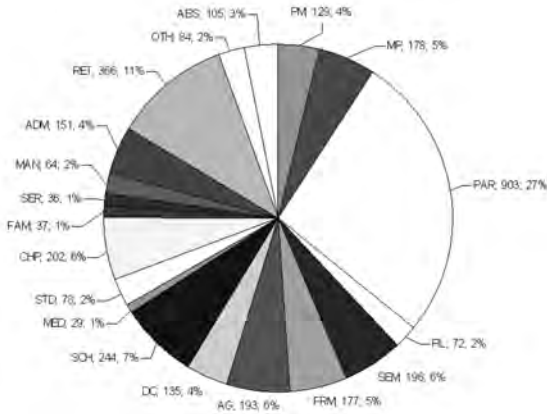


Figure 8: Apostolates 2003

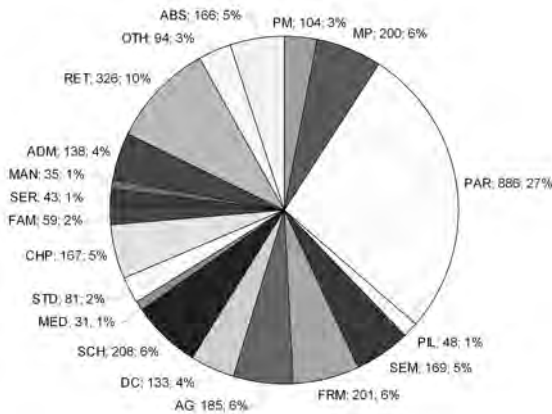
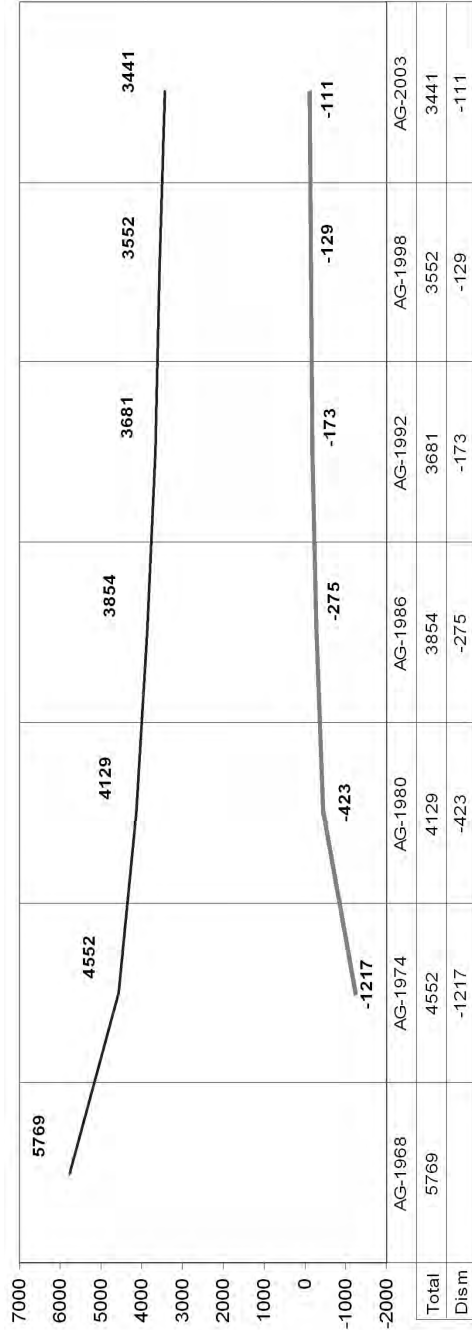




Figure 9: Incorporated Members 1967-2003

	Bps	Pr	PD	Bros	Inc Std	Total	6	%	1	%
AG-34, 1968	26	4395		527	821	5769				
AG-35, 1974	27	3995		472	676	4552	-1217	-21,10%	-202,8	4,43%
AG-36, 1980	29	3652	3	344	101	4129	-423	-10,00%	-70,0	1,69%
AG-37, 1986	31	3433	8	288	94	3854	-275	-6,70%	-45,8	1,19%
AG-38, 1992	30	3267	7	236	141	3681	-173	4,50%	-28,8	0,78%
AG-39, 1998	30	3189	10	195	128	3552	-129	3,60%	-21,5	0,60%
AG-40, 2004	31	3089	5	180	136	3441	-111	3,20%	-18,5	0,53%

Figure 10: Decline C.M. 1967-2003



### III. Our past

#### 1. Incorporated members 1967-2003 (Figures 9 and 10)

##### **From the period after Vatican II and the approval of our Constitutions to today.**

Figures 9 and 10 show the number of incorporated members that the Congregation has had during approximately the last 40 years, from 31/12/1967 to 31/12/2003. These accompany, in six-year periods, the dates of the last seven General Assemblies, 1969, 1974, 1980, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2004.

During these years, the Congregation declined in the number of its members. In the four columns at the right of figure 9, you will notice the total of the decline for each six-year period, (6), the percentage of the corresponding decline (%), the median annual decline in this six-year period (1) and the corresponding percentage of annual decline (%).

In figure 10, "C.M. Decline 1967-2003," you will be able to see that the declining line is constant from 1967. This decline, however, seems to be slowing each time, and the last six-year period (1997-2003) shows the least decline.

Since a little after the end of the Second Vatican Council (1968) until the end of 1973, in only six years, there was a terrible loss of 1217 members. The decline was 423 in the next six years, 1974-1979, just before the moment of the approval of the new Constitutions. Afterwards, the decline was slower: 275 between 1980 and 1985; 173 between 1986 and 1991; 129 between 1992 and 1997; and 111 between 1998 and 2003. We keep diminishing, but each year we are diminishing less and at a slower rate.

#### 2. Our numerical evolution throughout history (Figures 11 and 12)

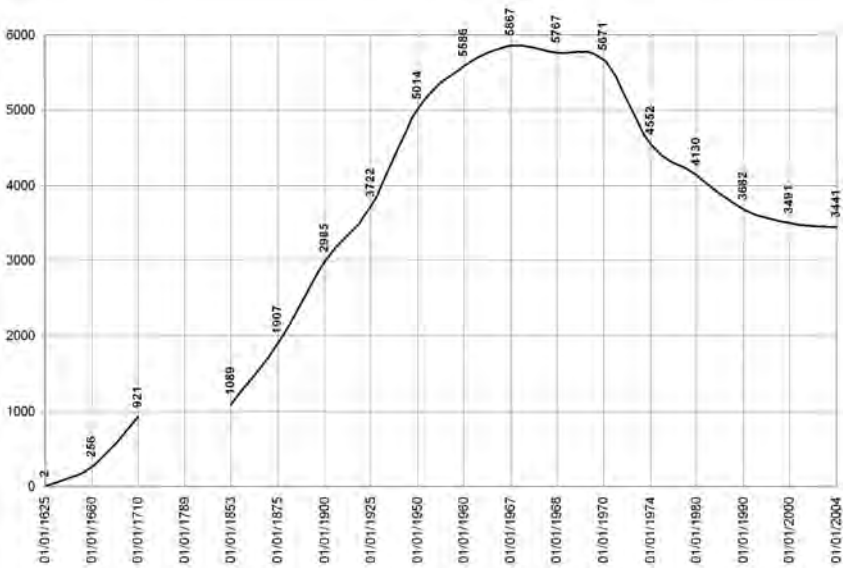
I present to you now, by way of illustration, a historical graph (figures 11 and 12) taken from Fr. JOSÉ-ORIOI BAYLACH, "Evolution numérique des membres de la C.M. (1625-1989)," in *Vincentiana*, 1989, pp. 326-329.

In these figures we can see that, from our beginning in 1625 until 1966, our tendency was a constant rise in total members. For nearly three and half centuries, there was continual growth. At one point, between 1950 and 1966, this growth became a vocational explosion. In those 16 years, the Congregation grew from 5014 members (beginning in 1950) to 5867 (at the beginning of 1966); an increase of 853 incorporated confreres, approximately 16%.

Then, after the Council, the Congregation suffered a sharp decline. The vocation explosion of the former period became a sudden

01/01/1625	1625	2	01/01/1960	1960	5586
01/01/1660	1660	256	01/01/1967	1967	5867
01/01/1710	1710	921	01/01/1968	1968	5767
01/01/1789	1798		01/01/1970	1970	5671
01/01/1853	1853	1089	01/01/1974	1974	4552
01/01/1875	1875	1907	01/01/1980	1980	4130
01/01/1900	1900	2985	01/01/1990	1990	3682
01/01/1925	1925	3722	01/01/2000	2000	3491
01/01/1950	1950	5014	01/01/2004	2004	3441

Figure 12: Incorporated Members - C.M. History



bloodletting. The 5867 members of 1966 declined to 4129 at the beginning of 1980. In the next 14 years, the Congregation declined by 1738 members, or nearly 30%.

In these last decades, from 1980, when the new Constitutions were approved, until the end of 2003, the Congregation has continued to decline slowly, as we have just seen. We went from having 4129 members at the beginning of 1980 to 3441 at the end of 2003: that is, 688, or 17%, fewer. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future we will stop declining and may even grow moderately, as already happened in the years 1999 and 2003.

### IV. Our future: admitted members of the Congregation

#### 1. Admitted members 1997-2003 (Figures 13 and 14)

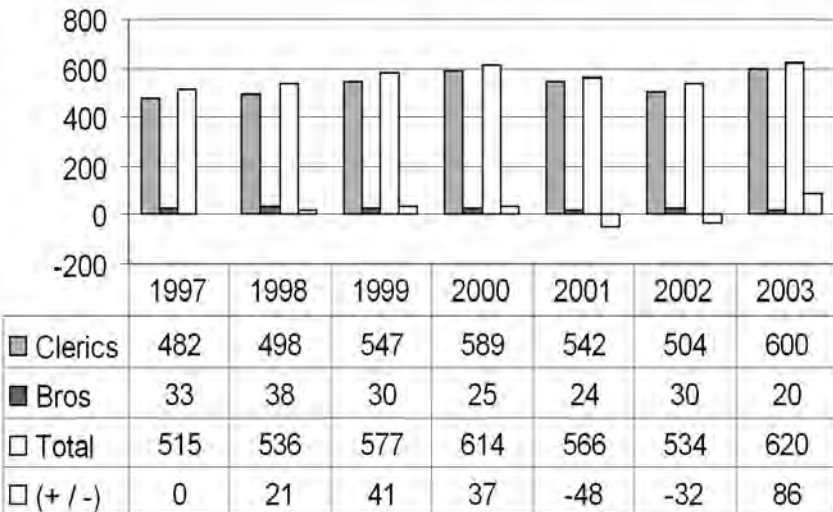
“Admitted members” of the Congregation refer to all those who are currently making their Internal Seminary, or who have already made it, but who have not yet taken vows.

Figures 13 and 14 show how many admitted members we have, and the tendency of increase or decline. In 1997, there were 515 admitted members; at the end of 2003, there were 620. This is the good news: the admitted members grew by 105 members, that is, by 20%.

**Figure 13: Admitted Members 1997-2003**

	Clerics	Bros	Total	(+ / -)
1997	482	33	515	0
1998	498	38	536	21
1999	547	30	577	41
2000	589	25	614	37
2001	542	24	566	-48
2002	504	30	534	-32
2003	600	20	620	86
				<b>105</b>

**Figure 14: Admitted Members 1997-2003 (+ 105)**



**2. Admitted members by regions: 1997 and 2003  
(Figures 15 and 16)**

These figures show in which continents or regions we have admitted members. In some way they also show where our short-term future is in terms of human resources.

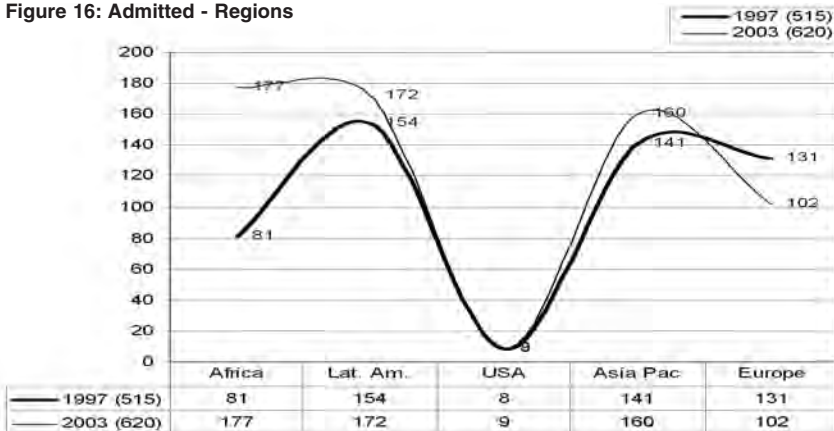
It must be said that these figures do not reflect precisely the real situation. There are, for example, some cases that should be kept in mind. The Province of Paris has 25 admitted members, for the most part in Vietnam (Asia) and in Cameroon (Africa), but they are nevertheless counted as admitted members in Europe. Likewise, the admitted members in the Eastern Province and the Midwest Province of the USA are counted as part of North America, whereas they are either in Panama (Eastern) or Kenya (Midwest).

In any case, the tendency is clear enough. In some regions, we see an increase of admitted members: Africa (+ 96 admitted), Asia-Pacific (+ 19) and Latin America (+ 18). In other regions, there is a decline: Europe (- 29) and USA (- 1).

**Figure 15: Admitted Members 1997, 2003 - Regions**

	1997	1997	2003	2003
Africa	81	15,00%	177	28,54%
Lat. Am.	154	29,90%	172	27,74%
USA	8	1,50%	9	1,45%
Asia Pac	141	27,37%	160	25,80%
Europe	131	25,40%	102	16,45%
	<b>515</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>99,98%</b>

**Figure 16: Admitted - Regions**



Perhaps this will be the near-future tendency: an increase in the total number of admitted members, a continuing increase in admitted members in the regions where they are already growing today (Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America), and a decline — we wish this tendency would change — in admitted members in Europe and the USA.

\* \* \* \* \*

I hope that these numbers will help us to look at our past with thanks, our present with wisdom, and our future with hope, as we try to follow with docility the call of God's Providence to evangelize the poor.

Thank you very much.