

7-2004

## Work of the Assistants General

Jozef Kapusciak C.M.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kapusciak, Jozef C.M. (2004) "Work of the Assistants General," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 48: No. 4, Article 15.  
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol48/iss4/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentiana by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact [digitalservices@depaul.edu](mailto:digitalservices@depaul.edu).

# Work of the Assistants General

by Józef Kapuściak, C.M.

*Assistant General*

*16.VII.2004*

## *Preliminary notes*

1° The Preparatory Commission of the General Assembly asked me to make a presentation on the work of the Assistants General. Given that I only have 15 minutes available, I will present here in the hall an abbreviated version of my talk; you, however, will receive the complete text of this talk.

2° The Vicar General and the other two Assistants General have spoken before me of this work, so they have already said, in part, that which is announced in the title of my presentation. In addition, each of us prepared his talk on his own, so some repetition is unavoidable; there will even be some in my talk and I ask you to excuse me.

## **1. Introduction**

According to the Constitutions of our Congregation, there must be “at least four” Assistants General (C 116, § 2), including the Vicar General, who “elected vicar general automatically becomes also an assistant general” (C 109). One of the Assistants, as required by the Statutes, “has special responsibility for the foreign missions” (S 57). All the Assistants General “constitute of the council of the superior general” (C 115).

Their task is that of helping, “by their labor and advice,” the Superior General “in the government of the Congregation in order to promote the unity and strength of the Congregation, to assure the effective implementation of the Constitutions and decisions of the General Assembly, and to foster collaboration among all the provinces in advancing the works of the Congregation” (C 115).

As defined, the work of the Assistants is accomplished, in practice, in the General Curia and outside it. In order to describe it, allow me to use, as a motto, the words that Louis Abelly attributes to

St. Vincent (obviously narrowing and modifying the sense a little), that is, that the Assistants General are “like Carthusians in their house and like Apostles outside it.”<sup>1</sup>

### ... CARTHUSIANS IN THEIR HOUSE...

## 2. Work of the Assistants General in the General Curia

There are various types and forms of work that the Assistants General do in the General Curia.

1. *Participating in the meetings of the General Council.* The principal work is that of participating in the sessions of the General Council. There are two types of General Council meetings: a) those called *ordinary* councils, which last a half day, more or less, and b) those called *tempo forte* councils, which last five or six days in a row. These latter take place four times a year, usually at the beginning of March, June, October and December. The Superior General, at the beginning of his mandate, sets the dates for all the *tempo forte* councils. Thus all the Assistants General have to schedule their activities in order to be able to participate in them always. The Superior General, however, convokes the *ordinary* councils when the situation demands (sometimes once a week, sometimes two or three times). Thus, not all the Assistants are able always to be present for them, because some of the Assistants might be, for example, making a canonical visitation of a province. In the past six years, that is, from the last to the present General Assembly, we have had a total of 147 ordinary councils and 23 *tempo forte* councils. I participated in 131 ordinary councils and all the *tempo forte* councils.

The work strictly connected with the council meetings is not limited solely to participation in the discussions and in the decisions made within the General Council. These also require a prior preparation on the part of the Assistants General through reading the documents (sometimes quite numerous) relative to the matters that will be treated during the council session. There is, moreover, work to be done after the council session. This consists of: 1° drafting some of the letters by which the Superior General communicates to the provinces or persons concerned the decisions made during the council meeting; 2° contacting the confreres concerned to ask them if they will accept a duty (e.g., as Director of a Province of the Daughters of Charity), and

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf., L. ABELLY, *La Vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, Book I, Chapter XXII, Paris 1664, p. 100.

3° writing an appropriate follow-up memorandum for the General Council.

2. *Examining documents coming from the provinces, vice-provinces, and international missions.* All the provinces, vice-provinces and international missions send the Superior General various documents: the Acts of the Assemblies, the Provincial Norms, the Provincial Plans, the reports of canonical visitations by the Visitors, etc. Some of these documents are sent solely for his information; others, however (as, for example, the Provincial Norms or, in the case of the international missions, the Community Plan), are presented for approval. Documents of this latter type, before being subjected to examination by the General Council, usually are examined and commented on in writing by one of the Assistants General who, at the request of the Superior General, follows the province, vice-province or international mission from which the given document comes. It is also his task to communicate to the concerned Visitors and confreres the decisions made in council or to ask for further information with regard to the matter being treated.
3. *Contributing to the drafting of documents of the Congregation.* One of the activities of the General Council is that of drafting documents useful for the life of our Congregation. In the past six years, that is, from the last to the present General Assembly, the General Curia published the following documents: a) Study of the Superior General on the various forms of association by groups and individual persons with our Congregation<sup>2</sup>; b) *Ratio Missionum* for the Congregation of the Mission<sup>3</sup>; c) *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*.<sup>4</sup> The entire General Council (thus also the Assistants General) gave its contributions to the drafting of these documents either by work on the special Commissions, or by gathering material, or by a critical reading of the documents in the various phases of their development, or by bringing forward corrections or modifications to the text.

Personally, a few months ago, I made my contribution to a new, revised and updated edition of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, working on the Commission specially formed by the Superior General.

4. *Collaborating in the preparation of the Visitors' Meetings and the General Assembly.* As is known, the General Curia organized in the past six years: a) a meeting of all the Visitors of the

---

<sup>2</sup> R.P. MALONEY, "On Associating Groups and Persons with the Congregation of the Mission," in *Vincentiana* 43 (1999) 111-125.

<sup>3</sup> "Ratio Missionum," in *Vincentiana* 46 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> "Practical Guide for the Local Superior," in *Vincentiana* 47 (2003).

Congregation (this meeting was held in Dublin in the month of June 2001); *b*) moreover, it organized three meetings of new Visitors dedicated to the study of the *Practical Guide for the Visitor* (in December 1999, January 2002 and January 2004). In the first case, the Superior General confided the preparation of the meeting, from the essential side (contents, program, methodology, etc.) to the Commission composed of some Visitors; in the second, instead, to a confrere. But many practical things, such as lodging, reception, places for prayer and work, various services (translators, secretariat, etc.), are done by a group of members of the General Curia, and in such a group there has always been at least one Assistant General. (Personally, I worked with the Secretary General and the Treasurer General in the preparation of the Visitors' Meeting in Dublin. Fr. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, along with the Secretary General and the Treasurer General, took care of the preparations for the Meeting of New Visitors in Rome).

These observations refer also, in a particular way, to the preparations for the present General Assembly. The Preparatory Commission of the General Assembly, a Commission composed of various Visitors, did the major work (the preparation of the *Documentum Laboris*, the compilation of the synthesis of the replies coming from the provinces, the revision of the *Directory*, etc.). But there remained many other practical things to do and a small Commission from the General Curia, of which I was a member, took care of these. In the last few months, and especially in the last few weeks, we worked hard to guarantee, as far as possible, acceptable conditions for the confreres for their month's stay in Rome and to make their participation in the Assembly more fruitful.

5. *Personal work.* There is also personal work that each Assistant does in view of or as a follow-up to his activity outside the Curia. This work entails principally the preparation and the summary (the conclusion) of the visits or trips of various types.
  - a) The Superior General has assigned to each Assistant ten or so provinces, vice-provinces and international missions to visit. At times an Assistant is invited by a Visitor or sent by the Superior General to participate in a regional meeting (e.g., Meeting of a Visitors' Conference, Formators' Meeting, etc.) or a special celebration (e.g., the centennial of a province). Naturally, such visits and trips must be prepared. This requires, among others: 1° an exchange of correspondence with those responsible to set the dates and programs; 2° the preparation of several talks, homilies, some conferences

to a group of confreres, Daughters of Charity or Vincentian laity; 3° dealing with, in many cases, the paperwork in the embassies to Italy in order to obtain an entrance visa into a country (or entrance visas, if the province is present in more than one country).

- b) After each visit to a province, vice-province or international mission, be it a canonical visitation or another type, every Assistant has these tasks: 1° He must prepare a report for the Superior General and his council on the visit made. 2° In the case of a canonical visitation, the Assistant General must also draft the letters that the Superior General, after having modified them, will send to the Visitor and the confreres of the province or international mission. 3° He writes a brief notice for *Nuntia* on the visit made and the activities that took place.
  - c) Also to be noted is another type of work that depends on the initiative and the personal possibilities of the Assistants, which is that regarding the preparation of spiritual retreats to the confreres or the Daughters of Charity of a province, or that which concerns writing some articles for a Vincentian magazine.
6. *Particular tasks.* There are, moreover, particular tasks that the Superior General asks an Assistant to handle in the General Curia House or in Rome. To me personally, the Superior General has confided the following three particular tasks:
- a) The first task is that of serving as a link between the Congregation of the Mission, the agency "Aid to the Church in Need" and the Collegio Leoniano in the matters which regard principally the scholarships. In practice, this service signifies: 1° Through a circular letter in three languages in November-December, informing the Visitors of needy provinces of the conditions for obtaining scholarships from charitable agencies for confreres who are to study in Rome; 2° Presenting to the agency "Aid to the Church in Need" the requests of the Visitors for scholarships and the required documents (by the month of February); 3° Informing the Visitors, through a circular letter in three languages in March-April, what formalities must be completed to obtain an entrance visa into Italy for a confrere whom the province has decided to send to study in Rome; 4° Going twice a year (mid-November, mid-March) to the agency "Aid to the Church in Need" to pick up the checks for the CM students to whom a scholarship has been granted and

hand these over to the Treasurer General who will take care of depositing them and distributing them to the respective accounts of the provinces for paying the Collegio Leoniano; 5° Meeting the CM students who have received scholarships from the agency "Aid to the Church in Need" (end of May, beginning of June) in order to inform them of the deadline for presenting the request for a "scholarship renewal" and to give them the appropriate forms; 6° Verifying with the agency "Aid to the Church in Need," at the beginning of the school year (end of October), if the CM students or former scholarship holders of the same agency have all their documents in order.

- b) The second particular task, less demanding than the previous one, is that of organizing every year (usually a Sunday before Christmas, in the period preceding the *tempo forte* council meeting), in common accord with the superior of the Curia House, a meeting of the CM priest-students from the Collegio Leoniano with the members of the General Curia House. The usual program for such a meeting includes: a brief conference or discussion on a current theme, a concelebrated Mass (usually presided by the Superior General) and a fraternal meal.
- c) The third particular task is that of accompanying and orienting the new coadjutor brothers who came to work in the General Curia House in these past five years (one Polish and two Slovak). This entails, above all, in helping them to adapt, in organizing a course of Italian language studies for them, in accompanying them in dealing with the various formalities (e.g., residence permit), in introducing them gradually to assuming the responsibilities confided to them, etc.

In addition, I must, even if this task was not specified, translate from Slavic languages into Italian letters written to the Superior General above all by Daughters of Charity but also by confreres and other persons.

- 7. *Varied services for the local community.* Finally, the Assistants General, like other members of the General Curia House, must render other ordinary services to the local community, such as: animating the liturgy and the common prayer, presiding at the Eucharistic celebrations, answering the telephone when the secretariat is closed or the doorman is not working, washing the dishes, setting the table, etc.

**... APOSTLES OUTSIDE IT...**

**3. Work of the Assistants General outside the General Curia**

The range of activities that the Assistants General carry out outside the General Curia is not as great, but no less demanding.

1. *Ordinary canonical visitations.* Among these external activities, the first place is occupied by the canonical visitations to the provinces and vice-provinces. In conformity with N° 51, § 2 of the Statutes, the Superior General has the duty to make such visits at least once during his mandate. There are two principal objects of these canonical visitations: 1° to permit the Superior General to be aware of the situations of the province or vice-province and that of its members; 2° to contribute to the spiritual, apostolic and communitarian animation of the province or vice-province (cf., Statute 51, 2°). The program of an ordinary canonical visitation includes in principle: two meetings with the Provincial Council (at the beginning and at the end of the visitation); a visit to all the houses and, at least, to the principal works of the province; dialogue with each individual confrere; meeting with all the local communities; at times a courtesy visit to the Local Ordinaries; frequently meetings with the representatives of the Vincentian Family (with the Daughters of Charity in particular); some celebrations. It is understandable that the Superior General cannot make such visits personally because the Congregation presently has 46 provinces, five vice-provinces and three missions and more than 500 houses. The Assistants General usually make them in his name. Actually, at the beginning of his mandate the Superior General assigned to each Assistant about ten provinces, vice-provinces and some international missions to visit. Some of these visits last around ten days, others three or four weeks, others still more than one or two months. That depends above all on how big the province is either with regard to the number of confreres and houses, or with regard to the territorial extension. There are, in fact, small provinces that have around ten confreres, three or four houses and are present in a single country (e.g., Cuba, Germany, Hungary). But there are others that have more than a hundred or two hundred confreres, some 20 or 30 houses and carry out pastoral activities in several countries (e.g., Poland, Colombia) or continents (e.g., Paris).

To this category of ordinary visits to the provinces is added visits to the international missions that the Assistants carry out with a certain regularity. They go there to support and encourage the confreres who are part of them and to help them resolve their problems.



Personally, I visited the international mission in Kharkiv in Ukraine and that of Nižnij Tagiĭ, until they became part of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

2. *Extraordinary visitations.* In addition to ordinary visitations, the Assistants General must at times carry out, at the request of the Superior General, extraordinary visits to a province, vice-province, region or group of houses. The reasons for doing such are always very serious (e.g., a great division in the province, a concern about the management of the goods of the province, grave negligence on the level of provincial government, etc.), but, fortunately, this does not happen often. Personally I had to make two visits of this type. The other Assistants made some also.
3. *Occasional visits.* More frequent, shorter and less wearing are the other visits that the Assistants make to the provinces and vice-provinces of our Congregation (sometimes also to those of the Daughters of Charity), accompanying or representing the Superior General for special occasions or events (e.g., centennial of the foundation of a province, inauguration of a seminary or a major social work, gathering of all the confreres, etc.).
4. *Participating in various meetings.* In the last decade, the number of meetings of various types, but especially formation meetings, in the Congregation and in the Vincentian Family has notably increased. In addition to the Meeting of the Visitors of the entire Congregation, which is held every three years, there are annual meetings of the Conferences of Visitors, of formators of a continent or region, of confreres of a province or group of provinces, of representatives of the Vincentian Family, etc. These and other similar meetings are often dedicated to the study of a very current theme or themes. It often happens that on such occasions one of the Assistants General will be invited to give a conference, to lead a discussion, to preside the Eucharistic celebration or, as in the case of the Meeting of the new Visitors, to handle even more modest things.
5. *Particular services.* There are other particular services that the Assistants General perform at the request of the Superior General. Some of these tasks are carried out for a specific period of time (e.g., I was asked to go to CIF to substitute for a month for one of those in charge — my brother Florian — who was gravely ill). Other services, however, are carried out for the entire length of the mandate. For example, Fr. José Antonio Ubillús has carried out this type of service as Delegate of the Superior General to the International Formation Center. This task requires, in practice, that the Assistant General; 1° go at least twice a year to CIF; 2° meet individually with those in charge of CIF and with the participants at the session; 3° hold

a community meeting with all the participants of the session;  
4° prepare a written report for the Superior General.

6. *Preaching retreats.* As I have already pointed out, some Assistants, if their time permits, dedicate themselves from time to time to preaching retreats to the confreres and the Daughters of Charity (in this field, the Vicar General is the unbeatable record holder; in the last six years he has guided some 15 spiritual retreats).

***Should have before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to but to minister... (C 97).***

#### **4. Conclusion**

It is not up to me to judge who of us Assistants are more “*Carthusians in the house*” and who more “*Apostles outside it.*” Moreover, this depends on the sensitivity of each one, on his personal capacities, on his preparation, on his experiences, on the way in which he conceives this duty. I believe, nevertheless, that we all have tried to do our best, considering our work as a help to the Superior General and, in the end, as a service to the Congregation.