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Mission Appeal 2004 (Rome, October 18, 2004)

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Vincentiana, November-December 2004

Mission Appeal 2004

Rome, October 18, 2004
Feast of St. Luke

To all the missionaries of the Congregation

Dear Brothers in St. Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

The Lord calls us to respond in faithfulness to our charism in the light of what Jesus says to us above. The month of October is traditionally known as the month of missions. We began the month by celebrating the feast of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus who is the patron of the missions. The celebration of mission month should animate each of us who are members of the Congregation of the Mission to deepen our own sense of being a missionary.

I would like to make four points in this Mission Appeal.

Evaluation of the international missions

First of all, the General Council hopes, in the next *tempo forte* session, to evaluate the international missions that the General Curia has initiated in recent years in order to improve our service of the poor and the clergy in these and other missions in the future. We want to do this evaluation in and through a questionnaire which will be sent to all the confreres who have been or are members of the international missions.

Prayer for the missions

One of the most important things we can do for the mission as members of the Congregation is to pray. Pray for our own mission and pray for the missions of the Church so that we might be able to bring about, with the grace of God, a change in this world in which we live, fortifying the process of evangelization. In particular, I think of the elderly confreres of our different provinces. There may be times when it is difficult for a missionary to have to curtail his

activities because of age or health, but I would like to encourage and remind all confreres that we never stop being missionaries. Perhaps one of the most efficacious ways that we can live out our missionary identity is in and through our offering of prayers and our own suffering as a support for the missionary efforts of the Congregation throughout the world. Several provinces have a very good practice. Each of the elderly confreres in the infirmary is given a mission to pray for, usually one of the apostolates of the province itself. I recommend that all our elderly and sick confreres throughout the world be assigned a mission, whether it be an apostolate of their province, or one of the international missions, or one of the provinces that is young and growing and needs to be fortified by prayer on the part of our older missionaries.

Financial support for the missions

Another point that I would like to make in this Mission Appeal Letter is the financial support that each of us can give to help continue our missionary efforts. In reviewing the different mission funds that we have, one of the things that struck me is how confreres, on a regular basis, have responded generously to the different mission appeals. In particular, there is one confrere who, on a regular monthly basis, gives a contribution of \$ 20. For some confreres that might not be much, for other confreres that might be a great deal. The amount is not important to me. If each of us could contribute on a regular basis to the mission fund as a way of tithing, this would be very helpful. I invite every confrere to examine his situation to see if he is doing what he can do financially to help the missions.

There is also the possibility that a local community, in its community project, might think of different ways that it could tithe and make sacrifices in order to contribute to the needs of the missions.

I am also deeply edified by the provinces that are blessed economically and which use their resources generously for the needs of developing provinces throughout the world. I encourage those provinces to continue to be faithful to our Constitutions in showing this generosity. Other provinces, that perhaps are not as well off economically, might be able to respond to needs especially in emergency situations. Again, it is not the amount that is important, but the sense of solidarity, recognizing that we are all one Congregation and can show that by helping one another financially when necessary.

Part of my orientation to the finances of the Congregation was a review of the mission funds, IMF 2000 and IMF 2004, that have been set up to help the work of our poorer provinces and missions. I

would like to share with you the progress of these funds and make a simple appeal for a new fund that has been created.

The International Mission Fund 2000 (IMF 2000) began in 1995 and continued receiving donations until the end of 1999. In that time it received a little over \$ 6 million USD in contributions. In 2000, while always maintaining the capital of the fund, we began to distribute annually the income generated by the fund in the June Mission Fund Distribution. In the past four years, this fund has provided more than \$ 1.5 million for over 30 missions and provinces.

After the great success of the IMF 2000 and encouraged by the generous donations of so many provinces and confreres, another fund, the International Mission Fund 2004 (IMF 2004), was created in 2000 with the same purpose as the IMF 2000. At the end of this year this fund will finish receiving donations and begin distribution from its income in 2005. By the end of the year this fund should have around \$ 5 million in donations.

I would like to thank all the provinces, confreres, and foundations who have contributed to these mission funds. Together these funds provide a solid foundation for the continued sustenance of our missionary efforts around the world. We will continue to maintain the capital of both these funds and use their income to support our ministries with the poor, our formation programs, and the care of our sick and infirm confreres in those provinces and missions that do not have adequate financial resources. At the same time I encourage developing provinces to continue to find creative ways of becoming financially independent.

A New Appeal

A more recent effort to support the work of our missionary provinces has been the creation of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO). This office assists poorer provinces and missions with writing grant proposals to funding organizations for their works and needs. The VSO is helping provinces find money for construction projects and creative works with the poor, often projects which require greater financial assistance than can be provided for them in the Mission Fund Distribution.

In general, grant proposals have a greater chance of acceptance if they can provide "matching" funds. That is to say, one approaches the funding agency asking for only a part of the funding of the project, instead of complete funding, having secured some financing for the project from one's own resources or other means. To increase the possibility of receiving funding from aid agencies, the Superior General with his council established the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF). The initial money for the VSF was provided from the funds of

the General Curia and has been used to secure financing from aid agencies for projects and then has been used directly in the completion of those projects. As more and more provinces and missions write to the VSO asking for assistance to find financing to fund their projects, the growth of this fund is necessary to increase their chance of success.

The Vincentian Solidarity Fund is fairly new and we are continuing to seek creative uses for these funds. Currently, the VSO is studying the possibility of funding "microprojects" (projects of \$ 5000 or less) directly from the funds of the VSF for imaginative works with the poor.

It is never easy asking for financial contributions, but seeing how generously the Congregation has responded in the past I ask you, with all simplicity, to reflect on whether individually, or as a local community, or as a province you can make a contribution, small or large, to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. I am enclosing a sheet that will provide you with the instructions as to how this can be done.

Volunteers for the missions

The fourth and final part of my Mission Appeal is a request for volunteers. The number of volunteers to the Mission Appeals has dropped off drastically in recent years. I simply ask confreres to consider the possibility of giving themselves in one way or another to the missions, whether to the international missions or to provinces which are in need of personnel. When Fr. Maloney first began these Mission Appeals 12 years ago, I was struck by the confreres who chose to leave behind traditional works in which they had served for a long time and start a completely new life in some kind of mission experience. That took a great deal of courage. The example of such missionaries has edified me. They themselves speak of how volunteering, leaving behind something known to which they had become accustomed, brought about a complete change in their lives, a change they will never forget, a change which has had a positive impact on helping them deepen their own identity as Vincentian missionaries. So I encourage confreres who have been a long time in a particular work, who feel that there is nothing else they are able to do or who feel very comfortable in what they are doing, to consider this as a call to break away from "the known experience," to leave it behind and move on to something new, giving yourself the opportunity to be completely free, without limits and open to the experience of God's grace in your life as you volunteer for a new mission.

I would like to recall the letter that the Holy Father addressed to me and wrote to us during our General Assembly 2004. He reminded

us to renew our own missionary spirit and at the same time encouraged us to remember our roots as formators and the great need that continues to exist in the Church throughout the world for priestly formation, by which we would be ever faithful to our Constitutions. “Many generations of priests have reason to thank your Congregation for the formation they have received at your hands. The importance of this apostolate cannot be overstated. Consequently it is essential to assign exemplary priests to this work: priests of human and spiritual maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, capable of working with others (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 66). Many Vincentians with these very qualities nobly dedicated themselves to priestly formation in the past. I encourage you to continue this vital mission in the years to come.”

Concretely we need volunteers in the following areas:

1. Solomon Islands

This mission needs English-speaking formators. The bishops have asked us to broaden our presence there in order to have a complete major seminary, adding the three years of theology to the already existing philosophy program. As you know, Fr. Victor Bieler is going there and Fr. Ivica Gregurec from Slovenia just arrived, but there are still not enough formators to serve the seminary adequately.

2. Ecuador

We have received a request from a bishop there to work in a missionary parish in the Vicariate Apostolic of Esmeraldas. This parish includes some 60 far-flung communities, which are not receiving sufficient pastoral attention for lack of personnel. In general, the bishops of Ecuador are still very desirous of the Vincentian presence in the formation of the clergy in their country. The language needed is Spanish.

3. Equatorial Guinea

The Bishop of Ebeyin hopes we can provide a missionary to give continuity to the work that our retired Guatemalan bishop-confrere, Msgr. Jorge Ávila del Águila, gave himself to so generously until he became sick. He made a great impression on the people during the short time he was there and the bishop would like to have the same spirit continued with the help of volunteers. We have the possibility of one volunteer for this country but only if we can come up with two or more others for that mission. The language is Spanish.

4. Moskitia, Honduras

In this area of Central America, the Congregation of the Mission has the strongest Church presence along with the Daughters of Charity. But there is always a need for more volunteers to help support the missionary process that is going on there. There is the possibility that it could be extended beyond the Honduras border to the area of Moskitia in Nicaragua, which is a vast missionary territory.

5. Cuba

Our confreres in Cuba continue to work in difficult circumstances. Because of small numbers, the confreres are spread out much too thin. Some live alone for long periods of time. Some are overworked. Some have become sick. I would like to be able to send more confreres to Cuba in the coming year.

6. El Alto, Bolivia

I would like to be able to send at least two more confreres to El Alto in the coming year. The languages on the mission are Spanish and Aymara. The living conditions are rugged because of the high altitude.

7. Istanbul, Turkey

The Austrian Province has conducted a mission in Istanbul for 120 years. The Visitor is looking for a confrere who would be willing to undertake a two-year educational program in Islamic studies: one year studying the Turkish language and culture in Istanbul and one year studying Islamic theology at the PISAI in Rome (where courses are given in either English or French). The language at our school is German.

8. Sts. Cyril and Methodius

The Vice-Province was formed in 2001 by joining five separate missions in the territory of the former Soviet Union. It still very much depends on the generosity of volunteer confreres from various provinces. The most recent prospect is that we may recover the community house and church in Vilnius, Lithuania, which were confiscated over 50 years ago by the Communist regime. But this will not be possible without new volunteers. Volunteers to the Vice-Province may be asked to go to Vilnius, or to work elsewhere in the Vice-Province, and so release someone else for Lithuania. The official language of the Vice-Province is Russian.

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A Reminder: In the Final Document of the General Assembly, the different Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces made concrete commitments. Please keep in mind those related to apostolate-mission.

I conclude my Mission Appeal by reminding us all to reflect seriously on our own identity as missionaries. May St. Vincent be able to say to each of us what he wrote in 1656 to a Priest of the Mission in Agen: "I thank God for the zeal he gives you for the missions. This attraction, coming from him, can only be very helpful to the people, so long as you are faithful to following it, and this fidelity can only be very advantageous for you, since, by working for the salvation of the poor, you assure your own. I ask Our Lord, who took the trouble to evangelize them himself and the care to call you to the same ministry, to animate you with his Spirit, so that you may acquit yourself of it in his sight and in the way he did" (SV V, 608).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND

Methods for Making a Contribution

Provincial Contributions

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back. These should be sent to:
Elmer Bauer III, C.M.
Treasurer General
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Roma
Italy
2. For Italy and France, the CCP account can be used following exactly the information in the General Catalogue, page 1.
3. Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.

Individual and Local Community Contributions

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back, sent to the address above.
2. Other arrangements can be made via the Provincial Treasurer, who will be acquainted with various methods of transfer.

In every case

1. All gifts received will be acknowledged.
2. If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification.
3. Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money, as described above.

Some Information and Criteria for Those Who Write

1. If you should wish to volunteer, please send your letter in time to arrive in Rome by December 15, 2004.
2. So that I might read the letters all at once and so that they might be carefully organized, would you please address the envelopes as follows:

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
MISSIONS
Congregazione della Missione
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA
ITALY

3. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries. Details will vary according to the particular place to which a confrere is sent.
4. While we have decided that no automatic age cutoff would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.
5. Confreres who volunteer, by sending a letter to the Superior General, should inform the Visitor that they have done so. I will always dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
6. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as what mission you would like to take part in.
7. Even if you have already written in the past, please contact me again. Experience has demonstrated that confreres who are available at one moment might not be available at another, and vice-versa.