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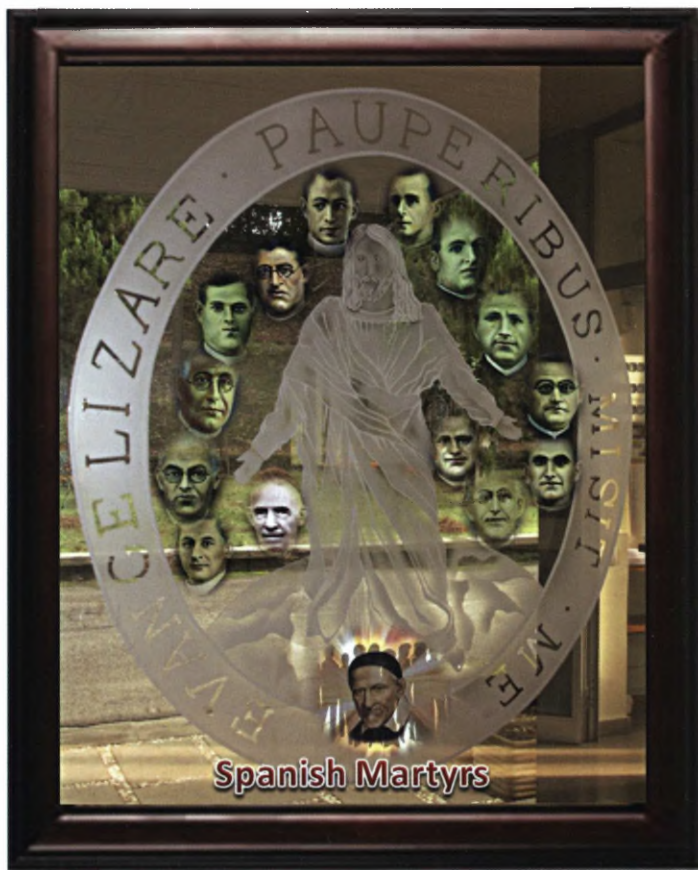
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VINCENTIANA

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October-December 2013



Remembering our Spanish Martyrs and Reconfiguration

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CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

The last issue of *VINCENTIANA* for 2013 provides us an opportunity to look back at not only an exciting, busy year within the Congregation, but to also reflect on an key part of our heritage as a community for mission. The benefits of the July 2013 Visitors Meeting, discussed in the last issue of *VINCENTIANA*, continue to bear fruit as several articles in this issue will attest.

For example, reconfiguration, a major thrust of the 2010 General Assembly and theme for 2013 in the strategic plan for communications, features prominently in this issue. Fathers Hans-Georg Radina and Franz Kangler, Visitors of Germany and Austria, describe how they have methodically worked at achieving reconfiguration among their two provinces, with hope of full unification in January 2015. Fathers Joaquin Gonzalez and Enrique Alagarda, Visitors of Madrid and Barcelona, two of three provinces in Spain entering into reconfiguration, share the story of how and why they and their confreres are moving forward to achieving this goal. And lest we think reconfiguration is limited to the CM, this issue highlights how Daughters of Charity in the USA have carefully managed to come together, uniting four of the five provinces into the new Province of St. Louise. Now, they are now actively planning for their future, forging new ways to serve those living in poverty, while continuing to innovate in their signature works.

The role of Vincentian Family was another major thrust of the General Assembly. This issue highlights four key reports for the Visitors Meeting on collaboration, leadership, service to the poor in India and Haiti, along with hunger initiatives. The concern of the confreres involved and their unwavering level of commitment and involvement with members of the Vincentian Family is inspiring, strengthening our goals of collaboration and empowerment for our charism.

Inspiration is another word one associates with our Founder and charism. As you read Fr. Teodoro Barquin's story of the confreres martyred in the Spanish civil war, the depth of their courage and faith is amazing and humbling. Along with over five hundred other religious, they gave their lives for the faith. The cover of *VINCENTIANA* and other reflections on them in this issue remind us of their enduring heroism, along with the company in heaven of our saints and beati.

Our newest Beati provide a fitting final tribute to this "Year of Faith". And the essay on this subject by Felix Alvarez provides some fine food

for thought and reflection. But those who also give of themselves to the Mission entrusted to the Congregation by the Church "in this life" also continue to show us a shining examples of living faith. Two such confreres come to mind. Fr. Tomaz Mavric, Visitor of the missionary Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, shares his experiences as a life-long missionary. Varghese Thottakamara, our newly ordained Bishop, reflects on his return to his missionary roots in Ethiopia. As you will read, both confreres mirror the words of Our Lord: "Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Mt. 6:21).

A "true treasure" of the Congregation is our Constitutions, which seek not only to *inform* us of who we are, but to *transform* us in deepening the purpose and spirit of our life as Vincentians. With this issue of VINCENTIANA, we will begin a series of reflections on sections of our Constitutions by the Superior General and Assistants General. The year 2014 marks the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of what was called then the "New Constitutions". These reflections can help us all to ponder anew not only the document, but what it means to be a member of the Congregation today. Our focus this issue is on 'Vocation' (nos. 1-9). To get the most out of this experience, it is suggested one read the part of the Constitutions before turning to the reflection.

May the true treasures of our faith; the Lord Jesus, Our Holy Founder, our beloved brothers in community, and God's poor bless and guide us!

FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

“Meditation Moment”

Under this title, *Meditation Moment*, the General Council, along with Vincentiana, offers confreres a series of meditations on themes in our Constitutions essential to our identity. We know that the Constitutions outline our present-day life and vocation. Therefore, in the Constitutions, we find the charism of St. Vincent, an inspiring gift received almost four hundred years ago and adapted to the present era. From this perspective we can say that it is as important to know the content of the Constitutions as Vincent’s writings. We want become knowledgeable about our Constitutions so it becomes the motivating force and source of inspiration for our life.

Fr. Richard McCullen, the Superior General at the time the Church approved our Constitutions in 1984, expressed this idea very well when he stated:

“Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated. We must not be content to leave that delineation on paper alone. The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach to the gospel the poor” (Constitutions, p. 14).

Our new initiative, “Meditation Moment on the Constitutions” points us in that direction. How will this be done? During each Tempo Forte the General Council will reflect on some parts of the Constitutions following themes in the Constitutions as recommended by Vincentiana. Then there will be an exchange of ideas, dialogue, and culling of the various ideas to write this meditation. Hopefully by publishing this in *Vincentiana*, we will encourage and stimulate both individual confreres and local communities to join in shared reflection on this subject.

One last word on how we will approach the Constitutions. These meditations are not meant to be an exhaustive study on the content of our Constitutions. We have many reflections on their history and theological content. Our objective is simple. ***We want to share with you what the Constitutions are saying to us personally, and where we believe our life and our vocation is directed.*** In 2014, we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of our Constitutions. We believe this is a fine way to assist confreres in deepening our appreciation of their value for us.

VOCATION

(Part One, Articles 1-9)

After having read, reflected on and dialogued about the first nine articles of our Constitutions entitled "VOCATION", we came to the conclusion that these articles are very dense. In a few lines they say everything, that is, they provide an excellent summary. Later chapters will develop more profoundly the themes mentioned in these first nine articles.

Vocation: the Constitutions begin with this word with deep biblical roots. If our Congregation exists, it is because God called it to become part of the church. If all of us, as confreres, are part of this Congregation, it is because one day God called us. To maintain this theological insight fresh and alive is like cleaning away the ashes so that the embers of the brazier of our vocation might continue to warm us. St. Paul told Timothy: "*I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God*" (2 Tim. 1:6).

The Constitutions however, do not speak about just any vocation, but rather refer to the Vincentian vocation. In this case, this adjective is important because it defines and enriches the concept, "vocation". Vincentians have been called to follow the Lord not in some general or undefined manner, but in the same way that Vincent de Paul did. The word "Vincentian" delimits, identifies, and orients our concrete manner of living the gospel.

This chapter does not speak of a personal vocation. The Constitutions do this implicitly in each section. Here, the vocation of the Congregation is presented. In Article 9, we distinguish between purpose, nature, and spirit. "Purpose" indicates the reason why the Congregation exists in the Church and world (Constitutions, #1-2). "Nature" defines the Congregation in the Church, and differentiates it from the whole of religious life as a *Society of Apostolic Life* (Constitutions, #3). "Spirit" responds to the style and the concrete manner of ministry and life in the Congregation in accord with specific virtues (Constitutions, ##4-8). We will now reflect on each of these three realities.

1. The Purpose of the Congregation

To be sure, the 'purpose' of our Congregation refers to the relevance of our charism. One of the great concerns of the Church is that of evangelization. From when Pope Paul VI wrote *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Church has ceaselessly convoked people to engage in this process. In 2012 Pope Benedict XVI, following up on the ideas of John Paul II, convoked the Synod of Bishops on the theme of the New Evangelization. In light of the urgent need to evangelize, our Vincentian vocation is most relevant as the Congregation can and ought to contribute to this effort through a specific form of evangelization. While that may

be difficult to do, but such are the popular missions which historically have been important in the life of the Church. Today, there is a need to up-date and renew this service/ministry of evangelization.

At the same time, another great concern of the Church (and of the world) is the situation of poverty which afflicts untold millions of people today. Often, the Church has defined herself as a church of the poor, with a preferential option for the poor. This has been especially true in the meeting of the Latin American bishops in Puebla (1978). In all of this we can see that the Vincentian vocation has two purposes: the mission and charity. The Church's two priorities and the great problems of world which continually create many other problems (such as violence), can only be resolved as we live out our Vincentian vocation.

Many other things could be said about us, including how we live and can improve our mission in the Church, but it could never be said that we have an irrelevant charism. In 1985, Blessed John Paul II gifted us and the Vincentian Family, with the following pearl: "*Your charism is one of indisputable relevance*". The fact that we have such a charism should never become a motive that leads us to cross our arms and to become caught up in the same routine as yesterday. We must actualize our qualities and potential as confreres and communities so that, as stated in article two of our Constitutions, *we open up new ways*. The Church needs the creativity of our Congregation and invites us to imitate the creativity of our Founder. There is certainly no more dynamic article in our Constitutions than the one we are commenting on now.

2. The Nature of the Congregation

With regard to nature, our Congregation is defined in article three as a *clerical society of apostolic life*. In the Church, there are only thirty-six Congregations that fall into that category, including the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Societies of Apostolic Life are characterized in the Church by the fulfillment of their own apostolic purpose. Our apostolic purpose was defined from the very beginning when Vincent stated: *the poor are condemned and dying of hunger*. Those words, internalized by Vincent in a way beyond our imagination, led to the establishments of his foundations, all of which had a clearly defined purpose, such as the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity.

In the second place, Societies of Apostolic Life are characterized by a common life. As this is such an important aspect, we cannot say that community life is a burden or imposed on us from a time long past. Rather, it is an agreed upon structure outlined within the broad framework of our Constitutions and therefore, cannot be neglected. Being "a community for the mission" provides us with a great flexibility to

adapt to any situation. Societies of Apostolic Life tend to the perfection of charity through the observance of their Constitutions. Thus, we need to know and continually deepen our understanding of the Constitutions. Finally, members of the societies of apostolic life do not take religious vows but another form of vows defined by their Constitutions. In our case, the ultimate significance of our vows is not to make us like some religious group, but rather our vows confirm and ratify our vocation as evangelizers of the poor.

We must say something about the word “secular” as a trait of the Congregation. Our secular nature is more than *carrying on its own apostolate in close cooperation with the bishops and diocesan clergy* (Constitutions, 3.2). Being secular is a mark of our identity and therefore gives meaning and a special character to our vocation. Our secular nature gives meaning and a special character to our roots through the dynamic of the Incarnation we are in the midst of the world and involved in all its affairs. Our secular nature gives meaning and a special character to our way of life, for example, we live in residences and not in convents or monasteries. Our secular nature gives meaning and a special character to our commitment to God, as expressed in the evangelization of the poor and reinforced by the vows that we take). Our secular nature gives meaning and a special character to our spirituality (which is quite distinct from any form of “flight from the world”). One of the clear signs of our secular identity is the language, which influences more than one might think or believe because in fact, language can influence reality. We speak in a “secular” manner when referring to the reality “of religious”. We do not use words like *convent, monastery, religious, novitiate, profession of vows, provincial or chapter*. Rather, we speak about *house, missionary, internal seminary, taking of vows, visitor, and assembly*.

3. The Spirit of the Congregation

The spirit is the spiritual identity of the Congregation expressed in article 4-8 of our Constitutions. Those articles present an authentic compendium of our spirituality which is Christ centered (article 5); Trinitarian and trusting in God’s Providence and ministering with a compassionate and effective charity toward those who are poor (article 6); missionary and clothed in the virtues of a missionary (article 7); always searching (article 8). With all of these different points of orientation, here we will focus on two, which we believe are most important.

The first point is that the spirit of the Congregation is a participation in the very spirit of Jesus Christ and thus, *Jesus Christ is the rule of the mission* (article 5), the center of its life and activity. Vincent considered Jesus Christ to be the key to his own spiritual life and therefore, Jesus should have the same importance in our life. But here we are not refer-

ring to the Incarnate Word that Vincent learned about Berulle (i.e., being the Word of the Father, the Word should be adored), but rather we refer to the Incarnate Word who became man, became a human person so that we might learn how to be human persons as we imitate Jesus. Vincent expressed this idea of imitating Jesus when he said that "*we must be clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ*" (CCD: XII: 93). Abelly also places these words on the lips of Vincent: "*Nothing is pleasing to me that is not of Jesus Christ*". This ideal lays the foundation for a Christ centered Vincentian spirit.

As Vincent reflected on the person of Jesus, he highlighted in a special way Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. In contrast to the other spiritualities that dominated the scene during the seventeenth century and might be in vogue in our own era, we must focus on Jesus, evangelizer of the poor. This image of Jesus should make all Vincentians "passionate". It is in this way we interpret the words of Vincent about *clothing ourselves in the spirit of Christ*. Here we note that "passion for Christ" is not the same as "following Christ": "passion for Christ" involves following Christ with zeal, decisiveness, and profound love. For Vincentians, the word "passion" is expressive and significant. If some day we were to discover that we were no longer in love with Jesus, then we would automatically be in love with something else and would have lost our identity, meaning, and strength. In light of the vocational crisis the Congregation experiences in much of the world, in light of discouragement and lack of orientation which are part of our reality, and in light of the limitations each of us experiences, there can be no other solution than to search for Jesus Christ and to do this in a passionate way. It is a crucial link to so many other things.

There is no reason to be fearful because today things change in unimaginable ways and we do not know in what manner our life, our vocation, and Vincentian charism will evolve and develop. However, we do know that passion for Jesus Christ is always an indispensable element for all Christians and for various vocations within the Church. We have no doubt about that.

4. Conclusion

As we conclude this meditation, we refer to article seven of our Constitutions, which indicates that to express the spirit of Christ from a Vincentian perspective, it is necessary to practice the five virtues that, according to Vincent, characterize the missionary: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls. There are great implications in living these virtues. Imagine simplicity shining forth as the splendor of truth in a world wounded by political, economic, and special interests! Imagine humility as an expression of our reaching out to others, our preference of them, and a countersign to rampant

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selfishness! Imagine gentleness removing every form of violence from human relationships! Imagine mortification as it confronts a world of luxury and comfort! Finally, imagine zeal for the glory of God in an era of heightened secularism which tries to eliminate everything related to God from the face of the earth! In such a situation, zeal is very relevant and it coincides with the ardor of the new evangelization.

We are convinced that we should following Jesus Christ in a Vincentian manner and practice the five virtues, as well as our personal contact with people, especially with those who are most abandoned. Taken together, all of this creates a profound joy for the members of the Congregation because it helps them to rediscover in a more profound manner their full identity. At this time in history, when everyone claims the right to fulfillment, our Constitutions point out a direct path for fulfillment as Vincentians.

SUPERIOR GENERAL AND COUNCIL

Edited for publication by JOHN T. MAHER, C.M.

Advent 2013



"...and a little child shall guide them".

Is. 11:6

To all members of the Vincentian Family:

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

This year, 2013, has been one of milestones. We celebrated the "Year of Faith" which coincided with the 50th anniversary of the start of the Second Vatican Council. This was also the year of "the two popes", giving us two unlikely events not seen for centuries: the resignation of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and the election of a non-European, Pope Francis.

However, one milestone of 2013 that touched me deeply was attending the beatification of 42 members of the Vincentian Family in Tarragona, Spain. These Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and a lay-woman all gave their lives for the Catholic faith. As with Vincentian martyrs of past generations, these Spanish Vincentian Family members died as they lived: preaching Jesus Christ in the service of the poor. It is a powerful witness to ponder in this "Year of Faith".

Placed near the end of the calendar year, Advent is a time of hope and renewal. It comes amidst changing seasons with less light and warmth as winter begins. But Advent is the ember of a fire stoking the hearth of the soul to a deeper reality: God is at work in our world, no matter what time or season. And in Jesus Christ, we find a reason for our hope and a way to renewal.

Hope and renewal are sorely needed in today's world. The realities of war, violence, poverty, hunger, and injustice all plague us as we live out the Vincentian charism. However, they are not "problems to be solved" but points of entry into solidarity with the human family. Advent awakens and renews our hearts in hope with Christ, our way, truth, and life.

The Event: Incarnation

Our Advent Scripture readings show the longing of ancient Israel for not only a covenant, but a connection: human contact, to close the gap between heaven and earth. Isaiah foretold that which Christians now know and rejoice in: "*The Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'*" (Isa. 7:14). Before we can welcome 'God with us', we must ready ourselves to receive this great gift. This is where the Advent season – its hymns, readings, and liturgy – assists to prepare to celebrate the Incarnation.

Our Advent readings, coming primarily from the prophet Isaiah and Matthew's Gospel, provide us with a rich scriptural mosaic of God's desires for the human family. Isaiah uses vivid images: scaling the "*mountain of the Lord*" (2:1-3); "*parched deserts*" into "*springs of life*" (35:1-2); and a 'peaceable kingdom', where "*the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb... the calf and young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them*" (11:6-8). Isaiah's images symbolize God's creative power for the good; the Divine desire to bring us healing and hope.

Matthew also present great images for Advent, such as Jesus' call to "*Stay awake... at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come*" (24:42-44); the cry of John the Baptist to "*produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance*" (3:8); and Jesus' work in bringing about God's reign: "*The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them*" (11:5). In these stories of salvation, our Savior becomes one of us to do God's work and save humanity. Let us resolve this Advent to allow these Scriptures to stir our imagination and deepen our identity with the Lord Jesus.

The Result: Transformation

It is not enough to "enjoy" Advent's trappings and bask in the "glory of the Christmas story". Like all moments in the Church's life and liturgy, Advent is a season of formation for transformation. It challenges us to imitate Christ who, "*for your sake became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich*" (2 Cor. 8:9). The poverty Jesus undertook for us and the richness he bestowed on

us came in his incarnation, literally, his “enfleshment” of our human condition. How do we “enflesh” Christ in our lives?

Jesus’ total gift of himself to us sets the standard for discipleship with him and in living out our Vincentian charism. The transforming message of Advent is that the coming and birth of our Savior is God’s ultimate affirmation of the value of humanity and the worth of every person. As Jesus’ disciples, we need to put aside our own quests for status, security, and comfort, and become collaborators with Christ, allowing the needs of the “other” to be our own concern.

The donation of self in love of God and service of neighbor is the greatest gift we can give at Christmas, or at any time of year. To give of ourselves for the good of others, especially to our lords and masters, God’s poor, binds us to Jesus and the human family he redeemed. Advent is a time for transformation to a way of love that shows itself in solidarity with others.

Solidarity with others brings us into oneness with Christ, who came “*not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mk.10:45). In a world where suffering abounds, fear takes hold, and the poor are neglected, belittled, and abused, the “Good News” may seem an empty promise. But when entering into solidarity in Jesus’ name, we affirm God’s love to all, putting our lives at the service of the Gospel. Like our Holy Founders, Vincent and Louise we become “*ambassadors for Christ... God appealing through us*” (2Cor. 5:20).

The Response: Living Vincentian Virtues

A favorite poster I once received was of the back yard of a small country house. At its center was a woman hanging laundry out to dry, a familiar scene the world over. It held a simple message: “*Love is hard work*”. How true! Sometimes, the “hard work” of discipleship can feel overwhelming or impossible. That is how transformation starts: allowing the person of Jesus and the way of St. Vincent to shape our lives, so we become a virtuous extension of the Gospel.

St. Vincent stressed the virtues of simplicity and humility to follow Christ and serve in solidarity with the poor. Centuries later, they are still in season! In simplicity, we speak directly and honestly; to say what we mean and mean what we say. Humility keeps us grounded in God’s love, and not let our own biases keep us from serving Jesus. These virtues were Vincent’s spiritual roadmap; they helped him navigate the terrain of his interior life and generously respond to the demands of the apostolate. He said, “*Our Lord is found and is pleased only in humility of heart and simplicity in words and actions*” (Vol. XII, #204, p. 182).

This Advent let us take time to examine the level of simplicity and humility in our own lives. Often at odds with the “ways of the world”,

they were essential to Jesus and St. Vincent. In my travels, I am always edified in my encounters with the members of the Vincentian Family who live the virtues of simplicity and humility in word and deed. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, inspires the world with his great witness of simplicity and humility. Reflect on his words below:

“Look, there is Someone who wants what is good for you- Who calls you by name- and Who has chosen you. The one thing that is asked of you is that you let yourself be loved”.

It is a sentiment most appropriate as we begin our Advent journey. May God bless you!

Your brother in St. Vincent,
G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General



Survey of Vincentian Schools

Rome, 19 August 2013

Dear Visitors,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill our hearts now and forever!

As I write to you, I extend my greeting to you and also ask for your collaboration in creating a database for Pre-K and K as well as primary and secondary schools of the Congregation of the Mission. One of the ways in which we carry out our Vincentian mission and implement the process of systemic change is through education in the schools and universities that are administered by the Congregation. At this time when we are searching for ways of “creative fidelity to the mission” and in the context of an on-going invitation to provide further encouragement to the mission of the Church, it seems important to be mindful of the document of Aparecida and its statement concerning Catholic schools:

“Catholic schools are called to deep renewal. We must restore the Catholic identity of our schools through a courageous and bold missionary impulse, so that it becomes a prophetic option shaped in a pastoral practice of participatory education. Such projects must promote the comprehensive formation of the person, having its foundation in Christ, with ecclesial and cultural identity, and with academic excellence. They must also bring about solidarity and charity to the poorest. Oversight of educational processes, parent participation in them, and teacher training are priority tasks of the educational ministry” (Aparecida, #337).

We need the following information to create the database:

Name of school	
Year of establishment	
How many confreres are directly involved in the school	
Name and address of confrere responsible for the administration of the school	
Number of students	Pre-K and K / Primary / Secondary / Total:
What is average social class of the students	
What percentage of students continue their studies at a university	

Thank you for your collaboration.

Your brother in Saint Vincent

G. GREGORY GAY, CM
Superior General

Collection for Vincentian Endowment Challenge

Rome, 1 August 2013

To the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of the Congregation

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

I was very pleased to have been with you in New York at the recent Visitors Meeting. I found the presentations and the opportunities for dialogue helpful. Thank you for your presence and participation.

In this letter, I would like to highlight an idea shared by Fr. Luis Fernando Macias Fernández, Visitor of Chile. You may recall that, in response to the presentation of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) concerning the Vincentian Endowment Challenge (VEC), Fr. Fernando made a suggestion, based on a project he hopes to undertake in his province: to have a collection on or near St. Vincent's Feast day of all ministries in our provinces or vice provinces. The funds collected would benefit the Vincentian Endowment Challenge, with a smaller portion going to a specific work of the province or vice-province.

I write to encourage you to follow the example of Fr. Fernando, and to suggest that you hold the collection between the days of September 26-29, 2013. The collection day would vary according to the needs of the local community. Each place would send the collected funds to the Econome of the province or vice-province. Each province and vice-province would retain 25% of the collection for their locally designated use, and send 75% of the funds collected to the Curia for the VEC.

You will be receiving materials from the VSO concerning the Vincentian Endowment Challenge to help you promote this collection. You will need to develop your own materials to explain the use of the portion of the collection that will remain in your province or vice-province. I am pleased to see enthusiasm for this collection, as it shows our unity as an international Congregation and our solidarity in mission. May the fire of our belief in our Congregation enflame the hearts of many to support us!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

2013 Mission Appeal

Rome, 1 October 2013

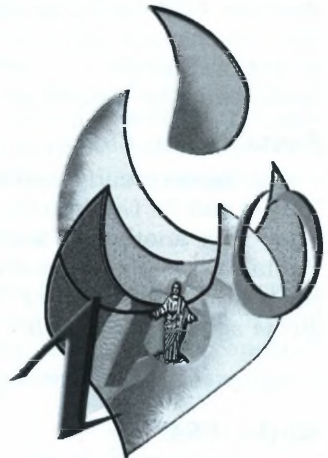
Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

As we enter October, we are reminded by the change of seasons that this once fresh New Year of 2013 is nearing its close. Indeed, both the "Year of Faith" and the annual liturgical year will soon come to an end. However, in October as we also celebrate World Mission Sunday, we are reminded to heed Jesus' call to go forth and be missionaries. At this time, we recall with awe and affection the lives of the great missionaries in our Church and Congregation. Their stories inspire us to live the mission of Jesus anew by following the way of St. Vincent de Paul.

I want to begin this 2013 Mission Appeal Letter with a missionary story, one that began 143 years ago when two confreres, true to our tradition as Vincentian missionaries, left France to go to a faraway unfamiliar place. On November 9, 1870, Fathers Gustave Foing and Augustine Rieux landed at the Port of Bonaventura in Colombia, South America and began the work of formation of the clergy and parish missions. These brave confreres were the first missionaries in what was then called the Central American Province, stretching from Guatemala to Peru.

On August 11, 1913, Fr. Antonio Fiat, Superior General, at a time of expansion, erected the Province of Colombia, separating it from the Central American Province. At the time of its creation, seven of the ten houses in the Central America Province were in Colombia. In 2013, we celebrate the most visible and lasting effect of these first efforts: the Centenary of the Province of Columbia. They who were once a mission, now send missionaries all over the world. I will say more on this later; but, inspired by their spirit, let us review our "*missions ad gentes*".



**MISIONEROS
VICENTINOS**
C O L O M B I A

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS: CURRENT NEEDS

Papua New Guinea:

This mission continues to grow. Our confrere, Jacek Tendej from Poland, will soon arrive to be Rector of the seminary for the Archdiocese of Bomana. In addition to seminary formation work, we serve in several dioceses including Port Moresby and Alotau-Sideia, where Rolly Santos, our confrere, serves as bishop. The seminary and Theological Institute in Port Moresby are in need of confreres, as are the parishes and missions. The language is Pidgin English.

Solomon Islands:

By the end of 2013, five confreres will have left this mission to return to their native provinces. We are hoping for at least one confrere from Indonesia join in 2014. However with demands of seminary formation work and pastoral and parish ministry, we need confreres to help us continue the good work begun here. With the arrival earlier this year of Fr. Greg Cooney from Australia and Fr. Jose Manjaly from Province of India-North, they join Fr. Twolde Teclemichael, rector of the seminary in Honiara where we serve. They are also awaiting the arrival of Fr. Jeff Harvey from the Western Province, USA. The language is Pidgin English.

Benin:

One of our newest missions, this French-speaking mission is served by two Polish confreres, Rafal Brukarczyk and Stanislaw Deszcz. They have been joined by a third confrere, Jaroslaw Lawrenz, also of the Province of Poland who last served in the Province of New England. After much preparation, the confreres are well-established. They engage in pastoral ministry, assist the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal, and accompany the Vincentian Family.

Punta Arenas, Chile:

This most recently established mission, currently staffed by Fr. Pablo Vargas and Fr. Gerardo Diaz, two confreres from the Province of Chile. They seek another to assist in pastoral ministry to the residents of Punta Arenas and the outlying islands city. Punta Arenas is located in the southernmost part of Chile, adjacent to Tierra del Fuego. The language spoken is Spanish.

NEW MISSIONS

Alaska, USA:

Archbishop Roger Schwietz, OMI, the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska has requested Spanish-speaking confreres to assist in meeting the pastoral needs of the burgeoning immigrant population in that city. The Superior General and Provincial of Colombia are in discussion

with the Archdiocese about forming a contract, but other interested confreres are welcome to apply. Alaska is the northernmost of the fifty US states. The languages spoken are English and Spanish.

Beni, Bolivia:

We have received a request from a Bishop in Bolivia, Fr. Julio María Elías, OFM who heads the Apostolate Vicariate of Beni. He is requesting 3 confreres (2 priests, 1 brother) to serve a native, indigenous population who are accessible through waterways and by riverboat. The confreres in CLAPVI South are organizing a “popular mission team” to go into this area in 2015 as an interim project to determine the peoples’ spiritual needs, and future possibilities for future missionary outreach. The language spoken is Spanish.

PROVINCIAL MISSIONS: CURRENT NEEDS

Cuba:

Although in dialogue with other provinces in the Caribbean about reconfiguration, the Province of Cuba is currently experiencing a major shortage of personnel. The former Visitor, still active in the province, was seriously injured in a recent car accident. This, along with the recent departure of two confreres to their home provinces, and the transfer of another confrere to serve as Director of the Daughters of Charity in their new reconfigured Caribbean Province, have created significant staffing problems for this already small province. The language is Spanish.

Vice Province of Sts. Cyril & Methodius:

This Vice-Province has continued to evolve and grow both in numbers of native confreres from the Ukraine, and a focus on finding creative ways to meet the pastoral and material needs of the poor. With ministry in the Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, this vice-province welcomes confreres for short-term ministry as well as new members. The language is Russian.

Vice Province of Mozambique:

This Vice-Province has works for the poor along with seminary formation and a mission in South Africa. However, they are still dependent on confreres from other provinces to continue their apostolic outreach. They always welcome new members and the language is Portuguese.

Province of Hungary:

This province, while small in number, has one of the youngest groups of confreres in the Congregation. They engage in various types of pastoral work. The language is Hungarian.

Province of China:

The Province of China continues to serve the pastoral needs of the people of Taiwan and mainland China. Confreres serve in a variety of ministries, and the language is Mandarin.

Province of Paris:

The Province of Paris seeks a confrere wishing to engage in pastoral ministry for its Thessaloniki, Greece mission. It is a parish setting and involves serving several diverse language groups who worship at the parish staffed by the confreres. The language spoken is Greek.

UPDATES ON INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

The following is an update on missions we have established from past appeals. These missions are a reality today due to those who volunteered as well as your prayers and donations.

ANGOLA:

The Portuguese-speaking mission in Angola has welcomed a third confrere, Fr. Jason Cristan Soto, who is applying for a visa. He joins Frs. Jose Maria Nieto and Jose Ramirez in pastoral work and accompaniment of the Vincentian Family.

CHAD:

This French-speaking mission in Chad, sponsored by COVIAM, is under the supervision of the Visitor of Nigeria. There are two confreres now stationed there: Fr. Onyeachi Ugwu, from the Province of Nigeria, and Fr. Roch Rambiljaona from the Province of Madagascar. They would like another confrere to assist them in pastoral work and outreach to those in rural areas.

EL ALTO:

The confreres in this mission continue their parish pastoral work and accompaniment of the Vincentian Family. Fr. Aidan Rooney, mission superior, works with Frs. Cyrille Pierre De Nanteuil and Jose Diego Pla Aranda in parish and pastoral work and outreach to the indigenous peoples. They have also fostered a vibrant lay ministry program to empower the three parish centers in their care. Also noteworthy is that due to the planning and foresight of Fr. Aidan Rooney, the mission has supplemented its budget by fund-raising through the internet and by personal contacts. You may view their web site: www.vocesvicentinas.org

COCHABAMBA:

This Bolivian mission is staffed by three Bolivian confreres from the Province of Chile: David Paniagua, Jorge Manrique; and Luis Montoya. They do pastoral work in parish and mission outposts. The mission has found ways to supplement its budget and to be self-sustaining.

TUNIS:

Fr. Jean-Pierre Mangulu, a confrere from the Province of Congo has arrived to assist Fr. Firmin Mola Mbalo the mission superior. The confreres in this French and English speaking mission do parish ministry, pastoral work, and accompaniment of the Daughters of Charity.

* * *

As you can see, the missionary spirit of the Congregation is alive and well, thanks to so many generous confreres who support the missions through volunteering, donations, and prayer. So once again I ask your support in whatever way possible. Attached to this letter, you will find a new feature by the General Council: a listing of necessary criteria to be a missionary. I urge all to read and reflect it, because Jesus and St. Vincent call us to a missionary vocation to build up the Kingdom of God on earth. There is another attachment outlining how a confrere should respond if he wishes to volunteer, along with ways to contribute funds to the VSO for micro-grants. Donations are always welcome, no matter what amount!

As noted, this year the Province of Colombia celebrates its Centenary. From a small start with two French confreres, the Province is now present in the USA, Brazil, Chile, Cuba Ecuador, Papua New Guinea, Toulouse, Rwanda and Burundi bringing Christ and our charism o wherever they are sent. Today, this Province has 25 houses, with 137 confreres and 50 seminarians. They who were once missionary territory have now become missionaries to the world! For this we rejoice, and ask the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers to the harvest.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

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**CRITERION FOR SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS
FOR MISSION 'AD GENTES'**

As the realities of life in the international missions are challenging and totally different from that of a confrere's home province, some criteria is required for selecting missionaries to serve in these places. Using the criteria below, the volunteer will be interviewed by someone from the General Council or by their representative.

1. ***Missionaries must have emotional stability.*** Missionary work is hard! Those ministering cross-culturally, if they are to be effective, must learn to speak other languages, learn new cultures, and speak God's eternal message in changing earthly contexts. Interpersonal relationships with co-workers, confreres who are also going through cultural stress and work anxiety, amplify tension. Only the emotionally stable should make the commitment for long-term, cross-cultural missions.
2. ***Missionaries must have spiritual maturity.*** They cannot effectively preach the Gospel by their own initiative and power. They are mere "jars of clay", who demonstrate that the "all-surpassing power" employed in Christian ministry is "from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Missions are thus a "supernatural work" ultimately accomplished by the power of God. Therefore, missionaries must be people who "fall on their knees before the Father" (Eph. 4:2) in prayer. They must also be committed to studying the Bible not only to prepare homilies and lessons, but also to reflect upon God's will in their own lives.
3. ***Missionaries must have an intimate relationship with God,*** one that will influence who they are and how they relate to others. They allow themselves to be increasingly transformed into God's likeness as they look upon Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Their spiritual maturity should lead them to **be effective teachers of the Word of God.** Teaching a Christian worldview as revealed by God in Sacred Scripture is integral to the missionary task. Therefore, missionaries sent to foreign mission fields should be those who have taught the Gospel in their own country and culture and have empathetically nurtured the faithful to Christian maturity.
4. ***Missionaries must have the aptitude and training*** to effectively build-up churches, nurture new Christians to maturity, and equip national church leaders for Christian service. These are essential tasks of missions. This must be done taking into account the local realities. They should not transport their own cultural church to the mission, but rather allow Gospel values to be implanted in the culture of the place where they serve. Missionaries must be trained to enter new cultures and lay the foundations of the Gospel.
5. ***Missionaries must have effective interpersonal communication skills.*** These interpersonal abilities are largely formed through parental, familial and other relational influences in one's early life, and are difficult to learn as adults. Personalities are also influenced by culture, and vary by country and continent. Despite one's personality type, all missionaries must have the ability to empathetically enter into the culture where they will minister. This will also include the capacity to work and collaborate as a team.

6. *The missionaries should have a pure motive.* A missionary should develop a clear and direct motivation for evangelization, a vision for the mission, and service to the poor; always keeping in mind that all this is ultimately for the glory of God alone. The dubious motives of personal gain and vain glory will always defeat the purpose and do harm to the mission and the missionary.

* * *  * * *

MISSION APPEAL LETTER 2013: NEXT STEPS

Information for Those Volunteering

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome by **30 November 2013** or again by **28 February 2014** so we can review requests in our *Tempo Forte* meetings of December 2013 and March 2014.
2. It is helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for all missionaries.
3. While we have no automatic age cutoff established, it is necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.
4. Confreres who volunteer should inform the Visitor in their province that they have done so. The Superior General will then dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
5. 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 the mission in which you would like to take part.
6. Even if you have already written in the past, please make contact again. Experience has shown that confreres not available at one moment might be available at another time.
7. If you are unable or unavailable for the missions, we welcome your monetary contribution to represent your zeal for our missionary endeavors. Every year, many eligible provinces needing help seek a micro-project grant of \$5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. These grants are awarded by the VSO quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful results of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (see: www.famvian.org/vso). Donations to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund are the only source of funding for the micro-project grants.

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**MAKING A CONTRIBUTION
TO THE VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND**

Provincial, House and Individual Contributions:

- Checks must be made only payable to: "**Congregazione della Missione**". The bank will not accept any other name. They should be sent to:

**Econome General
Congregazione della Missione
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Roma, Italia**

- Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.
- **Clearly indicate that the funds are for the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF).**

In every case:

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

Tempo Forte Report

October 2013

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

Here is a synthesis of our October 2013 Tempo Forte meeting, held at the Curia in Rome.

Congregation-wide Updates

We began our October 2013 Tempo Forte with an ongoing formation retreat: "Meditation Moment, taking time to reflect and dialogue on our Constitutions, in particular "Vocation" (Part 1, No. 1-9). The results of our dialogue appear in this issue of *Vincentiana*. Our goal in so doing is to spur reflection and discussion among confreres on the value of our Constitutions.

We did an evaluation of the International Visitors Meeting held in July, 2013 at St. John's University, NY. Overall, the evaluations of the participants and the General Council were very positive on all aspects of this meeting. Still, we always look for ways to improve it for next time.

We continued our planning for the meeting and workshop for New Visitors scheduled for January 2014 in Rome. An interesting phenomenon we observed when reviewing the list of attendees was that a number of confreres return as Visitors after having held this position previously, either in their own province or in another. With this dynamic, we hope to enrich our discussion on the "Practical Guide for the Visitors" with Visitors sharing their own experiences.

We also initiated the preparation for the General Assembly for 2016. A letter has been sent to the Visitors asking them to recommend members for the Preparatory Commission. We have finalized the date, and are trying to finalize a location and theme for the General Assembly.

Fr. Matthew Kallammakal, C.M., new Assistant to the Superior General, will assume the duties for coordinating the International Missions, mission distribution fund, and will be the liaison with the Asia-Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC). Fr. Matthew replaced Fr. Varghese Thotamkara, ordained a bishop for Ethiopia. Fr. Matthew arrived in September, and immediately delved into his new responsibilities, fully participating in Tempo Forte meetings.

We continued our discussion of reconfiguration on the number of provinces involved in this process at this time. As a Council, we are committed to encouraging and supporting the progress that has been made among our provinces.

With regard to the on-line catalog, a letter has been prepared for all Visitors to inform confreres how to access a temporary password which they can change once they log-in to secure both the site and user's identity.

We had a discussion regarding an idea from an incorporated member of the possibility of an international meeting of Vincentian students. We settled on a practical and less expensive proposal; namely, to invite Conferences of Visitors to have regional meetings as called for in our Constitutions. We also discussed the possibility of having representation of incorporated students at a General Assembly, but no decision has been made on that matter at this point.

It was also recommended that during gatherings of the Vincentian youth prior to World Youth Day, there be some time set aside for our Vincentian seminarians to discuss and share their own experiences at the international level.

With regard to our preparation for the 400th anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation in 2017, we will have a compendium prepared and ready for distribution at the 2016 General Assembly. This compendium will contain a summary of the Congregation's history, along with significant photos of different provinces throughout the world.

We began a discussion on how to improve the preparation of confreres going to the international missions and the formation for laity of the Vincentian Family wishing to serve in these missions. We are in dialogue with Fr. Pat McDevitt, President of All Hallows College, about developing a program coordinated by All Hallows, once a seminary that sent missionaries all over the world, and now has very well-recognized programs for lay formation.

The Visitors will receive a letter outlining creation of a center to help confreres needing vocational discernment, and to promote a deepened sense of belonging to the Congregation.

We will participate in an annual meeting of "Solidarity with Southern Sudan", sponsored by the Union of Superior Generals for institutes who send members to serve the needs of the Church in this recently-created country. Our own Fr. Manuel Ginete of the Province of the Philippines is now in Southern Sudan in this inter-congregational program.

We received an invitation from the Union of Superior Generals to maintain our presence on their Commission for Justice and Peace, which we accepted. We have asked our Procurator and Postulator General, Fr. Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel to be a member of this commission.

General Curia News

With regard to the General Curia, we discussed a number of matters pertaining to personnel. This includes seeking a new house superior to replace Fr. Giuseppe Carulli, whose term will end this summer, and replacing the two Brothers, Ivan Hueichan Sanchez and Leopold Myamba, as their terms of service end sometime in 2014.

We had a report on the activities and progress of our communications and publications works from Fr. John Maher, director of that office. Fr. Maher held a meeting of the SIEV Commission in September. The group focused on studying the results of the survey done at the Visitors meeting on topics important for SIEV. Of concern to the SIEV Board is the need to get assistance in preparing the next generation of Vincentian researchers, writers, and translators. Plans are being made on how these goals may be achieved for the next SIEV Board meeting.

Fr. Maher reported that the Vincentiana editorial Board met in September to review the progress of the publication, and to discuss themes for the issues in 2014. After discussion with the board and General Council, the themes are: "Vincentian missionary parishes", "Formation for our Vincentian Mission: Initial Formation", "Formation for our Vincentian Mission: Ongoing Formation". The last issue will either focus on the revised *Ratio Formationis*, or SIEV symposia.

Fr. Maher also noted that the CM-Global web site has progressed well, due to the fine work of Fr. John Freund, web-master and the assistance of Frs. Bernard Massarini and Cesár "Chuno" Chávez Alva who coordinate the French and Spanish versions of the web site. There will now be a greater effort to include videos, and insure news of the Congregation is posted in a timely manner. To do that, they need the help of confreres in various provinces to forward information.

We had a report from Fr. Giuseppe Turati, the Secretary General, who also serves as the Coordinator for the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change, which held one of its two yearly meetings in Rome in October. As the Commission is transitioning to new membership, this meeting helped insure a smooth running of events.

Fr Turati also reported on a new method he initiated to better track the large amounts of correspondence in the Secretariat: a new identifying 'protocol' number for all correspondence coming in and out of the Secretariat office.

We reviewed a report from Fr. Miles Heinen, Director of Vincentian Solidarity Office. We also discussed an evaluation done of the services that office provides for the Congregation, particularly their fundraising for the growth of our patrimonial funds. I encourage all confreres to read the October bulletin of the VSO, particularly on matters dealing with the Patrimonial Fund for developing provinces to help them stabilize financially and continue to do the Mission.

We read a report from the ONLUS Commission (Vincentian Solidarity Office in Europe), which is under the responsibility of Fr. Giuseppe Carulli, serving as its first Executive Secretary.

Financial Matters

We discussed two possible projects to be done in conjunction with the Franz Foundation: one promoting the development of Vincentian missionary parishes, and another, establishing an emergency relief action program. We discussed a proposal that we received from the Eastern Province, USA from Fr. Elmer Bauer, Provincial Econome, related to self-sustaining projects. We received our quarterly report from Fr. Joe Geders, the Econome General on our financial position to date, as well as the progress in developing a budget model for 2014.

International Missions

We reviewed reports from our missions in **Bolivia**: El Alto and Cochabamba. As El Alto has a new bishop, we are in the process of signing a new contract. Our confrere in El Alto, Diego Jose Pla from the Province of Madrid, has renewed his contract for another three years.

We received correspondence from the mission in **Papua New Guinea**. Fr. Emmanuel Lapaz, of the Province of the Philippines has also renewed his contract. We continue to support three different areas in Papua New Guinea: in the diocese of Alotau-Sideia, where we have two confreres working with the Ordinary, our confrere Rolando Santos; in the Diocese of Bereina where the Bishop thanked the Superior General for the help of the confreres in their mission; and in the Diocese of Bomana, where Fr. Jacek Tendej is newly arrived from Poland to serve as the Rector of the diocesan seminary. We have an urgent need for more confreres to work here!

We received a report from the mission of the **Solomon Islands**. They are awaiting the arrival of two confreres to help carry out the work of this mission. As previously noted, by the end of 2013, five confreres serving there will have left and returned to their home provinces.

We discussed a report from our new mission in **Angola**: now with three confreres who are formulating their community plan after having lived together for several months.

With regard to our mission in **Tunisia**, we now have two confreres there: Frs. Firmin Mola Mbalo from the Province of Toulouse, and John-Pierre Mangulu, from the Province of Congo. We also received news that Fr. Firmin was named the diocesan director of Caritas, an international charitable organization which works under the auspices of the Diocese of Tunis.

We discussed information on the mission in *Chad*. This mission is the joint responsibility of COVIAM. Fr. Sixtus, a Visitor and member of the conference, has agreed to supervise and coordinate the mission. Presently, there are two confreres in Chad; one from Madagascar and one from Nigeria. They will soon be joined by a third confrere from Nigeria.

We reviewed a report from the three confrères in the mission in *Benin*, all of whom are from the Province of Poland.

We had a written report from the Visitor of Chile, who, with the General Curia is responsible for a new mission in *Punta Arenas, Chile*. It is currently staffed by two confrères from the province of Chile, but there is an urgent need for at least two more confreres. This was noted in last month's Mission Appeal letter. Punta Arenas is in a most Vincentian area of the world, rich in mission territory, and offers opportunities to work with the Vincentian Family.

We approved a revision of the final draft of our International Mission Statutes which will be promulgated at the December 2013 Tempo Forte. We discussed how to juridically situate the different local community houses of the International Missions, whether to have them be the responsibility of the General Curia, or of a particular province. We received a request from two bishops for missionaries, both noted in the October Mission Appeal letter, including one in the apostolic vicariate of Benin, Bolivia, which involves evangelization by riverboat. We had a number of volunteers, two of which we will assign placement in an international missions.

Vincentian Family News

We had a report from Fr. Eli Chaves, Director of the Vincentian Family. He offered an evaluation of the "Wise Money Management" program sponsored by the Vincentian Family in Paris sponsored last summer. As a follow-up, we discussed the possibility of presenting another similar type program, but to do so in conjunction with a grant-writing workshop. This matter will be discussed by the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family at their next meeting.

We received a report from the Vincentian Family Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam which contained a draft of the program for their 2014 symposium to be held at DePaul University, Chicago from June 28 to July 8. Confreres and members of the Vincentian family are encouraged to attend this worthwhile conference. This is also an important event for confreres and Vincentian Family members who live and work among Muslims.

We received a request from the International Council of MISEVI for financial assistance for two upcoming activities: an international meeting in Europe in Slovakia in November. This meeting is open to all

involved and interested in MISEVI and its purpose is to promote a better understanding of MISEVI in Eastern European countries. We also approved providing financial assistance for the first General Assembly of MISEVI, to be held in Costa Rica in February 2014.

Visitors Conferences

We had an extended discussion on different activities of the Conferences of Visitors and provinces. The Asia-Pacific Visitors Conference (APVC) is currently without a president and secretary. The next meeting will be held in February, 2014 in Sydney, and the Superior General will assist at that meeting. Fr. Matthew Kallammarkal will be the new liaison from the General Council to the APVC.

In terms of the Conference of European Visitors (CEVIM), we reviewed the most recent minutes from their meeting, held at St. John's University last July. We discussed establishing a new internal seminary for the Mediterranean provinces, under the responsibility of the province of Naples. The Superior general shared the reflections from the National Visitors Conference in the United States regarding their current status.

Calendars

The General Council then shared their calendars for the months from October to December, including that of the Superior General.

In October, the Superior General participated in the beatification in Tarragona, Spain of the 41 martyrs of the Vincentian Family killed during the country's civil war in the 1930's. Over 500 priests, religious, and laity were beatified. From October 15-22, the General Curia made retreat together in Fasono, in southern Italy at "Trullo d'Immacolata", a retreat house run by the Daughters of Charity. The retreat ended with a pilgrimage to San Fele, birthplace of Justin de Jacobis. From October 26-30, the Superior General and Fr. Orlando Escobar, Visitor of Colombia visited Anchorage, Alaska, USA to explore beginning a new mission to Hispanics.

In November, the Superior General, joined by three other members of the Curia, will attend the MISEVI International meeting in Slovakia. Then, he makes a canonical visitation to Panama, and attends a meeting of the International Council of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Then, he will join in a Triduum celebration of the feast of the Miraculous Medal. Then the Superior General will attend a meeting of the Union of Superior Generals held in Rome.

December 1-7 will be the quarterly Tempo Forte meeting. The Superior General and Fr. Stanislav Zontak will visit Honduras, participating in the opening of a new mission house sponsored by the Province of

Slovakia. They will participate in a meeting of Vincentian Marian Youth in Panama, including representatives from Mexico and Central America. After Christmas with confreres at the General Curia, the Superior General will go to Paris to give the annual New Year's Day conference to the Daughters of Charity as is the tradition.

As we look to the end of the calendar year on the horizon and the end of the "Year of Faith", let us continue to pray that the Lord Jesus and St. Vincent will imbue us a deeper faith in God, as we might have the courage to serve the poor with open and loving hearts.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.

Superior General

POETIC MOMENT

The following poem was written by our confrere Eamon Flanagan, and included in his book "Harmony of the Faith", published in 2012 by Kolbe Publications in Cork, Ireland.

Saint Vincent de Paul

We come and pray at the altar
which you frequented through peace and war.
From your childhood days of learning,
when you toiled, living, and earning.
You filled your thirsting soul to the brim
and there found Christ's love, and worshipped Him.

Tribulation walked beside you
And from early days made you new.
From your views of France and beyond
Needs of Church begged you to respond.
A priest, at first callow, then purified,
you raised up pastors on a high tide.

The Charities and Saint Louise
Accompanied you to answer pleas
of needy, aged, children, convicts,
poor in city and urban districts.
On earth you championed God's reign,
and people adored Christ once again.

In the world of nobles and kings
you gave witness to divine things.
Bringing holiness to worldly spheres,
your wisdom fell on listening ears.
You inspired all who came to learn,
and the world's mission was your concern.

Eamon Flanagan, C.M. (2012)

THEME - I

Reflections on the Conclusion of the Year of Faith

Félix Álvarez Sagredo, C.M.

1. Introduction

On October 11, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI convoked the Year of Faith with his apostolic letter, *Porta Fidei*. My attention was drawn to the following words:

“During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the ‘pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Heb. 12:2): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection” (Porta Fidei, #13).

In fact, the letter invites us to focus our attention and to center our heart and our life on the person of Jesus Christ. Beside the gospels, I believe the document that can most help us in this regard is the Letter to the Hebrews. The entire letter, from the beginning to the end, speaks about the person of Jesus... his divinity and humanity, his passion and death and resurrection, the attainment of eternal redemption.

The opening of this letter might surprise us since they do not follow the traditional structure of that literary genre. It begins by highlighting the superiority of the incarnate Son of God and alludes to the fact that Christ's word is more excellent than the word of all the previous prophets who preceded him. Christ was constituted the heir of all things and through him the universe was created; thus Christ is the refulgence of God's glory and the very imprint of God's being.

The differences in speaking in this manner are explicitly stated at the beginning of this letter: the past was characterized by a multiplicity of persons who spoke in the name of God and thus the content of their message was provisional. In these last days, the Word of God is communicated to us through the ministry of one person, Jesus Christ, and his message is definitive and complete... the content of his message is clear.

This important nuance of the affirmation, that is, that in the past as well as now in the present the same person is speaking... this reality is

highlighted in an extraordinary manner in the gospel of Saint John who attributes the words that Christ proclaims, as well as the works that he accomplishes, to the Father¹.

Following this same argument, we find a very eloquent statement in the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*:

"This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (*Dei Verbum*, #2).

In John's Gospel, this theme receives great emphasis: in addition to the repeated references to Jesus' preaching where he attributes to the Father the gospel that he preaches and the revelations that he makes known to the community, John's Gospel also develops from the very beginning, a concentric and progressive dynamism.

The central affirmation of John's Gospel, "the Word of God was made flesh", is like the heart that constantly pulsates throughout the entire narration of the fourth gospel. It is the sign par excellence that God has given to the world in order to make tangible and understandable the love that has motivated and maintained his uninterrupted action into the present time.

Therefore it is right to highlight the profound significance of this sign in order to learn how to focus our gaze and our understanding on the person of Jesus. After turning over the tables of the money changers and spilling their coins on the ground, Jesus told them: "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" (Jn. 2:19-22). But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When Jesus rose from the dead his disciples remembered what he had said and they believed in the Scriptures and in the words that Jesus had spoken. *Dei Verbum* affirms:

¹ Cf., John 5:19, 7:16, 8:28, 10:37-38, 12:44-45, 14:24. These references, though seemingly repetitious, offer some interesting nuances and variations that enrich the meaning of the affirmation. These are the words that Jesus speaks and the actions that he accomplishes in the name of the Father, words and actions that verify and reveal his true identity as the only begotten Son. Accepting in faith Jesus' words and actions leads us to a true knowledge of the Father. Another reality that we should be mindful of with regard to the fourth gospel is the plurality of meanings that can be given to the same word, in other words, the distinct realities that a word might designate. Perhaps it would be better in this case to say that the same word can refer to distinct levels or dimensions of the same reality (some examples would be bread, water, spirit, birth, life, etc.).

"It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior" (Dei Verbum, #18).

In his apostolic letter, *Porta Fidei*, Benedict XVI alludes to the reasons that led him to convoke the Year of Faith. His reasons are expressed in a summary manner: God's continual invitation to us to enter the realm of faith, to enter into a relationship of friendship with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity; the mission of the Church to rescue men and women from the desert oasis of life and lead them to the One who gives the fullness of life; to discover anew the joy that is present in the Word of God and the bread of life and to believe that Jesus Christ will accomplish his work.

It is true that this introduction has been a little extensive but it seems to me that this is justified given the importance that the letter to the Hebrews places on the Word and given the fact that one of the most crucial implications for believers during this celebration of the Year of Faith is to recall the more important aspects of the recent solemn teaching of the Church and to do this at the same time that they celebrate their personal and their community encounter with the risen Christ.

2. The person of Jesus Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews

I would like to contrast two brief but very significant New Testament affirmations. John expressed it in the following words: *"And we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). For the author of the letter to Hebrews, these words reveal the primary characteristics of the person of Christ, the most profound dimensions of his identity.

It is here that the two natures of the person of Christ are clearly revealed: his humanity and his divinity; his mercy and his fidelity... a clear reflection of his divine sonship. The words of John the evangelist clearly refer to an awareness of the chosen people and the establishment of a relationship with the God of the covenant, the God of history. In other words, we stand before the people's experience of God as compassionate and faithful, as desiring to save his chosen ones and lead them to the fullness of life... and thus lead all humankind to the same fullness of life. Certainly the words that John utilizes are a clear example of the inculturation of the classical words of the Hebrew tradition into the Hellenistic world.

The Letter to the Hebrews presents the two natures of Christ in a somewhat unusual way. After a series of references to the Old Testament (especially to the Book of Psalms) that highlight the superiority of the Son in relationship to the angels, the author comes to the fol-

lowing conclusion-exhortation: "*We must attend all the more to what we have heard, so that we may not be carried away*" (Hebrews 2:1). Obviously this is a reference to the gospel of Christ which was mentioned at the beginning of the letter but there, other words were utilized. If the law, which according to common practice, was proclaimed through the angels and sanctioned in like manner those who transgressed said law², how much more will disobedience of the new law of mercy and fidelity given by Jesus Christ... how much more will such transgressions be sanctioned. The law was given to the people through the mediation of Moses; grace and truth have been passed on to us through Jesus Christ. St. Paul, after a thorough analysis of the realities of the law and grace, comes to the following conclusion: have no other debt with anyone except that of mutual love; charity is the fullness of the law (Rom. 13:10; cf., Lk 10:28,37; I Cor. 13:13).

There are two passages in the letter that are clear references to Christ's humanity. They are a synthesis, a summary of everything that had previously been stated concerning this matter; they are clearly referring to the reality of the Incarnation. The letter affirms: "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help*" (Hebrews 4:15-16). The same idea was expressed even before presenting Jesus Christ as the faithful and compassionate high priest: "*He had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested*" (Heb. 2:17-18).

The reflection of John Paul II in *Dives in Misericordia* follows the same line of thought when he affirms:

"In this way, in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in his mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as mercy" (*Dives in Misericordia*, #2).

Christ confers a definitive meaning on the whole tradition of divine mercy. Christ not only speaks about mercy and explains it through examples and parables, but even more Christ himself incarnates and personifies mercy. He, himself is mercy. To the person who sees mercy in him and finds it in him, God becomes visible in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.

² Cf., Deuteronomy, chapter 28: the blessings that are given to those who observe the law and the curses that will befall those who do not listen to the Lord's voice. See also, Joshua 24:25 ff. and Matthew 7:21-27, the conclusion to the sermon on the Mount.

As a conclusion to this first part I want to highlight the reality of the Incarnation and the profession of faith in the Trinity. The convocation of this Year of Faith explicitly mentions this need: to profess our faith in the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the letter to the Hebrews the narration of the Incarnation is so profound that it can only be compared with the hymn that Paul takes from the tradition of the primitive church in order to exhort the members of the Christian community to clothe themselves in the same sentiments as Christ and to remain faithful to their service and the practice of charity.

The brief passage, which concludes the first five chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews, is like a true profession of faith in the whole mystery of Christ. In four strokes the most outstanding characteristics of his identity are described: the prayers and supplications that Christ offered with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death is a clear reference to Jesus' passion and death, a reference to the priestly prayer that John places at the conclusion of the farewell discourses. Three times this passage refers to the condition of the Son. The perfection of the Son's obedience, even when confronted with the reality of martyrdom, becomes the cause of salvation for all those who obey him.

3. Jesus Christ, the high priest of the heavenly realities

The second part of my reflection will focus on three fundamental themes related to Christ's priesthood: the superiority of its worship, its sanctuary and its mediation. One will not find many references to all of this in the papal document even though this is the primary argument of the letter as stated by the author on various occasions. Nevertheless when speaking about the person of Christ I believe it is important to recall the content of this central part of the letter in order to come to some practical conclusions in two vital aspects of the life of believers: the area of worship and the area of witness.

Jesus Christ was a descendant of David and consequently he was not a member of the priestly family. The author has found in the person of Melchizedek the best possible way to explain the newness and the greatness of Christ's priesthood. The very etymology of the name (Melchizedek equals 'king of justice') and the city where Melchizedek exercised his ministry (Salem equals 'place of peace') help us understand the explanation and the argument before us.

If Abraham gave to Melchizedek a tenth of his spoils after he had defeated the kings, and if, therefore, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, it means that Abraham recognized the dignity and the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood. Indeed, the Levitical priesthood was familiar to Abraham since the twelve tribes of Israel came into existence from his descendants. This powerful

symbolism and typology are further enriched with the image of the risen one: *"Without father or mother or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever"* (Heb. 7:3).

In light of this extensive argumentation, I want to highlight three affirmations that are also three great proclamations of faith with regard to the priesthood of Christ. Beginning with this comparison between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood according to Melchizedek there are some very clear differences and we also become aware of the superiority and the excellence of Christ's priesthood in three or four concrete and essential aspects.

The first contrast/difference is found in the person and the person's condition: Christ, the heavenly high priest, is holy; in him there are no defects or weaknesses like those that other high priests; raised up to the heavens, Christ no longer needs to offer sacrifice for his sins or for the sins of the people. Jesus did this once and for all when he offered himself on the cross. Thus, the superiority of Christ's priesthood is revealed: the law established the office of the high priest, an office conferred on fragile human beings but the words of the covenant, prior to the law, made the Son perfect for all times: *you are my son, this day I have begotten you* (cf., Heb. 5:15; 7:1-3).

The second contrast/difference refers to the temple. Once a year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies where he poured blood on the mercy seat in expiation for sins. The Temple had been made by human hands which followed the plan that had been shown to Moses. The temple which Jesus entered once and for all was not of human construction or of this world. In the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist the Christian community expresses its faith with the following words: *on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and is seated the right hand of God the Father almighty*. The book of Acts provides us with a graphic description of this decisive and transcendental event.

The third contrast/difference refers to the efficacy of the sacrifice. What the rite of expiation was unable to achieve in the sanctuary of the Old Testament was fully accomplished by the death of Christ. The letter uses various expressions to emphasize this idea: *"Being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9). Christ has achieved an eternal and universal redemption, a true liberation. Christ, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself blamelessly to God and cleansed our conscience of dead works in order that we might worship the living God.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in the second volume of his work, *Jesus of Nazareth*, comments on some of these references and actions. He states that the Gospel of John (especially the theology of the priestly prayer) and the Letter to the Hebrews (especially its interpretation of

"It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize... Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord's invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples" (Porta Fidei, #7).

5. How to celebrate the Year of Faith

The letter to the Hebrews, after describing faith in the words that we previously cited, praises the great witnesses of faith throughout the history of salvation. In this context the patriarchs are the first ones to be mentioned. Perhaps the person who is most spoken about is Abraham, father of the offspring of the chosen people. There is a hymn to Abraham's faith: *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise" (Heb. 11:8-9).* The same expression, that is, the words *by faith*, are repeated as an introductory refrain to each of the paragraphs that follow, and then are concluded with: *"Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40).*

All these witnesses of faith in the Old Testament were less fortunate than we... in fact Jesus reminds us about this reality when he says: *"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Mt. 13:16-17).* John explains all of this in numerous references, for example, when speaking about the signs that Jesus revealed and when referring to Jesus' dialogue with his disciples or his debates with his adversaries: *"Amen, amen, I say to you whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:25).* *"It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn. 6:23).* *"My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Whoever chooses to do his will shall know whether I speak on my own" (Jn. 7:16-17).* *"I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father" (Jn. 14:6-7).*

Once again we highlight the initial idea of this reflection on the person and the message of Jesus Christ. The God that Jesus Christ reveals to humankind is not an abstract God of philosophy: the God

of order, beauty and creativity (even though God could be perfectly reconciled with this objective vision of reality). The God that Jesus Christ reveals is the God of creation and history, the God who is one and three, the God of revelation, the God of the Word and the God who is in constant dialogue with humanity and with each individual person, the God who is in dialogue with the gospel of Christ, the God who is present among us through the infusion and the permanent recreation of the Spirit.

After presenting the most exemplary witnesses of the first era of salvation history, the author of the letter to the Hebrews, as if dealing with irrefutable evidence at the end of some catechetical lesson, makes the following unique and conclusive affirmation in Hebrews 12:1-4:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith... fixed on him who endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lost heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood".

6. The work of faith

I would like to begin this section with a profound testimony from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians... a testimony that refers to the vitality of that community. Paul greets the members of the local church, the members of the new people of God, with words filled with enthusiasm and joy. He had great reason to feel as he did and some of those reasons he specifically mentions. I want to refer to two of those reasons which, from the perspective of the exhortation in the letter to the Hebrews (an exhortation referred to in the previous paragraph), place before us a series of options, practices and alternatives (which are both Christian and complimentary) that can be applied to the personal as well as the community and social dimensions of the faith.

With this we are not suggesting anything about the material author of the Letter to the Hebrews, but it is obvious that both the author of the letter to the Hebrews and the authors of the letter to the Thessalonians share a certain affinity in many aspects. When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul is especially grateful for their *work of faith*. He states: *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit... for from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth... in every place your faith in God has shown forth... may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all"* (I Thess. 1:3-6; 3:12).

With mind and heart attentive to the final exhortation in the Letter to the Hebrews, aware of the encouragement and the example of so

many witnesses to the faith, witnesses from the past and present day witnesses, and finally gazing on the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, let us then look at some concrete and specific areas with the corresponding actions that are referred to in *Porta Fidei* when speaking about the Year of Faith.

6.1. The word of life

I will limit myself to comment on three aspects. The first aspect deals with the word. When Paul VI proclaimed a year of faith in 1967, he thought of it as a solemn moment for the whole Church to make *an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith* (*Porta Fidei*, #4). Benedict XVI's invitation is also clear and very demanding:

"We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope... 'Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved' (Rom 10:10). The heart indicates that the first act by which one comes to faith is God's gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within" (*Porta Fidei*, #9, 10).

Those lines of thought are often repeated in revelation and in the Church's magisterium. In order not to be tedious with regard to the Church's teaching, I simply want to highlight one event that has profound doctrinal and pedagogical significance. I refer to the theme of the last two Synods of Bishops: the Word of God in the life and the mission of the Church (October 5-26, 2008) and the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith (October 7-28, 2012). Among other things there is an attempt to discover the truth and the beauty and the joy of the faith, an attempt to experience in some way a personal and community encounter with Christ and his gospel, an attempt to become familiar with the Word of God in order to discover its formative and transformative ability, its new and broad horizons that have been revealed to us. The apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, states:

"Every man and woman appears as someone to whom the word speaks, challenges and calls to enter this dialogue of love through a free response. Each of us is thus enabled by God to hear and respond to his word. We were created in the word and we live in the word; we cannot understand ourselves unless we are open to this dialogue. The word of God discloses the filial and relational nature of human existence. We are indeed called by grace to be conformed to Christ, Son of the Father, and, in him, to be transformed" (*Verbum Domini*, #22).

This first area implies that there is a whole world to be discovered. The Word that, in light of the mystery of Christ, is revealed and meditated upon and pondered in prayer... that Word clearly shows the authentic nature and value of created things and their relationship to transcendent and spiritual things. A true understanding of the legitimate autonomy of created things should never be cause to deny the value of that relationship. All of this has positive repercussions on men and women and their full development.

The gospel is rich in its teaching with regard to this area and enables people to act justly and live in solidarity with all people. If the human person is the supreme work of creation, then all other created things should converge toward the person so that they can fully realize their vocation in this world and become prophets of the new world in Christ. John Paul II referred to this reality when he convoked the Jubilee Year of 2000:

"The Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation which he has accomplished by his Death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human" (Incarnationis Mysterium, #1).

6.2. Reconciliation

I sincerely believe that this second area is a logical consequence of the previous one. One of the most encouraging and beautiful expressions is the affirmation that we find in the letter to the Ephesians: "*Jesus Christ is our peace*" (Eph. 2:14ff.). Christ has torn down the wall that separates us in order to create in himself one new person, thus establishing peace and reconciling both in one body. The Word of God constantly exhorts us to celebrate and live the reality of reconciliation. In Semitic culture and thought peace is the fullness of all blessings... peace fills and satisfies the human heart, that is, it creates internal beauty and order and also creates external and social order which are the fruits of justice.

The gospel proclaims that those who work for the cause of peace are blessed. The idea of reconciliation and peace not only reminds us of the many prayers, parables and exhortations that are found in Scripture (cf., Lk. 15:11 ff.; Jn. 3:16 ff.; II Cor. 5:19-20; Ps. 85:11) but also points us toward the Social Doctrine of the Church where we find a vast and complete development of this doctrine that is being constantly renewed. Indeed, the social doctrine of the Church together with the gospel from which it receives its primary inspiration and also together with its analysis of the reality and its attentiveness to the signs of the times and the hopes and the desires of men and women in every historical era... in this way the Social Doctrine of the Church can and ought to be constituted as a valid instrument of evangelization. Are not

these the legitimate aspirations of men and women and people throughout the world, especially those who are poor and afflicted in any way... are not these signs that question the Church of our era?

Therefore the reconciliation that is spoken about here encompasses every dimension of the human person and the many and varied situations in the midst of the which men and women constantly act, for example, family situations, professional situations, social situations, etc. In other words, we must be mindful of Paul's invitation: in the name of Christ we beg you to become reconciled with God (this reconciliation must involve reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, with society and with all of creation). I do not believe that we are dealing with some fantasy; indeed the fact that this invitation has been repeated so often by the recent teaching of the Church as it exhorts people to become aware of the social question and the problems of the world, leaves no doubt about the reality and the urgency of this. This same urgency is made clear in the new situations and challenges that are pointed out in the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization: secularization, emigration and immigration, economic inequality, scientific and technical research, etc.

6.3. Charity

Both *Porta Fidei*, as well as the letter to the Hebrews, emphasize the need to be faithful to the practice of the charity. We cite here the words of Benedict XVI:

"The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity. Saint Paul reminds us that faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path. Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love. 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'. Supported by faith, let us look with hope at our commitment in the world, as we await 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'" (Porta Fidel, #14).

In the letter to the Hebrews we read: *"Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have; God is placed by sacrifices of that kind"* (Heb.12:14; 13:1-16). For us, as Vincentians, this dimension or aspect of the celebration of the Year of Faith can only be achieved through a stronger and more effective commitment to the cause of the poor. Today we are aware of the demands of charity as they apply to our specific charism: to search out the causes of poverty and to do this courageously and intelligently and with humil-

ity and to offer specific, effective and applicable solutions. As we do this let us work effectively on behalf of the poor and for the credibility of the gospel and the Church.

7. Conclusion

The last proposal for the celebration of the Year of Faith has no time frame for its accomplishment. Indeed, it is one thing to speak about reflection and other activities and celebrations that should be done throughout this time and quite another thing to speak about the fruits that all of this should produce. Here we are not talking about some transitory and passing fruit, but rather we are referring to a personal and collective effort that will help us to be what we are called to be as Christians. As Benedict XVI tells us at the end of his letter:

“May this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm, since only in him is there the certitude for looking to the future and the guarantee of an authentic and lasting love” (Porta Fidei, #15).

Remembering our Spanish Martyrs

Beatification of 42 Members of the Vincentian Family

Tarragona, October 13, 2013

Franco Teodoro Barquín, C.M.

Some days before the celebration of the beatification of the five hundred twenty-two martyrs of the faith, the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference in Spain described the day as one of the most glorious in the history of Spain. The Eucharist was celebrated outdoors in the educational complex in the city of Tarragona and was presided by the representative of Pope Francis, Ángel Cardinal Amato, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. He was accompanied by one hundred-fourteen bishops, among whom were the President of the Episcopal Conference in Spain, Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, and the Archbishop of Tarragona, Jaime Pujol.

Also in attendance were one thousand three hundred eighty-six priests, two thousand two hundred women and men religious, and thousands of family members of the martyrs. It is estimated that more than twenty five thousand persons participated in this celebration. This historical act will be viewed by future generations as a time in which the Church honored those individuals who proclaimed their faith in a courageous and sincere manner and died in defense of the faith during the war of the 1930's. Here we have a very visible application of the words attributed to Blessed Pope John Paul II at the end of the last millennium: *"The Church has once again become a Church of martyrs"*.

Tertullian (155-222) referred to the third century as the century of martyrs. During the first three centuries many people died for their faith and in many cases were executed for their religious convictions. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, there were more Christian martyrs than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. Cardinal Ángel Amato, the representative of the Holy Father, described the significance of the beatification during his homily when he employed short, memorable phrases that will be repeated in the histories that recount this event. In his homily he pointed out that:

"The martyrs were not the fallen victims of the Civil War, but the victims of a radical, religious persecution that sought the organized extermination of the Church. These martyrs, our brothers and sisters,

were not combatants; they were not armed and were not found on the battlefield; they were not avid supporters of some political party nor were they seeking some provocation in order to launch a rebellion. They were peaceful men and women who were killed as a result of a deep hatred for the faith; they were executed because they were Catholic”.

Then, in order to explain the intensity of the religious persecution that occurred during those years, Cardinal Amato added that *“our noble nation became enveloped in a diabolical cloud that wiped out thousands and thousands of peaceful committed men and women. Church and religious symbols were burned; Catholic school and convents were closed, and part of our precious artistic patrimony was destroyed”*. He added that the martyrs *“did not respond to the atrocities of their persecutors with arms and rebellion, but rather with the gentleness of the strong... they hated no one but loved all people and did good”*. The Cardinal highlighted the courageous response of the beati who were not ashamed of the Gospel and who remained faithful to Christ:

“In today’s celebration once more we want to shout out and proclaim the fact that the world needs peace and communion and harmony. Nothing can justify war, hateful fratricide, the death of our neighbor. With their charity, the martyrs opposed the onslaught of evil. Indeed, like a reinforced wall they opposed the monstrous violence that swept over them like a wave. With their gentleness they disarmed the tyrants and thus overcame evil with good. They are always the present day prophets of peace on earth”.

In light of everything above, the five hundred twenty-two persons who were beatified in Tarragona on October 13th are honored as the fruit of the social and political disturbances of the 1930’s, but in no way should they be called “martyrs of the civil war”. The civil war was the social/political context which resulted in the death of the majority of these individuals, but they are the victims, not of the civil war but of a religious persecution... two totally distinct concepts. They were killed *in odium fidei*, as a result of the hatred of the Catholic faith.

Reason for the selection of the date and the place for the beatification

With regard to the selection of the date, the Episcopal Conference was very aware of the words of Pope Benedict XVI when he convoked the Year of Faith and pointed out that *by faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors* (Porta Fidei, #13). The “cause of God” demanded that the martyrs not place anything above the love of

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God, not even their own life. That is one of the most effective ways to delegitimize atheist ideology.

The beatification of these five hundred twenty-two martyrs during this Year of Faith has a special significance for society and for the church. The witness of the martyrs contains a sign of hope, one that encourages and strengthens people to renew their Christian life. This sign of hope also contains power of the witness of the martyrs because they remained faithful to Jesus Christ as they lived out their Christian life and vocation. The example of the martyrs is a powerful witness and encourages us to follow Christ. Tertullian said it so well: *Sanguis martyrum, semen est christianorum* (the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians).

For those who do not know the history of the Church in Tarragona it might appear strange that this Diocese was selected as the site for the beatification. Nevertheless the history of the Church informs us that Tarragona has a long tradition of martyrdom that dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. Several historical events confirm that reality: St. Paul, after proclaiming the Good News in that city, professed his faith as he was martyred in Rome; the protectors of the city, Saint Tecla and Saint Magin, were also martyrs; here also Fructuoso, bishop, and his two deacons, Augurio and Eulogio were the first martyrs of that city. Today we remember that one third of the new beati (one hundred forty-seven martyrs) ministered in the Diocese of Tarragona, including auxiliary bishop, Manuel Borrás and sixty-six diocesan priests.

In selecting this city as the site for the beatification, the bishops were mindful of the significant historical importance of the city which UNESCO has declared as the Patrimony of Humanity. All of this was taken into consideration when making the decision to name Tarragona as the site for the largest beatification ceremony in the history of the church in Spain. The entire environment of this celebration was influenced by the historical events that occurred in this city. The witness to the faith of those first martyrs in Spain, as well as the large number of present day martyrs who were included in the cause for the saints from Tarragona, led the bishops to select this Province as the site for the beatification.

Why are these “blessed ones” called “martyrs of the twentieth century”?

Numerous writers on this theme have stated that, in this case, when the victims are referred to as “the martyrs of the civil war”, there is a manipulation of language. In 1922, on the eve of his execution, Benjamin, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg, wrote: *“The times have changed and there has arisen the possibility of suffering and dying for the love of*

Christ". The reporter, José Francisco Serrano Oceja, took up the words of Benjamin to show the religious persecution in Spain during the twentieth century was not some idiosyncrasy of the century. The same reporter explains this situation with the following commentary:

"Spain was the victim of revolutionary atheistic ideologies. Even though the material authors of this slaughter acted because they viewed their victims as enemies of the revolution, the larger plan was outlined from another perspective. Originally, it sought the extermination of the church and annihilation of the religious dimension from every aspect of life. The martyrs of the faith did not engage in combat on the battlefield and did not fall as victims of political repression. They died as a result of hatred for the faith. Blessed John Paul II defined the martyrs of the twentieth century as 'the great cause of God'. The martyrs did not place anything above the love of God, not even their own life. This was one of the most effective ways to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the atheistic ideologies which viewed the will of the human person as all powerful".

The religious persecution of the 1930's was not a reprisal for the Church's support of the nationalists during the civil war; nor the result of a social-economic situation; or the result of the sins/vices of the clergy (a reason expounded by various authors to explain the persecution). The primary reason for the "religious purification" was "odium fidei"... the hatred of the faith.

The historical context for the religious persecution is related to the Second Spanish Republic (1934) and the first year of the civil war (1936)... years of an unprecedented religious persecution in Spain, a persecution that finds its only parallel in the persecution that occurred during the time of the Roman Empire. An article entitled, *Down with the Church*, and published by the Workers' Solidarity Group, explains the intention of the revolutionary government:

"The church has to disappear forever. The church buildings can no longer serve these lying schemers. The church has to be uprooted by force. Therefore we must take possession of all of the Church's possessions which rightly belong to the people. The religious orders must be suppressed. The bishops and cardinals have to be executed and the church's good have to be confiscated".

The Vincentian Family, a group sought after in the time of the religious persecution

On March 19, 1937, Pope Pius XI, who lived during the time of the Spanish civil war, stated in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, that the unique characteristic of the religious purification in Spain can be seen in the fact that the members of the religious congregations that min-

istered with great zeal and determination on behalf of the poor, the infirm and the abandoned were sought out, persecuted and removed from the social life of Spain. This was precisely the activity that the members of the Vincentian Family were engaged in as they lived out their charism. The confreres evangelized the poor country people through preaching popular missions and educated the most abandoned members of society. The Daughters of Charity, the largest group of women religious with over nine thousand members, ministered throughout Spain with charity and love toward the poor in countless neighborhoods, hospital and orphanages and were involved in three fundamental areas of ministry: education, health care and social work.

The governing bodies of these public charitable institutions began to expel the Sisters from these works with the intention of eliminating Christian influence in the area of health care, education and other areas of social work. These charitable institutions, however, were unable to find a sufficient number of people to replace the Sisters. The patients in these hospitals were mostly women who were invalids and therefore totally dependent and needed the continual dedication and care that only Christian charity can offer. The sons and daughters of Saint Vincent were motivated by the principles of the charism that their Founders had entrusted to them and that we find summarized in the following words: *their passion: Jesus Christ; their inspiration: the gospel; their "chosen ones": the poor; their path: prayer; their lifestyle: simplicity, humility and charity; their family: the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.* The religious purification that was demanded by the legislation that was put in place by the 1931 Constitution discouraged the persecutors in their efforts to eliminate anything and anyone that was religious. The members of the Vincentian Family, like many other people, were hunted down, mistreated and executed.

Sisters Ángeles Infante and Lucrecia Díez have provide us with detailed accounts of the martyrdom of the twenty-seven Daughters of Charity and the lay woman, Dolores Broseta Bonet, as well as the ministry in which each of these women were involved. Indeed, we are given a description of the character and the human values of each one of these individuals. Father Antonio Orcajo does the same with the Missionaries.

The martyrs of Leganés (Madrid) – Puerta de Hierro
Date of Martyrdom: August 12, 1936

Sister Melchora Adoración Cortés Bueno Age: 42

She was born in Sos del Rey Católico (Zaragoza). She radiated the light of knowledge and faith in several school where she taught, the last school being that of Leganés.

Sister María Severina Díaz-Pardo Gauna Age: 41

She was born in Vitoria. Her joy was contagious to students in Leganés where she taught music.

Sister María Dolores Barroso Villaseñor Age: 40

She was born in Bonares (Huelva). She was noted for her kindness and her commitment to the elderly and the mentally infirm in Leganés.

Sister Estefanía Saldaña Mayoral Age: 63

She was born in Tabé de las Calzadas (Burgos). She rejoiced in teaching the younger children and preparing them for First Communion.

Sister María Asunción Mayoral Peña Age: 57

She was born in Tardajos (Burgos). She followed Jesus Christ as a dedicated nurse who cared for those who were blind or who were afflicted with tuberculosis.

**Martyrs on the road from Jaén to Madrid
Vallecas, the death train**

Date of Martyrdom: August 12, 1936

Sister Ramona Cao Fernández Age: 53

She was born in La Rúa de Valdeorras (Orense). She committed her life to caring for women with incurable diseases, soldiers wounded in war, and those who were afflicted with tuberculosis.

Sister Juana Pérez Abascal Age: 50

She was born in Madrid, and was seen as one always available to others and faithful to Christ. She ministered to children and to those persons in Jaén afflicted with tuberculosis.

Martyrs at the Asilo de San Eugenio – Benavites, Valencia

Date of Martyrdom: August 18, 1936

Sister María Rosario Ciércoles Gascón Age: 63

She was born in Zaragoza and was known to be very creative in evangelizing, as she prepared children for their future teaching them different professional trades.

Sister Micaela Hernán Martínez Age: 55

She was born in Burgos. Through her simplicity and responsibility she followed Jesus Christ as she ministered as a teacher and an educator.

Sister María Luisa Bermúdez Ruiz Age: 43

She was born in Sabugueria (Coruña) and was known as a faithful servant of the Lord, who engaged in various ministries, especially as a sewing teacher.

Martyrs of Vallecas (Madrid)

Date of Martyrdom: September 3, 1936

Sister María Dolores Úrsula Caro Martín Age: 43

She was born in Granátula de Calatrava (Ciudad Real). She was a generous and loving teacher and catechist and risked and offered her own life to save the life of her companion Sisters.

Sister Concepción Pérez Giral Age: 49

She was born in Madrid, and ministering among the sick, while also educating young children.

Sister Andrea Calle González Age: 32

She was born in Plasencia (Cárceres). She continued the mission of Jesus Christ as she ministered among the sick and cared for people in the various Mercy Centers.

Sister Martina Vázquez Gordo Age: 71

She was born in Cuella (Segovia) and was totally committed to the various ministries entrusted to her. A courageous witness of the faith, she was martyred in Algar de Palancia (Valencia).

Sister Josefa Martínez Pérez Age: 39

She was born in Alberique (Valencia). She was noted for her gentleness in ministering to children in the hospital and offered her own life to save the life of two other Sisters. She was martyred in Llosa de Ranes (Valencia).

Martyrs at the Casa de Beneficencia, Valencia – Gilet

Date of Martyrdom: October 29, 1936

Sister Victoria Arregui Guinea Age: 42

She was born in Bilbao. She served the Lord in the Charity Center in Valencia teaching in the school and offered workshops on sewing.

Sister Joaquina Rey Aguirre Age: 41

She was born in Bilbao. She evangelized as an administrator and as a teacher of sports.

Martyrs of the Eucharist – the Toledo Road

Date of Martyrdom: October 31, 1936

Sister Modesta Moro Briz Age: 35

She was born in Santibañez de Béjar (Salamanca). She was a witness to charity both in the School as well as in the Pharmacy at the Hospital.

Sister Pilar Isabel Sánchez Suárez Age: 30

She was born in Madrid. She lived out her charitable commitment on a daily basis as she ministers in the shelters of the homeless and the wards of the hospital.

Sister Gaudencia Benavides Herrero Age: 59

She was born in Valdemorriña (León). She was a missionary and experienced a slow martyrdom in prison. She was martyred in Madrid, in the prison of San Rafael de Chamartin.

Martyrs of Las Vistillas (Madrid) – Parque de Las Vistillas

Date of Martyrdom: November 22, 1936

Sister Josefa Gironés Arteta Age: 29

She was born in Garisósain (Navarra). She so loved the passion and the martyrdom Jesus Christ that she asked for the gift of martyrdom at time that she professed her vows.

Sister Lorenza Díaz Bolaños Age: 40

She was born in Sta. María de Guía (Las Palmas de G. Canaria). She was a catechist from the time of her youth and a witness of charity in the hospital.

Martyrs of the Colegio de Bétera (Valencia) – Paterna

Date of Martyrdom: December 9, 1936

Sister Josefa Laborra Goyeneche Age: 72

She was born in Sangüesa (Navarra). She encouraged the Sisters to remain faithful to Christ during their life and death and asked to be the last one to be executed.

Sister Carmen Rodríguez Banazal Age: 59

She was born in San Cristovo de Cea (Orense). During the time of her various assignments she left behind imprints of her goodness as she ministered to the children in the Asilo de Bétera.

Sister Estefanía Irisarri Irigaray Age: 58

She was born in Peralta (Navarra). She was an apostle among the young children and a servant to many families during the time of epidemic and illness.

Sister Pilar Nalda Franco Age: 65

She was born in Algodonales (Cádiz). She was an exemplary teacher and a witness to happiness and goodness in her ministry as choir director.

Sister Isidora Izquierdo García Age: 51

She was born in Páramo del Arroyo (Burgos). She was faithful to her vocation and reflected the goodness of God as she ministered to the children of Bétera.

Dolores Broseta Bonet Age: 44

She was born in Bétera (Valencia). An apostle of the Miraculous Medal she was martyred because she helped the Daughters of Charity who ministered in Bétera.

For more complete biographies of these Vincentian martyrs see:

http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Blesseds_-_Vincentian_Family

or

http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Saints_and_Blesseds_of_the_Vincentian_Family

In Spanish one can read these biographies in the book written by SOR ÁNGELES INFANTE - SOR LUCRECIA DíEZ, *Un Diamante de Treinta Caras (Hijas de la Caridad, mártires de la Fe)*, Editorial La Milagrosa, Garcia de Paredes, 45 - 28010 Madrid (www.editoriallamilagrosa.net).

VINCENTIAN CONFRERES WHO WERE MARTYRS

The community in Guadalajara

Father Ireneo Rodríguez González Age: 57

He was born in Los Balbases (Burgos) on February 10, 1879 and was ordained on November 1, 1903. He was then immediately missioned to the seminary in the Philippines, and from there went to Cuba. Finally, in 1931 was missioned to Guadalajara (Spain). On December 6, 1936 he was cruelly assassinated.

Father Gregorio Cermeño Barceló Age: 62

He was born in Zaragoza in May, 1873. In 1882 he was living at the Asilo de Jesús, a home for poor boys. He was ordained on September 8, 1899. He was assigned to Porto Alegre (Brazil) where he remained for two years. He was sent to Guadalajara in 1929 and on December 6, 1936 gave witness of his faith and love for Christ.

Father Vicente Vilumbrales Fuente Age: 27

On April 5, 1909, he was born in Reinoso de Bureba (Burgos). After attending a mission preached by Vincentians, he entered the Congregation of the Mission. He was ordained on September 9, 1934 and sent to Guadalajara in February, 1936. On December 6, 1936 his body was burned to ashes as he gave witness to his profound faith in Jesus Christ.

Brother Narciso Pascual Pascual Age: 19

He was born in Sarreus de Tioira (Orense). He entered the Congregation on November 26, 1933 in order to prepare to be a Brother. He took his vows on November 27th, 1935 and in the middle of May, 1936 was assigned to Guadalajara. On December 6, 1936, together with his confrere, Father Vilumbrales, his body was reduced to ashes. He was nineteen years old.

The community in Alcorisa (Teruel)

Father Fortunato Velasco Tobar Age: 30

He was born in Tardajos (Burgos) on June 1, 1906, and was ordained October 11, 1931. He ministered as an educator and a formator in the apostolic seminaries of the Congregation in Álava, Teruel and finally in Alcorisa, where he gave witness to his faith and love of Jesus Christ and his Church. He was killed and shed his blood on August 24, 1936

Father Leoncio Pérez Nebreda Age: 41

He was born on March 18, 1895 in Vallarmentero (Burgos). He was ordained on August 10, 1921 after having completed his theological studies with excellent grades. His first assignment was the Vincentian seminary at Teruel (1921-1935). From Teruel he was assigned to Alcorisa. In Oliete, near Alcorisa, he was betrayed and like St. Stephen, he was stoned to death on August 2, 1936. Soon after, one of his murderers bragged about having seen "a fat bird fall".

Brother Luis Aguirre Bilbao Age: 22

He was born on August 19, 1914 in Munguia. On June 29, 1931, he entered the Congregation to prepare to be a Brother, and took vows on June 30, 1933. He was assigned to Alcorisa (Teruel) where he devoted himself to manual labor. When religious persecution erupted, he remained at the Seminary until he was arrested and imprisoned. With arms outstretched he cried out: *Long live Christ the King!* and was executed by a firing squad on July 29, 1936.

The community at Oviedo

Father Tomás Pallarés Ibáñez Age: 46

He was born in La Iglesuela del Cid (Teruel) on March 6, 1890. He was ordained on August 29, 1915. He was assigned to Tenerife (1915-1923) and lastly, in 1930, to the seminary in Oviedo. On October 13, 1934 he died giving witness of his faith and love.

Brother Salustiano González Crespo Age: 65

He was born in Tapia de la Ribera (León) on May 1st, 1871. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 28, 1894. On October 29, 1896 he was sent to Ávila and from there to Valdemor (Madrid), La Laguna (Tenerife), Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Cuenca) and finally to Oviedo where he was tireless in his ministry on behalf of the poor and children. On October 13, 1934, he gave witness to his faith and love.

The community at Seo de Urgel

Father Antonio Carmanís y Mercader Age: 76

He was born in Rialp (Lérida) on April 17, 1860. Gifted with an great intellect, he entered the Diocesan Seminary in Seo de Urgel in 1872. But in 1879 he requested entrance into the Congregation of the Mission, and was ordained in 1855. He was missioned in Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Rialp in various ministries. After a long, painful agony, he was martyred in Llavorsi on August 17, 1936 before a firing squad . He died forgiving his executioners.

The community at Gijón

Father Amado García Sánchez Age: 33

He was born in Moscardón (Teruel) on April 29th, 1903. He was ordained on May 2, 1926. That same year he was assigned to the Casa Misión in Ávila and from there he went to Granada and finally to Gijón in 1929. He died on October 24, 1936 (the eve of the feast of Christ the King) giving witness to his faith.

Father Andrés Avelino Gutiérrez Moral Age: 50

He was born in Salazar de Amaya (Burgos) on November 12, 1886 and was ordained in October, 1911. From Limpías, his first assignment, was in Tardajos in 1917. The people called him "Father Taskmaster". In 1930 he was assigned to Orense and in 1933 was missioned to Gijón. There on August 3, 1936, cruelly executed death, he gave witness to his faith.

Father Ricardo Atanes Castro Age: 61

He was born on August 5, 1875 in Cualedro (Orense) and was ordained on May 27, 1899. He was assigned to Mérida de Yucatán (Mexico) where he remained until 1914 when served in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. In 1924 he was sent to Orense (Spain) and in 1935 to Gijón. On August 14, 1936 he died in Gijón giving witness to his faith and love.

Father Pelayo José Granado Prieto Age: 41

He was born in Santa Maria de los Llanos (Cuenca) on July 30, 1895 and was ordained on May 25, 1923. He was involved in evangelizing the poor first in Écija (Sevilla) and then in Granada (1927), Pagés del Corro, Sevilla (1929), Badajoz (1932), and finally, Gijón (1936). He was cruelly put to death on August 27, 1936.

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Witness of the Martyrs

The forty-two members of the Vincentian Family who died during the religious persecution of the 1930's are, and will continue to be, living witnesses of the Christian faith in the Vincentian Family and in the Church, people who lived the extreme dimension of love. All these individuals will be recognized in the history of the Church of Spain as unique witnesses to God, distinguished by the presence of Love in their lives, totally dedicated to God for the noblest of causes: the triumph of love over hatred, the triumph of forgiveness over vengeance, and the triumph of peace over war. The martyrs were courageous in suffering, and were filled with a love that enabled them to discover the fact that the truth and the dignity of the human person and the most authentic fulfillment of the person is freedom. This reality allowed them to seal their witness to the faith with the shedding of their blood for the cause of love and forgiveness.

In his homily Cardinal Ángelo Amato referred to the message that the ancient and modern martyrs offer us and stated that these martyrs offer us a twofold message:

"Above all else they invite us to forgive. Pope Francis recently reminded us that the joy of God is forgiving... The whole Gospel, all of Christianity, is here! But make sure that it is not just some sentiment, it is not being a 'do-gooder'! On the contrary, mercy is the true force that can save people and the world from the 'cancer' that is sin, moral evil, spiritual evil. Only love fills the void, the negative chasms that evil opens in hearts and in history. Only love can do this, and this is God's joy!"

The members of the Vincentian Family, following the counsel of St. Vincent, viewed martyrdom as a grace. Thus, strengthened by this grace, they made the supreme sacrifice of laying down their life to give witness to their faith. There was no act of apostasy and none of the martyrs experienced doubts of faith at the time of their execution. No one could have shown greater love than these martyrs who died for the very cause of love.

All that is stated here is confirmed in the account that Sisters Ángeles Infante and Lucrecia Díez provide us with when describing the death of Blessed Sister Martina, a Daughter of Charity who was referred to as a "woman of steel" and "a creative woman". Before her death she revealed her boldness and her creativity as she saved the life of nine

companions. She begged her captors: *"These women can heal people. You have placed them in a hospital in Segorbe and if you give them a nurses' uniform, they will do much good"*. She told her executioners: *"Do not kill them..."* and they listened to her.

Sr. Martina continued to give this powerful witness up to the time that she was to be executed by a young man whom she had taken off the streets. This individual wanted to blindfold her but she said: *"My son, do not cover my eyes. Jesus Christ died facing those who crucified him and forgave them. I want to die the same way. I forgive you because you do not know what you are doing. You are following orders. You are opening the doors of heaven to me and so allow me to die with my eyes open and do not blindfold me"*. She invoked the Blessed Mother as she prayed: *O Mary, conceived without sin...* and then professed her faith anew as she cried out: *Long live Christ the King!...* then Sr. Martina died.

To obtain the gift that was given to the martyrs we must be animated by religious values, which one does not obtain over night. To obtain this gift, we, brothers and sisters who are united by the Vincentian charism have to learn from the life of these martyrs, where and how to renew the spirit to enable us to be faithful martyrs like them, echoing the words that St. Vincent de Paul spoke to the Missionaries:

"God grant, my dear confreres, that all those who present themselves to join the Company will come with the thought of martyrdom, desiring to suffer it and so devote themselves entirely to the service of God, whether in far off lands or here, wherever it may please God to make use of the poor Little Company! Yes, with the thought of martyrdom. How often we should ask Our Lord for that grace and the disposition to be ready to risk our lives for his glory and the salvation of the neighbor" (CCD: XI: 334-335).

Fr. Fortunato Velasco internalized those words of St. Vincent. He desired martyrdom and was prayed for God to give him that grace. He expressed those feelings when granted provisional freedom, even though he was still being watched. It was a time of great tension, for me, having obtained freedom he said with some disappointment: *"I have not received martyrdom because I have not been found worthy of this grace"*. He was imprisoned anew and a few hours before his execution, he wrote the following in a letter to a Vincentian seminarian, Manuel Herranz, who would later become a Missionary: *"I am writing to you to communicate to you the following... I have spent the whole night in prison and this morning I gave my statement. We are held responsible for the whole movement and therefore I expect that at any moment they are going to execute me. Pray for me... I will die as a martyr in defense of the faith... I have offered myself to God so that he might do his holy will"*.

In the account of the lives of each of these martyrs, we discover that all of them were men and women of faith and profound prayer that was centered on the Eucharist and on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Thus, for as long as it was possible (and this includes during the time that they were imprisoned), these members of the Vincentian Family participated in the Eucharist, received Communion and invoked the name of Mary as they prayed the rosary. They were apostles until the last moment of their lives. They were courageous when they had to openly profess they were believers. They comforted and supported one another in their imprisonment and rejected any offer that would have forced them to renounce their Christian identity. They were strong when they were mistreated and tortured; they forgave their persecutors and prayed for them. At the time of their death, they revealed a profound calmness and peace; they praised God and proclaimed Christ to be the only Lord.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Beatification Reflections

LETTER ON THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SPANISH MARTYRS

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

To the Members of the Vincentian Family

Peace and joy in the Risen Lord!

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We are approaching the celebration of our faith which will take place in Tarragona, Spain and during which time forty-two members of the Vincentian Family will be beatified. These were men and women who were faithful to their vocation of following Christ, as they engaged in ministries of preaching, teaching, and charitable service to those who were poor. As members of the Vincentian Family, Sunday, October 13, 2013 will be a day of great joy and gratitude. It calls us to renew our fidelity to our vocation, while giving new impetus to our missionary endeavors. Our brothers and sisters who were martyred embraced such a call, and did so without fear or anxiety. The initiative, the call to follow Jesus Christ always comes from God, but still we are mediators, men and women willing to accompany others on the journey.

These martyrs are witnesses of the faith and they illuminate us with light – the light of the Holy Spirit – who filled their own life with strength, enthusiasm and generosity that ultimately enabled them to profess courageously their faith and to seal that profession with their own blood. “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends*” (Jn. 15:13). Only love for Jesus Christ, a love greater than for one’s own life can explain the value of martyrdom.

On October 13th, the Church in Spain will witness the beatification of 522 men and women from thirty-three dioceses and various religious Congregations who gave witness to their faith during the twentieth century. Among this group of witnesses we find:

- ***27 Daughters of Charity of Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac***
- ***11 priests of the Congregation of the Mission***
- ***3 brothers of the Congregation of the Mission***

• ***1 laywoman, Daughters of Mary, Miraculous Medal Association: Dolores Broseta***

This is a time of light and grace for the Church and the Vincentian Family. In these days, I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and the joy expressed by family members of these martyrs during interviews with various media outlets. In the works that have been written about our martyrs, we find some literary images that speak to us about the light and strength and peace that was so much a part of the martyrs. For example, some works written about the Daughters are entitled *Luminaries of Faith* and *A Diamond of Thirty Faces*. Here we are referring to the Light of Christ which the martyrs received at the time of their Baptism, a dim light that they knew how to accept, how to care for, and how to spread.

All the major superiors and the bishops in Spain, who in some way promoted the cause of the martyrs, have written letters and messages about the meaning of this beatification. Most of these writings contain some important gospel expressions, key words in the life of faith that these martyrs lived and professed, such as **grace, gift, light, service and happiness**.

In my opinion, those words are characteristic of our faith, which Pope Francis has referred to on so many different occasions. **Grace** and **gift** require our acceptance, and mean that we are willing to imitate our Founders, the saints, and beati of the Church and the Vincentian Family. In so doing, we show we are willing to live in openness to the movements of the Holy Spirit.

The light of faith that, in a world often darkened by the eclipse of God, once again shines forth through prayer, study, participation in the sacraments, and charity on behalf of the poor and needy. That light, revealed by our martyrs, is a divine invitation to live anew our charism, to rise above all forms of superficiality, to become more contemplative, and to deepen our spiritual and apostolic life. This enables us to become more focused and less scattered.

Service lived as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ was what led to the execution of our martyrs. During that time of persecution, there were attempts to eradicate the name of God from the hearts of school children, from the sufferings of the infirm in hospitals, and from the kindness offered by the Sisters in their many centers of charitable works.

Happiness is the fruit of joy from the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is the Spirit alone who gave the martyrs the necessary strength that enabled them to embrace martyrdom as an extraordinary gift and the supreme act of charity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, #42). As prophets of hope, these martyrs invite us to overcome every form of modern pessimism, so we

may live our vocation with a new zeal that allows the light of faith to shine forth in our daily fidelity to the gospel.

I invite all of us to rejoice together with the members of the Vincentian Family in Spain and to give thanks to God for the newly beatified, by following their example of faith, courage, and charity. In celebrating this event and living our charism, I hope all members of the Vincentian Family will find in this beatification a time of grace, gift, light, service, and happiness.

DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY MARTYRS FOR THE FAITH IN SPAIN

Evelyne Franc, D.C.
Superioress General

We bless the Lord and thank Him for the witness of heroic fidelity by twenty-seven Daughters of Charity and a Child of Mary who accompanied them even to martyrdom.

Our martyred Sisters gave a courageous witness of faith and love for Jesus Christ: their lives were put to the test in persecution, and at the bitter hour of Gethsemane, they did not back away from the supreme sacrifice.

Contemplating their simple lives totally given in humility and fidelity, we admire the marvels that the Lord did in each of the Sisters. They remained rooted in a firm faith, an intense prayer life fed by the Eucharist, a great love for the Virgin Mary and a very strong sense of the Church. Encouraged by community life that supported them, they tenderly loved persons who are poor and served them with great enthusiasm and joy; they suffered and found joy in giving the best of themselves where the Company had sent them.

Their path, in response to God's call, radiated brightly and steadfastly through an ardent faith, a joyful hope and a boundless love. The strength of the Holy Spirit shines in their martyrdom: they preferred to leave their ministries and security rather than renounce their faith and vocation as Daughters of Charity. They accepted death with joy and hope, offering the gift of forgiveness with a peaceful smile to those who persecuted and killed them.

The shining message of our Sisters martyred for the faith in the 20th century is still alive and relevant. Their memory lives on in history: they are witnesses of mercy and forgiveness for humanity that aspires to knock down the barriers dividing peoples and strongly desires to strengthen the bonds of fraternity as a prelude to a new springtime where love and justice, liberty and peace will flourish forever.

Our martyred Sisters invite us to be lights of love with persons who are poor whom we serve, with the present generation that needs a lamp to shed light on their perspective and direct their steps to Jesus, our only hope.

*"The blood of our sisters will be spilled
by those deserving of God's grace,
and it will make holy those who remain".*

(SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, 1658, COSTE X, p. 551)

Vincentian Missionaries, Martyrs for the Faith

October 13th, 2013 – Tarragona (Spain)

Joaquín González Hernando, C.M.

Visitor, Province of Madrid

INTRODUCTION

It was Blessed John Paul II who wrote: *A sign of the truth of Christian love, ageless but especially powerful today, is the memory of the martyrs. Their witness must not be forgotten. They are the ones who have proclaimed the Gospel by giving their lives for love. The martyr, especially in our own days, is a sign of that greater love which sums up all other values (Incarnationis mysterium, #13).*

Those words of John Paul II have not been forgotten by the church in Spain or by the Congregation of the Mission in Spain. Thirteen years later, on October 13th, 2013, in the city of Tarragona and at the conclusion of the laborious process of these Causes, five hundred twenty-two martyrs were beatified, men and women from various dioceses and religious congregations in Spain, victims of the religious persecution that occurred in Spain during the twentieth century.

As of now their names have been written in the *Martyrology* of the Church and they will be the object of our veneration and prayers. This day will also be written into the history of the Congregation in Spain as an historical and memorable day because eleven priests and three brothers were beatified. This day is just as memorable for the Company of the Daughters of Charity because twenty-seven Sisters and one daughter of Mary of the Miraculous Medal were also beatified. Here, I want to offer a simple homage to the fourteen Vincentian Missionaries, now blessed, and also, I want to express my gratitude for their witness to the faith.

A GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE

The Cause of the fourteen Vincentian Missionaries, headed by Father Fortunato Velasco Tobar, had been long awaited and was joyfully concluded with the decree of Pope Francis (July 5, 2013). This decree reinforces the desire of the Congregation in Spain that we do not want to forget those persons who, for the cause of Christ, suffered a violent death as they offered the greatest witness of the faith. We do not want

to forget those who so loved Christ that they poured out their blood in his name. We cannot forget these confreres who so loved God, the Church and the Congregation that they offered their very life.

Those fourteen Missionaries (Fortunato Velasco, Leoncio Pérez, Luis Aguirre, Tomás Pallarés, Salustiano González, Antonio Carmanfu, Ireneo Rodríguez, Gregorio Cermeño, Vicente Vilumbrales, Narciso Pascual, Amado García, Andrés Avelino, Ricardo Atanes y Pelayo José), were martyred in distinct regions of Spain (Teruel, Seu de Urgel, Guadalajara-Sigüenza, Asturias), and died as the result of cruel and vicious torture. We must remember that their physical suffering was accompanied by spiritual suffering which was no less painful. There is no doubt about the fact that they have obtained the palm of martyrdom and that they are present to us today and will be remembered forever.

All of these martyrs were sons of families who had strong Christian roots. They were members of a people who for centuries had their feet firmly planted on the land they cultivated and their eyes firmly fixed on the heaven they hoped for. These Servants of God lived during one of the most tragic eras of the history of Spain: the revolution of 1934 and the beginning of the civil war... a war between Spaniards that encompassed the years 1936-1939. The civil war is the social/political context that resulted in the death of the majority of the confreres, but they are not the victims of the civil war. Rather, they are the victims of religious persecution, two very distinct concepts. Unfortunately, every war claims innocent victims. Mothers cried countless tears for their dead sons who died as participants in one or another faction of the conflict. Every innocent person who dies deserves our respect and our compassion.

For this group of confreres who were victims of the religious persecution, a new path was opened to them, which led to their martyrdom. They died for the faith, because they were members of a religious group. They did not die because of their political beliefs. The narrative of events surrounding their final days is truly horrifying: fugitives, hiding, denounced, tortured, and ultimately, killed. Prayer and the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal sustained them. Who can deny the fact that they never harmed anyone? Who were their enemies? These confreres were courageous Missionaries. Prayer and the Eucharist made them strong, and it was with this strength that they confronted death and spoke words of forgiveness to their executioners. It was with this strength that they entrusted their life to Our Lady, and prayed like Jesus for their executioners: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do* (Lk. 23:34).

Martyrdom is the seal of love and commitment. Vincent de Paul referred to it in this way: *"There is no greater act of love than that of martyrdom"*. On another occasion he said, *"The salvation of people, and*

our own, is a good of such magnitude it deserves to be bought no matter what the price. It matter not if we die in the fight. Only let us die with our weapons in our hands, and happy, for by our death the Company will not be the poorer, because, sanguis martyrum, semen est Christianorum" (ABELLY II: 168).

JOY AND COMMITMENT

The celebration of October 13th in Tarragona was a joyful occasion but, at the same time, it was an occasion for further commitment, one we must continue to concretize in the various initiatives that the fruit of the Year of Faith which ended in November. The celebration of the beatification of this group of confreres has significance for the Congregation in Spain and throughout the world only if we are able to be strengthened in our own faith and take up the torch that has been lighted by their hope, and live with a charity that acts justly. This celebration will have meaning for us if in every local community worldwide where Vincentians serve we do not hide the light of faith under the table but place it on a lampstand, giving witness to the living God. We glorify our martyrs if we become ever more aware that the path along which the Congregation must travel: the way of faith, hope and service on behalf of those who are poor. This is also the path that each one of us should travel, with joy and new hearts of flesh.

In the universal Church and also in our Congregation we need the witness of the martyrs to learn anew the lesson of their sacrifice. At a time when we are surrounded by ideologies that deny the presence of the living God and are opposed to the faith, the martyrs, through their intercession and example, help us to remain strong in our faith. The Church places these martyrs before us as examples of peace, forgiveness, fidelity, and compassion toward the world. The Church does not point a finger at those responsible for their death of these confreres, but rather highlights the potential of humanity that is enclosed in those lives that were offered to God.

The martyrdom of these confreres is a gift and a grace, a grace that invites us to remain faithful. Their witness as martyrs is very important but we must recognize that their martyrdom was the result of a lifetime of on-going fidelity. Perhaps we are not called to a bloody martyrdom, but we are called to be faithful. We are called to give daily witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor. Witnesses are only credible if they live with the love of the children of God. That is what the world expects of us as Vincentians.

If the Church and the Congregation glorify these Servants of God, it is not to honor them, as they already rejoice in the promise of the Lord: *the Father will honor whoever serves me* (Jn. 12:26). Rather, we honor these martyrs in order to take up the heritage of their witness

which commits us to be the Lord's witnesses. The martyrs, however, are not only an example, but they are also our powerful intercessors in the struggle of faith and the search for peace.

CONCLUSION: blessed are you

The profound theological meaning of beatification is found in Jesus' words: "*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you*" (Mt. 5:11-12). We celebrate the Lord's words fulfilled in them: "*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for there is the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt. 5:10). The martyrs help us to be aware of the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The martyrs preach silently but eloquently, enabling the Church to grow, not from a perspective of strength but one of weakness. Death, which the world views as defeat, becomes a sign of victory to the eyes of faith. Thus, the words of Tertullian's have a profound theological meaning: "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians*". The Church has been esteemed as a result of the admirable witness of the holy martyrs who proclaim anew Jesus' resurrection. In the last century, the Congregation has been esteemed in Spain. St. Vincent said, "*For one Missioner who has given his life for the love of God, the goodness of God will raise up many others to do the good he will have left undone*" (CCD: XI: 366) May we continue to be esteemed for our love and commitment to the poor. May the blood shed by these fourteen confreres continue to be the seed of new vocations to the Congregation.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Our Newest Confrere-Bishop



An interview with

most Reverend VARGHESE THOTTAMKARA, C.M.

Coadjutor Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte (Ethiopia)

John T. Maher, C.M.,

with Varghese Thottamkara, C.M.

Editor's note

Last June, as the General Curia gathered at St. John's University in New York City for final preparations for the International Visitors Meeting, word spread very quickly of the appointment of Fr. Varghese Thottamkara, C.M. as coadjutor bishop of the Apostolate Vicariate of Nekemte, Ethiopia, a place with a strong Vincentian presence. Announced in a press bulletin by the Holy See on June 28, 2013, it caught all by surprise, most of all Fr. Varghese! Before his ordination as bishop and departure from the Curia and Rome, Fr. Varghese sat down with Vincentiana for an interview and to share his thoughts, reactions, and hopes.

Tell a little about your background, family, education, and how you came to the CM.

I was born on June 2, 1959 at Thottuva, in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Ankamaly of Kerala, to late Mr. & Mrs. Souru (Xavier) and Mariam Thottamkara. I have 3 brothers and 2 sisters. My father was a farmer and from a middle-class family. After completing high school studies at G.V.H. School, Koovapady, I joined the minor Seminary of

the Congregation of the Mission at St. Vincent's, Gopalpur-Orissa on July 2, 1976. My cousin, Fr. Basil C.M., another Vincentian priest, was my inspiration in joining the CM. Fr. Louis Vadakeparambil was my vocation promoter.

I did my philosophy studies at Aquinas College from 1979-1982, and entered the Internal Seminary of the Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission, on May 11, 1982. Having completed theological studies at St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary in Alwaya, I pronounced vows and was incorporated into the Congregation on May 10, 1986. The priestly ordination was conferred on me on January 6, 1987 at my home parish, St. Joseph's Church, Thottuva by the late Cardinal Antony Padiyara of the Ernakulam- Angamaly Archdiocese.

What has been your 'pathway' or various assignments in ministry?

After ordination, I served as assistant parish priest, hostel warden and youth animator in our parishes of Muniguda and Christnagar in the diocese of Berhampur for three and a half years. In October 1990, I was assigned to Ethiopia to teach in the Minor Seminary of the Vincentians at Ambo, where I learned the local language Amharic, and served as English teacher and assistant Rector for 3 years. From 1992 I started teaching in the Major Seminary at Addis Ababa as a visiting Professor. In 1993, I was transferred to Addis Ababa as the first Rector of St. Paul's Major Seminary of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte. During this time I taught various topics in Theology at St. Francis Theological Institute.

In 1995 I was sent to Rome by the Ethiopian province to specialize in Moral Theology. On completion of graduate studies, I was awarded a Licentiate in Moral Theology from St. Thomas University of the Dominicans known as '*Angelicum*'.

I returned back to Ethiopia in 1997 September and was appointed Rector of the Vincentian Major Seminary at Addis Ababa and continued to teach Moral Theology in St. Francis' Institute. I served also as the Dean of Theology of the Institute. I served as provincial consultor of the Ethiopian CM for two terms and assisted in the formation program of the CMRS (Conference of Major Religious Superiors) with classes, conferences and retreats and taught Medical Ethics in the Nursing College of the Catholic Bishops' Conference at Wolliso.

In 2002 June I returned to India and served as Rector of the Vincentian minor seminary, provincial consultor and assistant provincial of the Southern Indian Province and Rector and Superior of the "Vincentian Major Seminary" at Aluva. The Superior General appointed me Procurator General to the Holy See of the Congregation and Archivist General in 2005. As Archivist General of the Congregation, I attended a Course in Archivistry and Paleography at the state university of LUMSA in collaboration with the Vatican Library. In 2006 I was elected

as the provincial of the Southern Province of India in which position I served for 4 years. On July 10, 2010 in the Jubilee year of the death of St. Vincent, during the General Assembly, at Paris, I was elected one of the Assistant Generals of the Congregation of the Mission.

What was your experience like as a missionary in Ethiopia: ministry, people, etc?

I worked in Ethiopia mainly as a formator, retreat preacher, spiritual counselor and teacher. My service was not limited to Vincentians alone, but was extended to the seminarians, religious, and priests of various Congregations and dioceses of Ethiopia. I enjoyed serving the Ethiopian Church, as I saw how much it was needed, as well as how much my service was appreciated. I really felt satisfied that my work there bore fruit. Today, I can see many of my former students working earnestly in Ethiopia in various positions for the good of the Church and of Ethiopian people.

The Ethiopian people are a very warm and hospitable people. They respect guests and honor them. Even the poorest readily to share with others the little they have. I was so deeply affected by the Ethiopian cultural values that I made a comparative study of them with some of the important Gospel values for my research paper in Rome as part of the work to get a licentiate in did graduate studies. Though I left Ethiopia after 12 years of service there, I love the Ethiopian people and am happy to go back to Ethiopia.

What was your reaction when you were informed of your appointment as Bishop?

Indeed, it came to me as a surprise. I thought that they would certainly be looking for an Ethiopian to lead the Vicariate. So my first reaction was "why me?". I remembered the words of one of the bishops of Ethiopia who said "*It is the Holy Spirit who works through us and therefore we can never say 'no' to the Holy Spirit!*". I imagined how challenging the task is going to be and I knew my limitations. Yet I said in my prayer, "*If this is what you want me, Lord, let your will be done. But please, give me your Grace to carry it out well!*". The officials (Bishops) from the Propaganda Fide also explained to me the need, and the reason for choosing me. So I accepted with all humility.

In your opinion and from your experience, what is the Bishop's role in today's Church?

I believe the role of the Bishop is to lead, teach, and to give witness. This role is to be exercised in collaboration with the laity, religious, and priests of a diocese. Above all, a bishop should guide and lead

through personal example, genuine love, and respect. The bishop should be a unifying force who, together with the faithful, religious, and clergy, allows themselves to be guided by Christ, the eternal shepherd. The true good of the diocese, especially of the faithful, should be the primary concern of the bishop.

In your opinion, what are the needs of the Catholic clergy and people of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte, Ethiopia?

The majority of the priests of the Vicariate are my former students. They know me well and I know them. They are enthusiastic and devout priests. I believe they need somebody who will motivate, appreciate, and unite them. I will be concentrating on these aspects as I reach there. The people are very simple and poor. They need all kinds of assistance. The pastoral and catechetical need is great. The faithful must be helped to grow in their faith and live it. They are looking to the Catholic Church to help them address their social and educational needs. So evangelization through schools, social work, and charities is also a goal of the diocese.

Is there anything you like to say to the confreres in your province, the General Curia whom you have lived and worked with, as well as the entire Congregation as you enter this new phase of your life and ministry?

I am proud of being a Vincentian. I owe my identity to the Congregation of the Mission. When I was celebrating the sacerdotal silver jubilee in my home parish in India last year, my parish priest asked me to tell to the youth whether I am happy with my vocation as a missionary. I told them "There are many challenges of being a missionary. But if you ask me whether I am happy as a Vincentian, my answer is this: 'If God were to offer me another life, I would again choose to be a Vincentian priest'". I said this with deep conviction, and I repeat this even today. I learned to be a simple zealous missionary seeing the example of many committed confreres. So I wanted my confreres to be true to their call. I thank the Congregation for forming me and giving chance to serve the church and the poor in various capacities. Now I am taking up this task of the Church in the name of the Congregation. The Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte is entrusted to the care of the Vincentians. I am the eighth consecutive Vincentian bishop of the Vicariate. They have asked me to take up this task just because I am a Vincentian, and a former missionary in Ethiopia. So I ask all the confreres to continue to consider me a confrere and encourage and support me. I will do this task in your name.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

The task ahead for me is a challenging one. I feel sad that I have to once again leave behind my friends and community and learn to adjust to new realities situations and ministry. I hope with the help and prayers of all I will learn to fit into the new shoes. I look forward to the continued love, support prayer, and encouragement from all. Thank you and God bless you all.

“St. Vincent as First Econome” Address to Provincial Economes

Paris, 5 August 2013

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Introduction

Welcome to Paris and to the place I call “Vincentian Central”! As Parisians use August for vacation to flee the City of Lights, I am happy to join you here and to spend this time reflecting on the indispensable role each one of you plays as a Provincial Econome. We are here not just to discuss “wise money management”, but to make use of your wisdom as the tireless managers of the goods of the Congregation. I use the word ‘wisdom’ in describing you because I believe to be an effective Econome, you must be knowledgeable, not just in the ways of the world, but wisely attuned to your province, your confreres, their hopes and needs, and to your available assets.

Yours is truly a ‘hidden ministry’ as you toil in what must seem so far away from the active apostolates and works of the Congregation that bring your confreres personal and spiritual satisfaction. Yet, were it not for your competence and dedication to your duties as an Econome, much of what your confreres take for granted in the resources provided for their apostolates and community life would be missing. In your ‘hidden ministry’, the charism of the Congregation is able to grow and flourish; new members are formed and our elders are assured of proper care. You make it possible for the creation of a quality of community life, enabling our confreres to “live in the manner of dear friends” as Our Holy Founder St. Vincent envisioned.

St. Vincent as the First Econome!

Speaking of St. Vincent, we can all agree that he was a man of many talents and abilities, which for over 350 years have positively impacted the Church and the world. We can recall some of the illustrious accolades bestowed on Vincent by posterity, such as ‘Father of the Poor’, ‘Light of the Clergy’, ‘Organizer Unafraid’ and “First Priest of the Mission” to name but a few. Today, I believe it is time to unveil a new, long overdue title for Vincent. Are you ready? It is: “*Vincent DePaul: First Econome of the Congregation*”. Don’t wait for it to show up in our

community prayer books, liturgical calendars, or the stained glass windows of your oratories!

But I believe that to properly understand Vincent, his mindset, mission, and the charism he left us, we must realize that in his lifetime, Vincent de Paul learned how to be not only the first “shrewd money manager” for the Congregation, but more importantly, he mastered the complexities of obtaining property, funding for ministries, and formulating and enforcement of contracts that ensured the fiscal stability for the Congregation. If that sounds too mercenary for your taste, then perhaps delving into a little of our community history will prove my point.

In an illuminating study of the financial acumen of Vincent, Jose Maria Roman noted that whenever Vincent undertook a new work, “the contract stipulated exhaustively the financial conditions on which depended the number of members of the new community and their ministerial obligation” (*Vincentiana*, July 1984, 141). From the outset, Vincent envisioned confreres’ service to the poor to be done free of any financial obligations to those served. Therefore, it was necessary to have funding in place to insure the stability and continuity of a work. As Roman noted, “For every foundation in the canonical sense, there was a corresponding ‘foundation’ in the financial sense” (*Vincentiana*, December 1984, 153).

These funds came from many sources: bishops who invited the Congregation into their dioceses, donations from wealthy patrons, the Propagation of the Faith in Rome (for missionary endeavors), and even the treasury of the royalty. Vincent also made use of ordinary means of income in his day, which included leased farm land, rented properties, revenue from public transportation, and investments. All these served the same purpose: to stabilize the Mission and the community life of the confreres. If a funder reneged on a financial commitment, Vincent was not hesitant about withdrawing confreres. As John Rybolt noted in “St. Vincent de Paul and Money” (a most original title, I think!), “Vincent insisted on stable financial foundations for any new apostolate, and when he occasionally discovered that bishops were not honoring their commitments, he withdrew confreres” (*Vincentian Heritage Journal*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, 2005, 92).

One final idea on why Vincent should be seen as “First Econome of the Congregation”: as we marvel at the many new pathways he blazed: works of charity with the laity, foundation of the Congregation and the Daughters, overseeing missionary activities, services he provided to other religious, civic officials, and the royal court; now imagine the complexity in negotiating, writing, and enforcing the financial agreements that made all that possible! One example will suffice. When Vincent took over St. Lazare from the Canons of St. Augustine, he inherited one of the largest ecclesiastical properties in Paris, with out-

lying farms and mills. But, it needed extensive renovations. Vincent also had to care for the elderly Canons who lived there, while adapting St. Lazare to the new works of the Congregation. He had to fund the education of his seminarians, and later, provide care for his sick and elderly confreres. The demands of managing that property could have buried any man, but he made it work! Vincent’s patient trust in Providence, his attention to detail and collaborative ways enabled him to make St. Lazare a home for the Congregation and a renowned place for service to the poor and diocesan clergy formation.

Two Key Themes for Today’s Provincial Econome

When considering how I would like to frame our discussion today, different ideas came to mind. One could approach this topic in a business manner, or in a philosophical or theological context, but none of these would capture the vital nature of your work. So I decided to focus upon two key themes I believe are the ‘drivers’ directing your ministry as Provincial Econome. They are solidarity and stewardship.

Solidarity

The word solidarity is frequently used today to indicate one’s personal, political, social, economic, or even religious preferences. In the Congregation, we have stressed the importance of ‘economic solidarity’, drawing on its biblical, catechetical, and historical roots. The early Church (as seen in the Acts of the Apostles) was a community of solidarity in all its forms. The teachings of the Church Fathers (esp. the Didache) reminded the early Christian community of the need to share their goods and to serve the needy as a reflection of God’s will, as seen in the person of Jesus. And St. Vincent’s Common Rule, his many conferences, and our Constitutions tell us “we live within a true community of goods” and “hold all our goods in common” (C. 32, No. 4).

Moreover, our Fundamental Statute on Poverty (the most detailed explication of the vows, promulgated in 1659) tells us how we are to understand and live our vow of poverty. If we are truly seeking solidarity with Christ, one another, and the poor, then it must be seen in the quality of our witness to the vows, specifically, our vow of poverty which centers on our relationship to and use of temporal goods. Solidarity moves us from an ‘I- centered’ attitude toward community life and temporal goods to a ‘We-focused’ mindset. We develop and dedicate our time, talent, and treasure not for ourselves, but for the good of the Mission and our confreres.

However, what does solidarity mean when viewed from your perspective as Provincial Econome? In answering this question, I think a good measuring tool to test solidarity is to ask this question: will this

decision or expense be consonant with our Vincentian charism, and will it be of benefit to the apostolate, the community, and the confrere? I suggest some ideas for promoting solidarity in your work as Econome.

- A task of the Econome is to help the Visitor to manage well the temporal goods of the province for the full benefit of the mission. Are the properties, houses, and goods of the province in a state that they are useful to confreres for their work and community life?
- The basic needs of confreres must always be met, and the Econome should work together with the Visitor to insure that they are healthy and able to live in a way that assists them in living the Mission and being of support to one another and their families.
- Regular dialogue with the Visitor and local superiors on the finances related to the works and living conditions of local communities insures proper communication and avoids problems in money management or distribution on the local (or even provincial) levels.
- Full transparency in financial interactions, written and oral communication, and reports and statements. When needed, an Econome should engage professional outside assistance to insure the highest standards of accountancy of all funds received and spent.

Stewardship

Stewardship is a concept one hears often both in secular and religious circles. Its biblical origins situate it as a human response to the awesome beauty and wonder of God's creation. In fact, much of our 'eco-theology' on the environment is based on biblical stewardship. But as Christian stewards, we share in the fullness of life given by Jesus, whose humanity brought us "abundant life". The Catholic Bishops of the United States captured well the meaning of stewardship for us: "As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord" (*"To Be a Christian Steward"*, Pastoral Letter, USCCB, Washington, DC, 1992).

In the Congregation, stewardship involves other key criteria: what impact will this decision or expense have on our patrimony of the poor? This idea goes back to the time of St. Vincent, who always encouraged his first generation of followers to move beyond the familiar boundaries of local communities and works. It was not an apostolic exhortation, or a personal call to conversion: Vincent believed the funds given us were for service of the Mission to the poor, and not for our convenience, comfort, or accumulation. This is why we find so much corre-

spondence between Vincent and local superiors on temporal matters that might seem trivial. Vincent knew that like conversion, stewardship is an ongoing process, requiring reflection and dialogue. In this regard, I would like to share several ideas to promote stewardship with you:

- Are our confreres willing to reflect and discuss the “Fundamental Statute on Poverty” I mentioned earlier? I think your facilitating a discussion of this type on both local and provincial levels about this statute is a good way to help confreres connect the relationship with stewardship, our finances, and the patrimony of the poor.
- In realizing that our goods are ultimately the patrimony of the poor, we must help educate confreres on the importance of “thinking globally, while acting locally” especially when it comes to sharing resources. This is especially important as many provinces are engaged in the process of reconfiguration and inter-provincial ventures.
- As Econome, you must walk the fine line between insuring your province’s security and that of the confreres, works, and temporal goods, while not amassing excessive amounts of money or property. In today’s uncertain economic climate this is most difficult, but it is still a goal you must set in union with the Visitor and his Council. I say it quite simply: avoid economic ‘empire-building’ at all costs.
- Finally, you must be ‘wise stewards’ in the Gospel sense. Funds given for a specific purpose must be used for the intention of the donor or returned. Reserve funds should be rare and only exist for a given intention and time span. And again, transparency and good communication with the Visitor, local superiors, and confreres when asked will be of enormous help to you in the long run, even if it can be time consuming.

Challenges Today

I suppose no talk on finances is possible without reference to today’s current challenges. However, I am not going to focus on the world economy, on stocks or bonds, or other hot button items making up today’s headlines. I am sure you are all well-versed in these matters, more than I hope to be! But I do want to discuss areas I believe are challenges you have or will encounter, and in light of our Vincentian virtue of simplicity, I will state them clearly and directly.

- A challenge I see for you today is how to navigate in a climate best described as a ‘culture of entitlement’. While this term is ascribed to young people in the first-world countries, it is a world-

wide phenomenon, brought on by rampant consumerism. Yet, this problem is present in community life in other forms, including clericalism and elitism.

- Therefore, it is essential that in your dealings with confreres, you be even-handed, setting and adhering to standards expected of an Econome. Requests from confreres who are friends or by persons in authority should be filtered through already established policies and procedures. The appearance of favoritism should be avoided at all times.
- There should be no distinction in dealings with confreres who are income-producing and those who are not. As you know, our bonds as confreres are spiritual and are rooted in our charism as a community for mission. All confreres are full members, and equals.
- At a time when there is great external scrutiny of funding (particularly when monies given for works with the poor are mixed with private and public funds), it is essential that you have all the proper tools at your disposal to do your job effectively. I urge you to engage professional services when needed, and to make sure your reports are complete, current, and accurate. It is what we must do to protect the patrimony of the poor.

Best Practices of a Good Econome

It is common practice today to hear the phrase “best practices” used as a recommendation in business, education, or industry. Perhaps that is applicable here; but I prefer another phrase: the “Good Econome”. So what makes a “good Econome”? Allow me to offer several ideas.

First and foremost, a good Econome is a “team player”, who is willing to work with the Visitor, his Council, and local superiors. He realizes that his position is not one of power, but service for the good of the Mission and the province. His expertise and availability will serve the confreres of his province well, and they in turn will make good use of his service.

A good Econome takes an active interest in the well being of the province as an organic unit, as well as the local communities and individual confreres, becoming familiar with their working and living environments. He also is willing to train and keep himself updated in this work by learning new approaches and interacting with lay colleagues who can assist him. This is where in many places members of the Vincentian family can be helpful to an Econome. Lastly, a good Econome is a man of prayer and perspective. He comes to realize that his work, while hidden, and at times tedious is Vincentian at its core.

Like many of the countless meetings, letters, contracts, and entreaties made by Vincent de Paul during the course of his life, the work of

a good Econome is often unnoticed and unheralded. But is it the 'glue' holding the Congregation together. Your service reflects the timeless words of our Holy Founder: "And so, at the beginning, one does what one can, and little by little, Providence arranges things for the best" (COSTE: CED, 4:480). Thank you for your time and attention. May the Lord Jesus and St. Vincent strengthen and bless you in this important ministry of service to the Congregation of the Mission.

Final Document for the Symposium

On Wise Stewardship of the Assets of the Vincentian Family

Yasmine Cajuste, José Luis López Callardo
and Dan Borlik, C.M.

From August 9-11, seventy-two members of the Vincentian Family from every continent met in Paris to reflect on Vincentian management of the patrimony of the poor as “Wise Stewards”. Our work was based on the conviction that the resources that the Lord has entrusted to us “*are the patrimony of Jesus Christ, the sweat of poor people*”¹. The themes and cases studied during the Symposium can be found on the web page for the Vincentian Family Symposium:

<http://mission.depaul.edu/VincentianIdentity/vfs/Pages/default.aspx>

As a result of all our reflections on the administration of goods and wishing to serve our Lords and Masters better, we conclude that the following concepts and principles should be taken into account.

Stewardship

Wise stewardship of the patrimony involves caring for all the goods of creation that God has entrusted to us, including material goods and our personal gifts. The good use of creation is our responsibility since all human endeavors take place within a limited and finite context. This leads us to live ecology in a Christian manner.

1. The Vincentian steward must accomplish his task in co-responsibility, establishing mechanisms for control that bring total transparency to his administration, so that his management is always based on the principles of truth and justice. These mechanisms include:
 - The creation of an institutional context in which interpersonal relationships and internal control are experienced in a spirit of mutual trust for optimal and effective service of those most in need;
 - The division of tasks and supervision processes that promote responsibility;

¹ COSTE XI, 190.

- Budgetary planning and control of expenses; inventories and other means of managing resources;
 - External audits that strengthen institutional credibility;
 - Establishment of concrete, extensive, and discrete mechanisms that allow for ongoing evaluation of the work achieved and assure good use of financial, human and patrimonial capital.
2. The servant leader should have certain qualities: ability to listen, empathy, reconciliation, awareness, conceptualization, foresight, good management, commitment to the growth of persons and the ability to work as part of a team.
 3. Good stewardship of Vincentian institutions requires optimal management of human resources, our most valuable asset. It will be particularly attentive to ongoing formation through opportunities for personal training and regular evaluations carried out in a spirit of simplicity and charity.
 4. Ongoing reflection on the work accomplished, when necessary time is taken to learn from success and from failures, will help to improve effectiveness.

Transparency

Transparency, or simplicity, is an essential virtue of the Vincentian Family. For the good of the mission, it is indispensable that we present ourselves as we are.

1. This transparency requires internal dynamics for participation that help all of the members to feel responsible for significant decisions. In the same way, it is essential that our Vincentian charism be adequately shared with all our collaborators and with the institutions with which we establish agreements and contracts, while always respecting their convictions and interests.
2. Project planning is essential for good management, but the ability to accomplish planned projects is much more valuable. In order to do so in total transparency, we will use an important tool, which is the development, approval and adherence to budgets. This allows for ongoing management that is better adapted to needs and available resources. Ongoing adjustment of the budget and regular evaluations of projects are key elements for success.
3. Vincentian groups and institutions strengthen the credibility of their work through transparent administration that allows everyone, including persons who are poor and benefactors, to see the wise use of goods in the service of evangelization and building of the Reign of God.

4. Aware of the importance of communication in today's world, the Vincentian Family should seek effective strategies to make its work known in society and in the church, with the double objective of engaging more collaborators and raising funds to strengthen its capacity to serve the most disadvantaged.

The fight against corruption

Vincentian stewards know that they carry out their tasks in the midst of a society and some sectors that often are subject to corruption or the structures of sin, out of which resources are deviated for personal interest, resources which should be at the service of the least fortunate. Corruption is a significant obstacle to sustainable development, with a disproportionate impact on poor communities. It erodes the social fabric.

This is why the Vincentian steward must be aware of the "corrupting power of money"² and the responsibility to go against the tide, with attitudes based on the Gospel and the Vincentian charism, seeking to eliminate corruption or minimize its impact on the life of the least fortunate.

1. Vincentian institutions should work within the legal framework of the country, striving to fulfill all their civil responsibilities (labor contracts, just wages, payment of taxes, submission of reports, etc.) and procuring all necessary permissions.
2. The Vincentian administrator should be attentive that all those who collaborate in our works are guided by the principles of truth and justice, dialoguing with these collaborators and establishing from the beginning the ethical principles that govern our activities and defining the limits that cannot be breached.
3. Internally and within the Church, Vincentian institutions should practice zero tolerance, establishing concrete monitoring strategies that prevent any type of corruption from penetrating its structures and individuals since this is completely incompatible with the goal of just social conditions. In this way, negative repercussions that corruption entails are avoided, because those who are poor would remain neglected and the institution would lose its reputation, causing scandal in society.
4. Whenever ethical dilemmas, external to Vincentian institutions, must be considered, the context and the local culture must be kept in mind because sometimes a certain degree of corruption in the world is not within our control. A certain flexibility and mutual

² Cf. COSTE X, 245-256.

compromise may be needed as long as the Vincentian mission and its integrity are not compromised. In these cases, it is very important to engage in a discernment process as a team and with appropriate formation and information, which permits responsible action in corrupt environments and recognition of the course of action that best responds to the ultimate objective of serving those who are poor.

5. Vincentian behavior should often be a prophetic denunciation, using the existing institutional structures and the powerful resource of social communication. It is important to remember that the impact of this denunciation is even more powerful when we act together with those who share our values.

Sustainability

Our tradition is inspired by a balance between an efficient effort to assure the continuation of our works and great trust in Divine Providence, which supplies goods for God's most beloved children and guides our actions at every step.

1. Vincentian work is called to be part of the Christian tradition of putting goods in common, which allows for their use according to the recommendations of the Social Doctrine of the Church, being especially attentive to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, co-responsibility, and justice.
2. As in the time of Vincent and Louise, the present and future of Vincentian works require that an active network of charity be established and maintained; this network, starting with those who are the closest to us, will involve the many people and institutions who are interested in the mission of the Vincentian Family. This activity will also remain open to collaboration with governmental institutions to help them achieve their social mission.
3. A Vincentian creatively seeks new and diverse financing sources in order to fight against poverty and uses the goods he or she already has in an appropriate and wise way. The following funding sources should be encouraged, among others: developing social networks, seeking grants from government or private entities, creating foundations, investing ethically, creating patrimony funds, and administering funds from income-generating activities or micro-businesses.

Collaboration

Collaboration is essential for the present and future of Vincentian efforts, and should consider the different opportunities to work together both within the Vincentian Family and also with other persons and

institutions that share our mission or want to help us build a better world where justice and charity reign.

1. The Vincentian Family is called to collaborate with other religious families and civil and church groups and institutions that want to share in its mission. In the same way, it is important to remain open to opportunities to work with those who seek the good of the most deprived, beyond our own institutions.
2. Interpersonal and institutional relationships are essential for any collaboration's success. The Vincentian steward should strive to invite others and enflame people's hearts so that they become committed to the mission, respecting different perspectives and focusing on the common task of serving the poorest of the poor.
3. The challenges of collaboration must be recognized, such as lack of trust, the risk of superfluous and unfruitful relationships or seeking the starring role. Simplicity and humility create favorable conditions for collaboration, personal transformation and mutual trust, essential for work together.
4. The exchange of experiences and sharing formational, human, material and economic resources within the Vincentian Family should be the first step toward living collaboration according to the example of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac.
5. As cherished sons and daughters of God, persons living in situations of poverty should be active subjects in their life and Vincentian action, collaborating in different ways in their own integral human development and in the works from which they benefit, since no one is so poor that he has nothing to give.
6. In order to accomplish more effective work in a globalized world, the Vincentian Family needs to surround itself with competent professionals and encourage skill development internally in the various fields of its numerous works.

Conclusion

The principles mentioned here are the fruit of the knowledge of experts who have accompanied us during these days and the sharing of our experiences. Faithful to our charism, let us always remember what Saint Vincent told us:

"We shall render a very exact account in this matter before God. Our goods belong to God and to the poor. We are only their providers, not their lords" (COSTE XI, p. 30).

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

An Interview with Fr. Tomaz Mavric, C.M.

Visitor, Vice-Province of Saints Cyril & Methodius



John T. Maher, C.M.,
with Tomaz Mavric, C.M.

Editor's note

VINCENTIANA welcomes Fr. Tomaz Mavric, C.M., Visitor of the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Born in Argentina of Slovenian parents who emigrated when Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia) fell under communist rule after World War II, Fr. Tomaz has served in ordained ministry outside his native land as a missionary in Canada and Russia. He was named Visitor of the Vice-Province of in 2009, and reappointed in 2012. He spoke with us recently.

Tell about your background; family life, schooling, and how you came to the Congregation.

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1959, and am one of five children. My parents moved there from Slovenia due to the Communist repression of religious and civil rights when Tito took over after World War II. After leaving Slovenia, they lived in a refugee camp in Austria before Argentina granted asylum to Slovenians. Although I grew up in Argentina and learned Spanish in school, we had a strong community of Slovenians who kept our ethnic heritage alive. There was an area

just outside Buenos Aires called 'Slovenian Village'. There, the confreres had a parish and a boarding school that I attended, which is how I came to the Congregation.

After I graduated, I decided to enter the Congregation as a member of the Slovenian Province. I did my formation in Ljubljana, where I studied philosophy and theology, and made novitiate in Belgrade. I was ordained in 1983 in Ljubljana. My parents attended, and since I hadn't seen them in several years, it was a truly joyous occasion. It was the first time they returned to their native land in three decades. My mother with my youngest brother came to visit me once before a few years before ordination. It was a very poignant time for all of us.

Where have you served in your ministry as a Vincentian?

I requested to go to the missions, specifically Madagascar. I was first assigned to our Slovenian parish in Toronto, Ontario Canada, a place (like Argentina), that welcomed a sizable number of Slovenian immigrants. Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal is a large, active parish. I threw myself into the sacramental life of the parish, and did ministry with the young people. It was a great pastoral and community experience. I served at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal for ten years, from 1984-1994.

In 1994, I was sent to Slovenia where I served for three years. The country was quite different- Tito, the communist dictator, was dead. The "Yugoslavia" of the past now gave way to independent nation states, and Slovenia was the first to declare its independence. So, it was a time of great upheaval with new-found freedoms not seen for generations. While it was exciting, there was much instability in the region, as ancient religious and ethnic rivalries were rekindled. I served in a parish, and did youth ministry and vocation promotion.

In 1997, I got my "missionary wish". Then Superior General, Fr. Robert Maloney asked for volunteers to go to an international mission starting in Russia in Niznij Tagil, a remote area in the Ural Mountains. This area had held numerous prison camps (or 'gulags'). Most of the people interred were sent there by Stalin. They were classified as lifelong 'enemies of the state' although they had done nothing illegal.

I arrived with a confrere from Poland. I didn't speak Polish, nor did he speak Slovenian. But somehow, we managed to communicate and learned to live together as brothers and co-workers. Our parish was a tiny church. It was a new experience: For example most of the people, because of their isolation from the other parts of the world did not hear about Vatican II and the changes it brought to the Church and world. They had been in a 'survival mode' for so long that they relied on the religious faith and devotions of their youth, which was heroic.

It was so deeply moving to hear of how they had survived for so long as a community, meeting for prayer in small groups in houses, parks, and cemeteries. One elderly woman (her name is Lydia and she is still alive today!) went often to a very long journey by train to meet secretly with a priest who would supply her with consecrated hosts she would take back for communion prayer services. She was (and still is) a wonderful inspiration to me!

Over time, we were able to grow as a parish community, overcoming a great deal of fear and reticence from the people. They were clearly affected by all they had endured. Also, the Catholic Church was viewed suspiciously by the regional government and the local people. Our parish church was a pre-fabricated building made in Germany and sent via large trucks. The drivers who delivered it said that while traveling in Russia, some criminals stopped them with the intent to steal it until they found out it was for a church. They decided it would be bad luck to do so, and let the drivers through! The Church was assembled quickly and it was dedicated on May 13, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, which became the name of the parish.

In 2001, I left our mission in Russia and went to Ireland to do some human development coursework, which was a wonderful person experience. In 2002 I accompanied our Novices from then already the Vice-Province who joined the Novitiate of the Slovakian Province in Banska Bistrica, Slovakia. In 2003 I had a knee replacement surgery, so I returned to Slovenia.

In 2004, I was assigned to our house in Kiev, which we call "God's gift" because of Divine Providence (which guided Fr. Paul Roche, Visitor, to find generous donors to purchase land and build a provincial house). In 2009, I became Visitor, and was reelected Visitor in 2012.

What challenges do you face as the Visitor of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril & Methodius?

Well, the challenges are many, but I have great confidence in our confreres.

The Divine Providence, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and St. Vincent walk before us. I would say that my first and greatest wish is for us to learn to know Jesus and St. Vincent more intensely, and in their works to emulate Vincent as a true 'mystic of charity'. (Fr. Hugh O'Donnell used this term at our yearly Vice-Provincial retreat that he led, and said it was coined by an Italian confrere).

In my first term, I set some goals like strengthen our presence in ministries in place; to insure that each local community has direct contact with the poor; to help our confreres spread our charism to this part of the world; to organize and "grow" the presence of the Vin-

centian Family here, to insure the stability and growth of our formation system so we can attract 'native' vocations. However, we live in an area where Catholics are a very small percentage, and civic and religious realities make it challenging for parochial and pastoral ministry. But, like our men, I believe we have a great contribution to make as Vincentians.

In my second term as Visitor (which started last year), we are considering to keep strengthening the present ministries among others The Vincentian Harbour Project, ministry to the Catholic foreigner students, Parish mission team and develop some new projects. We are thinking to develop a Vincentian Spirituality Center in the city of Sniatyn where the grave of Blessed S. Marta Wiecka, DC is, to provide programs for pilgrims, our apostolates, the Vincentian family. I would also like to see at one point even many years down the road to strengthen our presence in Russia, as we call it a "mission within a mission". Of course, doing that involves dealing with complicated civic and religious factors beyond our control, but I still say, let's try it and see! I also would like to 'grow' our Vincentian Family roots to build community, engage in on-going formation, and deepen the bonds of faith and service. Presently we have ten branches of the Vincentian Family within the borders of the Vice-Province (which include the Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia).

One branch that is fast growing is the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Here in the Ukraine, we have over 2,500 registered members. Through Mary's intercession, we are gathering young people, families, and new members of the Church into the Association, which, as you know, promotes devotional and service opportunities to the poor in line with our Vincentian charism. Many of our people in the AMM personally attest to the power of the Miraculous Medal in their lives. I see only good things for the growth of the AMM in the Vice-Province, and I believe Mary's intercession will be essential for future ministries, especially in Russia.

Last but not least, we need to be open to 'new ways' of reaching out and serving the poor.

Is there any one great challenge for the future that concerns you?

Well, of course one ongoing challenge is an operational one that every Visitor has to deal with: finances! As a young vice-province with small numbers of Catholics, many of whom live in poverty, our resources are slim. So we must depend on financial assistance from the Curia, other provinces, donations, and grants. That is why developing the "Patrimony Fund" is essential for our future. We must have a stable financial base to fund existing works, undertake new ministries, and provide for the formation of our seminarians. We cannot live "hand

to mouth' financially each year if we want to stabilize and also grow in the future.

So we are always looking for new ways to raise funds, including going to foundations to get grants through V.S.O., etc.

In terms of confreres, what is the makeup of the Vice-Province today?

We are currently twenty-four confreres, where almost half of whom are native to the Ukraine, home of most of our works. Many of our vocations come from the Eastern part of Ukraine known as "Transcarpatia". It borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and has been under the domination of empires and nations, including Austria-Hungary and the Soviet Union. In that part of Ukraine we have a community house, mission (in Perechyn) with six parishes.

Currently, we have six young men in formation: three who were recently ordained to the diaconate, two in the novitiate, and one in theological studies. The average age of the confreres here is 44, which is great for us, as it provides vitality to build up the presence of the Church and the Congregation in this part of the world. Most of our men are in pastoral and parochial ministry, but we have confreres primarily involved in other ministries, such as formation, parish mission teams, teaching in the seminary, and direct service to the poor. It is essential we provide excellent initial and ongoing formation so as to constantly guard the depth of our spiritual life, so that we can continue to grow in our Vincentian vocation.

How would you describe the state of the Church in the Ukraine?

Well, historically the Catholic population of the Ukraine has never been big in number, where the Orthodox Church is the majority. This factor, along with the Stalin era, Soviet occupation of the Ukraine intensified the reality of the Church as a small minority.

Although the Church here is small, the Diocesan Clergy, Men and Women Congregations, Laity are trying to create vibrant, welcoming communities in parishes as well as in other areas of ministry and service.

In terms of the external factors of life and ministry here, we find that while it varies from place to place, overall, we have more freedom of movement in the Ukraine than is true in other places.

Lastly, where would you like to see the Vice-Province be five years from now?

Well, of course, five years will be past my time as Visitor. The Divine Providence will guide us. I believe that the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and St. Vincent will do great things for our Vice-

Province and the Vincentian Family. I would like see the numbers of vocations not to stop but even increase. I would like for us to keep looking for new signs of the times, engaging in the 'New Evangelization' and expanding our works for and with the poor. I would like for us, individually and as a Vice-Province, to search for answers what does it mean to be "mystics of charity" and walk towards the goal.

Reconfiguration

A German and Austrian Dialogue on Reconfiguration

John T. Maher, C.M.

Editor's note

As the reality of reconfiguration looms before the Congregation, two Visitors have been steadily working together to make it a reality. At last July's Visitors Meeting, I spoke with Fr. Hans-Georg Radina, C.M., Visitor of the Province of Germany, and Fr. Franz Kangler, C.M., Visitor of the Province of Austria. Their presentation to the Visitors on the process they undertook to join their provinces together was well-received. Afterwards, they graciously agreed to be interviewed for *Vincentiana*.

Visitors' Background

Fathers Hans-Georg Radina, C.M. and Franz Kangler, C.M. have Vincentian roots that run deep. Both grew up in Vincentian parishes, which formed and influenced them. Hans-Georg and his family were members of a parish in Lippstadt. His father was a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Franz recalls the confrere who was his pastor as a "prophetic presence" and a great influence on his life. Franz described his family as 'slightly shocked' when, at the completion of his studies, he told them of his desire to enter the Congregation. Both confreres credit their families and interaction with confreres as positive, lasting influences on their lives.

When asked to give a brief sketch of their provinces, both described them as "small, but dedicated" and "dynamic". Franz observed that the Province of Austria has undergone a series of changes, mainly in terms of apostolates and local communities. Hans-Georg noted that the Province of Germany has never really been a large one, either its area (northwest Germany) or its number of confreres. However, both agreed that their provinces, while smaller in number, have kept a balance between starting new ministries and, when possible, strengthening existing works. Hans-Georg observed that, "No matter what our size, we can't do everything we used to do. We need to make choices". Franz noted that, "In both provinces, we are blessed to have young gifted confreres. We owe it to them to plan properly for our future".

From these realities – the smaller number of confreres and a need to choose where to focus for the future – came initial talk of reconfiguration. “Actually, our two provinces talked about this for over a decade” Franz said. Hans-Georg agreed, and added that “at first, we did retreats between both provinces. Then, the two provincial councils met annually to discuss matters of mutual concern. From those small starts, there came the level of interaction we now have today”. As the two provincial councils, along with confreres of both provinces got to know one another, the stage was set not just for talk of reconfiguration, but the actual planning to make it a reality.

First stirrings of reconfiguration

“As you can see, our response to the request for reconfiguration did not just come from ‘above’ (meaning a mandate of the General Assembly), but from verities of a common language, the proximity of our two countries and works, and common elements in formation”, said Franz. In 2012, the two provinces held individual meetings, including separate provincial assemblies, and then selected confreres to be on a Steering Committee to study reconfiguration and develop a basic structure as a model of reconfiguration for both provinces. After a series of meetings, they proposed a model of reconfiguration as a province made up of two regions.

In 2012, meetings took places in Vienna and Munich. Reconfiguration was discussed in great depth, focusing on working out the complex factors involved in melding local communities, apostolates, and the civil and juridical issues arising from uniting provinces in two different countries. Following this Munich meeting, the Steering Committee met again in 2013 to discuss the results of their talks and plan a common provincial assembly in Munich, held in May, 2013. At this assembly, confreres voted to accept the proposals of the Steering Committee, its model of reconfiguration, and authorized the Committee to continue its work.

Both Fathers Hans-Georg and Franz believe this process has been effective in helping confreres to become more familiar with one another and their respective provinces, along with devising a plan that has been widely well-received. “Of course, sharing a common language and close geographical boundaries helps a good deal”, Hans-George noted. “We have shared resources in the past, such as the staffing of St. George’s School in Istanbul, which German and Austrian confreres began over 130 years ago”, Franz added. Both provincials agreed that after reconfiguration, they will be better able to collaborate in existing works and focus on new ones.

Details of reconfiguration process

What will this new province look like? How will it be led? When and how will it come into being? As with any major change 'the devil is always in the details', to quote an old proverb. Hans-Georg and Franz outlined an ambitious agenda for the next eighteen months. For the rest of 2013 through mid-2014, the results of the common provincial assembly in Munich will be studied and presented to the General Curia, with a visitation from an Assistant General, Fr. Zeracristos. (Ed. Note: Fr. Zeracristos was on the visitation when this issue went to press.)

Included in the actions for 2014 are a formulation of a set of common provincial norms and the unification of norms for daily life for this common province. Once done, this will be presented at a common provincial assembly for discussion and ratification. After this, the norms along with all other relevant data will be sent to the Superior General in Rome for ratification. The official date of the emergence of the new province will be January 1, 2015.

This new province will either be known as the Province of Austria and Germany (Österreich-Deutschland, using the actual names of both countries), or by the name of a common saint like St. Martin, St. Severin or St. Boniface. It will consist of two regions, and the organizational forms of existing civil law of both provinces (as it affects the confreres and their works) in both countries will remain unchanged. Properties, assets, and obligations will remain regionally-based, but the newly formed provincial council will equally be comprised of confreres from Austria and Germany to resolve any potential problems. Each confrere will belong to one of the two regions, and can transfer into the other region at their request or by their consent.

New Provincial Administration

There will be one Visitor of the new province and one common provincialate. Vienna has been proposed as the location of the new provincialate, as was recommended by the Munich provincial assembly. The Visitor will be elected for a period of six years, with a renewal of three additional years. He will be voted on by confreres in both regions of the new province. The Visitor will work with a Provincial Assistant, also voted in by confreres in both regions. Confreres with active voice are eligible to vote. Like the Visitor, he too will be elected for a six year term, with a possible three-year extension. However, will be stipulated in the norms that the Visitor and provincial assistant must be from different regions to have balanced representation.

The new Österreich-Deutschland Province will have two regional superiors from each country with an office in a house of their region. However, the Visitor and the Provincial Assistant will automatically

take office as the regional superiors for the region they belong to. Each region will elect two regional consultors for a period of three years, with re-election possible two additional times. These regional consultors will assist the regional superior in the administration of the region. Along with a regional econome, they form a regional council.

The provincial council will be comprised of the Visitor, Provincial Assistant, four regional consultors, and one of the two regional economes, appointed by the Visitor upon advice of his council. There will be careful, delineated differences between the Provincial and Regional Councils. The Provincial Council will focus on personnel planning, including the placement of confreres in various works of the province. It will also approve acceptance of candidates and grant permission for men in formation to take vows and to petition for ordination. This council will coordinate initial and permanent formation, and a common internal seminary and theologate.

The provincial council will also prepare provincial assemblies; supervise and administer the financial aspects of the province, and represent the province at Congregation-wide meetings, as well as to outside authorities in Austria and Germany. Regional councils will coordinate financial matters for their houses and works in their respective region, and will prepare decisions about personnel or works that need to be discussed by the provincial council. Decisions made by the provincial council may not be reversed or amended by the regional councils.

The above is what might be called 'broad strokes' of administrative details about the way in which the new province with its two regions will function. Detailed and finalized regulations will be given in the new provincial norms, now in the process of being formulated and submitted for approval. This new model of a province with two regions shall be put into place for six years "ad experimentum", after which an evaluation will take place in 2021. Different names for the new province are still being discussed by the confreres, as previously noted.

Reactions of the Two Visitors

Both Hans-Georg and Franz admit this process has been a difficult, complicated one, but very worthwhile. "Confreres, for the most part, have received this process well. While it has been unsettling to some, I think they realize we must do this or we will not survive", said Franz. "My hope is that once this process is completed and the new province is in place, it will make it easier for us to discern as Vincentians the future direction of our works, which we must do", said Hans-Georg. Both men agreed that without this major effort at reconfiguration, both provinces would phase out, due to their smaller numbers of confreres, and the trend of Catholics in both countries toward apathy in religious observance.

However, the Visitors noted that the Vincentian charism has great appeal with Catholics (active and inactive) in both countries, so there are opportunities for ministry and evangelization. But there are challenges in reaching out to evangelize, or in presenting the “New Evangelization” as promoted by the 2012 Synod of Bishops. Yet, both Visitors felt that among younger confreres there is an enthusiasm to reach out to youth by using the ministries in their provinces to do so. “It is a challenge, but with the new configuration of the province with its two regions, we will be better positioned to reach out to the young and present our charism in a way to attract them”, said Hans-Georg. “Our new province, along with all our confreres, young and older, working together can bring the vitality of our Vincentian charism to all who need to experience it”, said Franz.

Advice for Visitors

Fathers Hans-Georg and Franz were asked what advice they would offer other Visitors and confreres considering reconfiguration. “It’s good to start with a time-frame, even if you have to move it”, said Hans-Georg. Franz agreed adding, “And if you appoint a committee to work on it, you should trust them to do what is necessary”. Both strongly stressed the need to put into place a process that is inclusive and open and avoids being secretive or selective. “This way, you will have more participation and acceptance of the outcome by all the confreres” said Franz.

In doing reconfiguration with their respective provinces, both Visitors agreed they had to balance the mandate of the 2010 General Assembly with the realities of working with confreres in their provinces to achieve a worthwhile, lasting end. At the conversation’s end Hans-Georg summed up the outcome most appropriately: “If you’re going to do it, then do it properly”.

Report of the Progress of Inter-Provincial Reconfiguration in Spain

Joaquín González Hernando, C.M.
Visitor of Madrid

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank the Preparatory Commission for the Meeting of Visitors for the opportunity offered me to share with all of you, although quite briefly, the steps that we are taking in Spain in the process of the reconfiguration of the provinces.

Before beginning this subject, it seems right for me to share with you some of the history of the C.M. in Spain. The first confreres arrived in 1704 from Italy. In 1774, the Spanish province of the CM was established. In 1902, the Spanish province was divided into two: Barcelona and Madrid. In 1968, the former province of Madrid was divided into three: Madrid, Salamanca, and Zaragoza. Currently, there are four provinces in Spain with the following membership: Barcelona 39, Madrid 107, Salamanca 79, and Zaragoza 104.

The 2010 General Assembly listed among its Lines of Action the theme of “reconfiguration”. And it invited us to deepen, in local communities, provincial governing teams, provincial assemblies, and meetings, the issue of reconfiguration in the sense of “intra-provincial” and “inter-provincial”, and its importance for the future of the Congregation (2-2.1).

In an attempt to move this idea along, the Superior General wrote a letter to the four Spanish provinces. In it, on the occasion of the 2009 provincial assemblies, he invited us to reflect on this question. Each province sent in its opinion to the Curia. Since then, there have been various meetings of provincial councils and superiors of the four provinces. The theme was discussed in those meetings.

On the occasion of the 2012 provincial assemblies, the superior general wrote a letter again to all the confreres of the four CM provinces in Spain (12 December 2011), laying out the theme of reconfiguration. In this letter, he invited us to proceed with a reflection and he asked our consultation on reconfiguration toward a real union of the provinces: “Are you in favor of reconfiguration, leading to a real union of the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission in Spain? In domestic assemblies, the confreres can declare whether they are in favor or not; the provincial assemblies should decide”.

Toward a new reconfiguration for creative fidelity to the Mission

This was the common theme of the provincial assemblies of Barcelona, Madrid, and Salamanca. It had been formulated previously in a joint Superiors' Meeting. It had also been agreed to hold our provincial assemblies on the same dates (24-29 June 2012) and in the same place (Salamanca).

An inter-provincial commission was charged with preparing a single "*Instrumentum laboris*" for the three provinces. Then, with the responses of the three provinces, a working document was also drawn up for the members of the assemblies of the three provinces.

To begin with the question posed by the Superior General in his letter, we decided unanimously in the assemblies, as did each province individually, to begin this process of the union of the provinces. The province of Zaragoza treated this question in its provincial assembly, but it did not agree to the union of the provinces, going on record to follow the path of inter-provincial collaboration. This is why, in this process, only three Spanish provinces began, and not four.

Specific actions to continue the process

In the Superior General's letter mentioned previously, he asked us, if we came out in favor: "What specific actions will be needed to continue the process of reconfiguration toward a real union of the provinces, taking into account what has already been done until now?"

How to proceed, with specific actions, would from then on be the major theme of our assemblies, once declared ourselves in favor of reconfiguration. All our works will now be directed toward this end, and the activities of the assemblies would be summarized in a broad and well defined "final document" entitled:

"Toward a new reconfiguration for creative fidelity to the Mission: final document of the provincial assemblies in response to the consultation of the Superior General by the canonical Provinces of Barcelona-Madrid-Salamanca".

Final document of the provincial assemblies

This document lists those aspects which we must not miss for reconfiguration to be a success. Allow me now, briefly, to assemble the main parts and some of the more important ideas.

Reconfiguration: its meaning and basis

By "reconfiguration" we understand the internal transformation of each province, moved from within itself, toward choosing a new kind of presence of the Congregation in Spain, as demanded by fidelity to

its end. In this document, we mentioned reconfiguration as a profound transformation (a structural change). This will go beyond mere inter-provincial collaboration. It is based on a spiritual process. It cannot be completed without a determined choice for the continual renewal (*metanoia*) of all the confreres. God is offering us this opportunity to revive our proper spirit, and to offer quality evangelization and an effective realization of the Kingdom of God among the poor. Evidently, too, this is demanded by reality: the smaller number of confreres in our provinces.

Goal of reconfiguration

- a) *Pastoral Plan for evangelization in the new province.* This has to include our common feeling, desire, concern; the road to follow; and the dynamism for a new way of being in the Church and in the world.
- b) *A new province of the Congregation in Spain.* 82% of the confreres in the domestic assemblies declared themselves in favor of the union of the provinces. The deputies of the provincial assemblies also declared themselves in favor by 87%. This supposes that once the 2016 general assembly is over, on the date that the 2015 provincial assemblies approve (27/09/2016 or 25/01/2017), the Superior General will erect a new canonical province in Spain. We are already looking for a name and a location for the "new child".

Goal, inspirational principles, and lines of Action

The goal is to revitalize the life and the mission of the Congregation of the Mission in Spain today, by placing our manpower and resources in the service of the evangelization of the poor, according to our charism, and being more meaningful in the places where we are located. The inspirational principles are: faithfulness to the Gospel and to the charism of Saint Vincent, faithfulness to the end of the C.M., faithfulness to mankind and to the signs of the time, and faithfulness to our own vocation. The lines of Action: Vincentian identity, missionary community, and the mission of evangelization.

Activities and procedures leading to reconfiguration

Various activities were mentioned concerning understanding, sensitizing, and conversion. Directions were also indicated about how to draw up a new "Pastoral Plan for Evangelization", and various activities were mentioned, and a direction toward a new province of the C.M. in Spain. In the following section, I will summarize the more concrete steps that we have taken up to now.

Our direction up to the assemblies of June 2013

We decided that 29 October 2012 would be the official start of this process. In Madrid, the three provincials met along with the superior general and the vicar general. Also, the visitors of Zaragoza and Portugal were present as guests. In this meeting, we named an "Inter-provincial Commission", composed of one confrere from each province, responsible for studying the process: provincial realities, main lines, directions to follow, elaborating the Pastoral Plan for Evangelization of the new province. Also, a secretary was named for the meeting of the councils.

In this same session, the Superior General was asked to name a delegate. After a few days, Fr. Gregory responded that it would be Fr. Javier Álvarez, vicar general, who should "accompany and animate the process of reconfiguration. In this way, a link with the general council would be maintained. The delegate will be asked to know and accompany the entire process, as much as possible, in the most important meetings, and to move the process along, for whatever reason, if it is blocked" (excerpt from Letter of 23 November, to Visitors and Councils).

On 14 February 2013, the three provincial councils met again. Following the proposals of the coordinating commission, we took steps to agree on a "road map", to approve a questionnaire to be sent to each confrere, and to finalize the various commissions to be established. On 10 April, the three visitors met with the members of the coordinating commission to review the process.

Commissions to accompany the process

Besides the coordinating commission, other commissions were established and their responsibilities were specified:

Formation Commission: to draw up a project for initial and ongoing formation for the new province. This commission has already drawn up four papers which have been worked on in each of our communities. Their titles are: 1) "Eyes to see and a heart to feel", 2) "Be what we are called to be", 3) "With our own style", 4) "Community for the mission". Three meetings were also organized concerning sensitizing and understanding, plus formation, held for two days, so that the confreres might be able to take part in one of the three of them. The themes are: "Seeing the world as evangelizers of the poor", and "Evangelization of the poor and Vincentian identity".

Evangelization Commission: A study of the current situation, understanding activities and resources, proposing new forms of apostolate, identifying pastoral priorities, etc. And, organizing meetings of the confreres.

Social Communication Commission: On unifying our web pages, provincial bulletins, publishing houses, etc.

Commission on legal matters and provincial norms: To draw up new provincial norms and to specify the transition phase and the structure of the new province.

Finance Commission: To unify our accounting procedures, to specify the patrimony of the provinces, and to have an audit of each of them.

Recently, the three provincial councils met in Barcelona on 8 May to study common criteria for the revision of our ministries and presence. Now, I want to conclude with the "Prayer for this time of reconfiguration", prepared by the coordinating commission, and which is being said in all our communities:

Lord, you have set before us the challenge of reconfiguring the missionary activity of our provinces. This places us in a time of reflection and deepening of our Vincentian vocation. Grant us the strength and the inspiration needed to know how to respond to the current demands of evangelization and service to those who are most in need. May your Spirit be with us to enlighten us in the process, that we may live it out as your gift and our task. Amen.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Inter-Provincial Cooperation

Enrique Alagarda, C.M.

Visitor of Barcelona

As a point of departure for my reflections I refer to Statute #5.1: *"In a spirit of co-responsibility, provinces, whether on their own initiative or at the invitation of the superior general, should give mutual assistance"*. I believe that this statute reflects the spirit that presently governs inter-provincial relationships.

This statute, redacted in a very simple manner, is in my experience, the cause of great joy and great pleasure for the Visitors. In the case of our province, we are a very small province involved primarily in missions *ad gentes* and therefore we have always had very limited structures to deal with initial formation and with formation for ministries proper to the Congregation (for example, popular missions). This reality has necessarily made us "very inter-provincial".

With regard to the dimension of formation, the fact that we have spent the time of the internal seminary as well as the years of philosophical and theological studies in other provinces has, in the majority of cases, been an opportunity for enrichment that has made us feel very close to the confreres of other provinces. At the same time, there have been moments when we have been pained as the result of the departure of some candidates whom we were unable to accompany in an adequate manner because they had been entrusted to other formators... thus the bitter sweet flavor of this experience. Truthfully, however, our experience on the whole has been more sweet than bitter.

The provinces are also able to put into practice the spirit of this norm when they participate with confreres from other provinces in different pastoral ministries or when they create inter-provincial houses or projects: inter-provincial communities of initial formation, Vincentian Missionary Evangelization Teams, and the formation of other commissions dedicated to various pastoral tasks. We have various local communities that could be considered inter-provincial as a result of the composition of its members: the mission in Honduras (San Pedro Sula, Puerto Lempira and Patuka) and the mission in Spain (Valencia). The presence of confreres from other provinces in our local houses in the Province of Barcelona is governed by contracts that define the rights and the responsibilities of the confreres and the respective provinces of those involved.

All of this enables us to maintain houses, pastoral works and projects that otherwise we would have to abandon because of the lack of voca-

tions. In my experience, the establishment of such contracts between provinces in which the form of inter-provincial collaboration is outlined and the rights and responsibilities of the confreres who leave one Province to minister in another are clearly stated... all of this is fundamental and avoids future problems. I have to say that ultimately, inter-provincial collaboration in pastoral ministry and the stability of the confreres in inter-provincial communities depends basically on their motivations and the good will of the respective visitors. When one of these elements is lacking (motivation or good will) the contract becomes like a piece of junk-mail and the work and/or house becomes a failed experience.

Another important area to be mindful of when reflecting on inter-provincial activity is the manner in which the Province relates to the General Curia and the Visitor relates to the Superior General. The Curia has insisted upon a more universal approach when reflecting upon our membership in the Congregation. This idea is reflected in the words of the Superior General that were addressed to the Visitors in Spain at the time of reconfiguration:

“Allow me to speak about the second point of our lines of action that deal with reconfiguration and states: ‘To cultivate a vital and concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the sense of belonging to a local and provincial community’. Without this dimension it will be very difficult to achieve any form of reconfiguration. This orientation of the General Assembly reminds us that we are Missionaries and that we are members of the Congregation of the Mission. Saint Vincent told the first Missionaries: ‘We are all missionaries and we form one body’. It is interesting to note that the candidate, upon entrance into the Internal Seminary, becomes a member of the Congregation (cf., Constitutions, #83.1) and the vow formula highlights the fact that one is a member of the Congregation of the Mission and as such lives out his vocation as an evangelizer (cf., Constitutions, #58). Above all else we are Missionaries who belong to the Congregation of the Mission. Let us listen anew to the words of Saint Vincent as he speaks about the universal meaning of our vocation-mission: ‘Our vocation is go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world’ (CCD: XII: 215). To highlight in an excessive manner our provincial identity impoverishes our missionary vocation, makes inter-provincial collaboration difficult and makes it impossible to think about reconfiguration”.

This vision of universal membership in the Congregation that was highlighted in our last Assembly and that the General Curia has emphasized is not always lived out with calmness by the Provinces, the Visitors and the individual confreres. One has only to raise the question in a Provincial Council meeting that there has been an appointment of

a confrere to minister outside his province and thus become involved in an inter-provincial ministry that has been requested by the superior general... in said discussion one becomes aware of the tension that is produced by this situation. Why does this occur? Why is such an appointment viewed as a loss and not simply as a change in assignment? I am going to offer my personal opinion in this matter and I will also offer some suggestions in this regard.

The visitors exercise the authority they have received as a way of expressing their responsibility to provide for the ministries and the confreres of their provinces. When we emphasize universal membership and the power of the Superior General to appoint confreres to serve in any part of the world (cf. *Constitutions*, #101-103), the Visitor sees his authority diminished but not his responsibility. Thus, with fewer resources he is responsible for the same number of works. The same can be said about the provinces when they emphasize the universal and inter-provincial dimension... in this situation the province sees its right to dispose of its human and material resources diminished and yet its corresponding obligation to maintain a vitality into the future is not diminished. I believe that these tensions on many occasions lead to a rejection of interprovincial initiatives because they are seen as an imposition. To eliminate this tension we need:

- To diminish the responsibilities of the Visitor when his authority is diminished;
- To diminish the obligations of the Province when its rights are diminished.

In conclusion I personally am convinced of the need for greater inter-provincial activity with the Congregation. Such activity makes it possible for the Congregation to engage in the process of evangelizing the poor where there is the greatest need. But I believe that as long as inter-provincial activity is subordinate to the motivation of the confreres involved and/or the good will of the Visitors, such activity will be nothing more than anecdotal for a group of volunteers within the Congregation.

If we want the majority of the confreres to be willing to go anywhere in the world (as stated in the referenced text of Saint Vincent) and thus move beyond an excessive provincialism, then we have to undertake radical changes in the organization of the Congregation and examine the prerogatives of each member. For example, with regard to inter-provincial activity: are we willing to make our theologates regional seminaries places that are dependent on the General Curia or the President of the Conference of Visitors and places for international formation whose candidates are then appointed by the Superior General to those places where he believes they are most needed? This is

not a proposal but just one example to clarify what I am referring to when I speak about "radical changes".

To join two provinces together or to create an inter-provincial seminary in which everything is decided by consensus are not radical changes but minor, necessary adaptations that are implemented in order to survive during a time of crisis. Finally, and here I will conclude, without these radical changes that move our Congregation in the direction of a more universal vision of membership and inter-provincial availability of the confreres, the Visitors and the Provinces... without this the Congregation, as an institution, will more often be an obstacle to rather than a facilitator of inter-provincial activity.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

Visioning for the Mission: The Province of St. Louise, USA

Mary Beth Kubera, D.C.

Councilor, Province of St. Louise, USA

This article reflects the background, process, challenges, and benefits of reconfiguration itself and the first two and a half years since the establishment of the Province of St. Louise, USA. It has been a faith-filled, Providential journey filled with moments of transformation for all Sisters of the Province.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The idea for reconfiguration of five provinces of the Daughter of Charity in the United States¹ began as early as 1973, just four years after the two United States Provinces² had divided into five. A proposal at the Evansville Province Provincial Assembly stated: "That in view of changing times and circumstances, the Community should consolidate staff and resources by combining provinces wherever it will increase our efficiency in caring for the poor". Although the proposal was not passed, the possibility of interchanging personnel among the English-speaking provinces did pass in June, 1984. When the feasibility of merging provinces was introduced again in June of 1990, it was approved in the St. Louis Province, met with a tie vote in the Evansville Province, and was defeated in the Albany Province. However, in July 1996, the same proposal passed by two votes in Evansville.

In August 2002, the Evansville and St. Louis Provincial Assemblies supported provincial reconfiguration by an overwhelming majority, while the Emmitsburg Province passed three propositions dealing with reconfiguration and collaboration among the provinces. The leadership teams of four of the five provinces met in March, 2003 to discuss this possibility. Visitatrixes of the provinces dialogued about the possibility of reconfiguration at their annual meetings. Discernment and dialogue took place with membership of each of the five provinces, followed by further reflection and discussion among Visitatrixes and their Councils.

¹ Albany, Emmitsburg, Evansville, Los Altos Hills, St. Louis.

² The Province of Emmitsburg was composed of 1213 Sisters while the Province of St. Louis numbered 1225 Sisters. The Superioress General and her Council believed that dividing into smaller numbers would allow the Visitatrix and her Council to have greater opportunities to know each Sister.

The Province of Los Altos Hills, California decided not to move forward as a part of the reconfiguration process.

However, it was not until the four Provincial Leadership Teams of Albany, Emmitsburg, Evansville, and St. Louis met in Albany, New York in August, 2006 that the impetus for moving forward became a reality. With fewer Daughters to serve and a median age over 70, it became apparent that the expertise of Sisters could be used better across province lines. Having fewer Sisters serving in provincial leadership would allow for additional Sisters to minister directly to those living in poverty. The Visitatrixes and Councils of the four provinces concluded that the future mission of the Daughters of Charity would be enhanced by further "communion, collaboration, and sharing among the Provinces"³ up to and including the unification of these Provinces in a form not yet determined. Leadership requested and received from the Superioress General and her Council permission to initiate the process of working toward unification of the Provinces by 2011. A Steering Committee composed of two Sisters from each of the four Provinces was named⁴, and given a mandate on October 7, 2006 to: "Develop a process, create a timeline and present recommendations that move us toward unification of the Provinces of Albany, Emmitsburg, Evansville, and St. Louis".

THE PROCESS

The mandate described a process that would be co-responsible, collaborative, and comprehensive. Involving all Sisters through constant communication, consultation, prayer, committee work, and regional and national meetings would be a priority. Through attentive listening, reflective thinking, flexibility and compromise, the Steering Committee would address the following crucial areas: mission and ministry, structure, culture, leadership models, legal and financial issues, use of properties, and care of sick and elderly Sisters. The committee's work would be spread over the next four years. Before the actual process began, Visitatrixes and their Councils determined that all the provincial retirement residences would for the present time as homes for our senior Sisters.

³ Constitution 6: *The Company is international. The charism is incarnated and made visible in various cultures and countries throughout the world: by its life, by its membership, by its organization and representation, by communion, collaboration, and sharing among the Provinces. In the words of Saint Vincent it is God "who desired this Company of young women from various regions and wanted all of them to be of one heart!"*.

⁴ Sisters Rosalie Digenan, Jane Graves, Sharon Haskins, Mary Ann Azar (replaced by Joan Keating), Helen Marie Kling, Rose Logan (replaced by Nora Gatto), Theresa Peck, Joanne Vasa.

The Steering Committee met for the first time in Evansville, Indiana, on January 17-18, 2007. Brother Steve Glodek, SM agreed to be the facilitator of the Steering Committee, which soon became known as the Visioning for the Mission Committee. The UFM Committee chose a chairperson⁵ who would be responsible for monthly reports to the Visitatrixes and periodic meetings with them. *Compass Points* was the communication vehicle developed to keep all of the Sisters informed of the progress of the process.

The Visioning for the Mission Committee met in person seven times in 2007 and had two conference calls. The meeting format included quiet prayer, reflection, and sharing at the start of each meeting. This helped committee members to get to know one another as well as a prayerful, reflective atmosphere in which decisions could be made. After listening to a presentation in February by a congregational leader involved in a seven community reconfiguration, the VFM Committee moved forward to approve a budget, logo, and a develop a Visioning for the Mission prayer to be used weekly in local communities. Once a communication plan was approved, a list of “publics” was developed in order to advise significant groups of the VFM process.

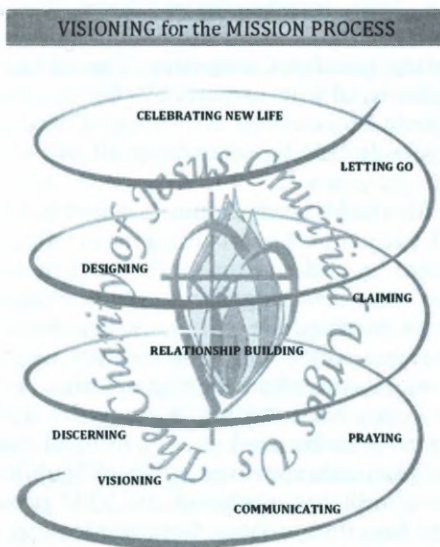
In May, the first four committees; Communication, Finance, Formation, and Gathering began their work. For the next several months, tasks centered on planning a national gathering in Buffalo, New York, set for the end of July. More than 450 Sisters participated in the meeting which allowed for presentations, reflection, and small and large group sharing and for opportunities to get to know one another. Following this meeting, a question about moving forward was sent to each Sister. Ninety-seven percent of Sisters favored moving forward for further communion, collaboration, and sharing among the Provinces. Several months later, a second survey was sent asking for the approval for the working these that the plan would be to create one province. Ninety-one percent of Sisters approved this. By November, a website began, providing information for the Sisters, and opportunities for communication and clarification.

The final VFM Committee work for 2007 included developing a visual presentation of the process to be used going forward (**graphic 1**). Included with this was a written explanation of the process. Right before Christmas, each local community received the name of a prayer partner community located in another province. In addition to praying for each other regularly, the Sisters sent photos, mementos from their local area, and cards and letters for various occasions. This provided a simple way of forming relationships across provincial boundaries⁶.

⁵ Sister Theresa Peck.

⁶ 2007 Annual Review compiled by Sister Theresa Peck, D.C., Chairperson of the Visioning for the Mission Steering Committee.

GRAPHIC 1



As the VFM Committee continued making plans for the fall, 2008 Regional Gatherings in Albany, St. Louis, Evansville, and Emmitsburg, they asked the Sisters to select a location outside their own provinces in order to get to know new Sisters. The VFM requested Visitatrixes and Councils ask the Sisters of the four provinces to respond to the following questions as part of their domestic assemblies:

- What are your hopes and dreams for a new Province of Daughters of Charity?
- What do you believe needs to happen to make these hopes and dreams a reality?
- What are the values you want to see preserved and enhanced in the new Province?

The synthesis of these questions revealed that the Sisters were very united in their purpose. A decision was made that the topic for the Regional Meetings would revolve around Governance and Structure of the new province⁷.

The Finance/Legal, Gathering, and Formation Committees met often during 2008. Each group attended to important tasks at hand: unifying house and provincial accounting practices and software, obtaining legal and financial council for assistance; preparing transportation

⁷ *Compass Points*, April, 2008.

forms and room assignments for the regional meetings; and creating monthly prayers, apostolic reflections, and dialogues for the local communities. It became clear that some new task forces would be needed to assist with the work at hand. Governance and Location Task Forces were formed after Sisters gave input regarding membership⁸. After input from the Sisters through the Location Task Force, Fr. Tom McKenna, C.M. facilitated a discernment session with the VFM Steering Committee to determine the geographic location for the new provincial headquarters.

The Fall Regional Meetings received outstanding evaluations, with (ninety-eight) percent of the Sisters who attended voting to form one province. The VFM Committee perceived the necessity of forming two additional task forces. The Mission Snapshot Task Force would create a booklet containing a snapshot of each existing local community; the Common Polices Task Force would find similarities and differences of policies in current provinces to create a new common policy book. The VFM made the decision to plan a September 2009 meeting in St. Louis with the theme "Living in Hope, Called to Prophecy"⁹. Some discussion began about the norm for selecting a Visitatrix.

In January 2009, the VFM Committee met with the Visitatrixes and English-speaking General Councillor from Paris to consider the draft of the norm for selecting a Visitatrix. The VFM also formulated a Council Sheet to be sent to the General Council for the formation of one Province. The many Sisters assigned to committees and task force groups met regularly during the months that followed. An Archives Committee was named to begin the work of determining record retention and destruction, policies and procedures, and the location of unified archives. The work of more than 105 sisters and about 15 associates who served on committees and task force groups began to define the structure for the new Province.

The September 24-27, 2009 Gathering of 400 Daughters in St. Louis included time for sharing and dialogue in small groups to consider governance, location, and leadership qualities desired in the new Visitatrix and Council. The group identified 12 leadership qualities they desired in the Visitatrix and her Council: approachability, building effective teams, composure, conflict management, dealing with ambiguity, decision quality, delegation, managing vision and purpose, motivating others, priority setting, and strategic agility¹⁰. It became clear at this meeting that involving the total community at every step of the process was most beneficial. In December 8, 2009, the Visita-

⁸ *Compass Points*, June, August, 2008.

⁹ *Compass Points*, October, 2008.

¹⁰ Leadership Discernment Reflection Sheet.

trix announced the location of the new provincial house: St. Louis, Missouri.

In 2010, the work of the Committees and Task Force Groups was extremely important. The Finance and Legal Committee continued to meet to gather materials related to Due Diligence and develop retention letters and severance policies, explore insurance options and benefits, search for a Chief Financial Officer, establish a Finance Office, and start to plan for Information Technology needs. The Policy Committee submitted a group of sixty-two Provincial Policies for the new Province, which were then forwarded to local communities for their input. The Communication Committee provided a job description for the Director of Communication, so the new Visitatrix could begin interviewing for this position. The Formation Committee began a long-range plan for ongoing formation in the new Province, and continued to develop prayer experiences to assist the Sisters with the transformation process.

The Transition Committee developed a timeline for action and made plans to visit the four provincial campuses to determine the best site for the Provincial Offices and House. The Vocation Directors also suggested a plan for the future of their ministry which was reviewed by the Steering Committee¹¹. On July 8-11, 2010, each of the four provinces had its final Provincial Meeting as a celebration of its history since 1969. On December 8, 2010, Sister Louise Gallahue, D.C. was named Visitatrix for the new province. Consultation from the Sisters determined the new Province would be called the Province of St. Louise. Later that month, Fr. Tom McKenna was appointed as the new Provincial Director of this new province.

The Visioning for the Mission Committee had its last formal face-to-face meeting in January, 2011. After thirty-two in-person sessions, the group believed that their task of planning the "United for the Mission" meeting in Baltimore (July 29 to August 1, 2011) could be done through conference call. The VFM Committee had already put in place a process for the consultation of an eight member Provincial Council; these Sisters were named on March 25, 2011. In April, Sister Louise Gallahue and the new Council gathered in St. Louis with the Sister Servants of all the local communities in the Province. In April, a Provincial Secretary and Treasurer were named. The Visitatrix continued to communicate with the Council members and requested input on their areas of expertise. In June, each Councillor reviewed her assignments and prepared a short introductory speech to be given at the Baltimore gathering. Graphic artists worked on a new logo for the Province; and the Transition Team Task Force identified artifacts from

¹¹ *Compass Points*, March, April, 2010.

each of the four former provinces that would be displayed in the Province of St. Louise Offices.

More than 400 Sisters arrived in Baltimore on Friday, July 29, to participate in the "United for the Mission" meeting. After presentations by Sister Evelyne Franc, D.C., Superioress General, and General Councillor Sister Kathleen Appler, D.C., the Sisters of the Province met in table groups to determine the priorities for the new Visitatrix and Council. Later a tally was completed of the priorities that emerged: get to know each Sister and ministry of the Province; study our present ministries and plan for ministries of the future; emphasize community life; communicate with the Sisters of the Province on a consistent basis; determine ways to continue to pass on our charism¹². During the afternoon, the Sisters experienced a "Ministry Showcase" in which they had time to learn about all of the ministries in the new province.

On Sunday, July 31, 2011, Sister Evelyne Franc installed the new Visitatrix and eight Provincial Councillors¹³ at a Mass celebrated by the Rev. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General in the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, Maryland. Fr. Gay presided over the installation of Rev. Thomas McKenna, C.M., and Sr. Louise Gallahue installed the Secretary and Treasurer¹⁴. That evening provided time for celebration of the beginning of the Province of St. Louise. On Sunday, Sr. Louise gave a brief introduction, followed by short biographical presentations by Fr. McKenna on each Councillor, the Treasurer, and the Secretary. After celebrating the Eucharist, all were sent forth to their local communities, united in the mission. The VFM Committee met one final time to evaluate the process and procedures that moved the Sisters to uniting as one province. Their work was finished; the work of the new leadership team had begun.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The overarching challenge of the reconfiguration process was creating a new culture for the new Province of St. Louise. In the four former provinces, the Sisters were known and understood by their leadership teams as well as by one another. Creating a "sense of belonging" became a top priority for the Visitatrix and Council. Most of the Council members were assigned to local communities outside their provinces of origin; this allowed them to get to know Sisters in different geographic areas. During the first year of the new province, the Council, and Pro-

¹² Notes from Cape May Planning, September 2011.

¹³ Sisters Rose Ann Aguilar, Nora Gatto, Janet Keim, Mary Beth Kubera, Jean Rhoads, Joanne Vasa, Mary Walz, Mary Catherine Warehime.

¹⁴ Sisters Maureen Schmalzried and Jane Graves.

vincial Director visited each house. They dialogued with each Sister and went to each Sister's ministry. They met with the local community as a group. Most houses also received a second visit later in the year. These personal visits gave the Visitatrix, Director, and Council a realistic view of each local community and each ministry. It became apparent during these visits that the mandate the Sisters had given the Visitatrix and Council at the Baltimore meeting was imperative. Yes, the province was larger with over 500 Sisters, but the same fact existed: there were still fewer Sisters to serve in the many ministries across the province.

During the second year, *Transforming for the Mission* began with the naming of a task force to design a process to assist the Visitatrix and Council in moving forward on this path. Again, the input of each Sister was valued highly, and the first part of the process included an individual survey, dialogue within each local community, and sharing among houses in different geographic regions of the province. In July 2012, the Sisters again gathered as a group in Indianapolis, Indiana to listen to an initial report from the task force. In the months that followed, each Sister met with her House Councillor and dialogued with her local community about her ministry and her community life. The Visitatrix and Council met numerous times to discern which houses and ministries would continue and grow, which houses would remain for a time, and which houses would close within a year's time. In September 2013, over 300 Sisters gathered in St. Louis to hear the leanings of the Council. The Sisters supported the facts presented and the province moved forward with a sense of solidarity.

Additionally, the intentional missioning of 55 Sisters (11 percent) across former provincial lines during the first two and one-half years began the process of helping Sisters to create something new. Sisters were challenged and stretched to warmly welcome other Sisters from a former province, to listen to her history and to share their own journeys, and to talk together to build a new way of doing things that were no longer *your way* or *my way* but *our way*! Common experiences were important. Besides the provincial gatherings, regional Formation Days on Community Life and Vocations were scheduled, and Sisters were encouraged to travel to a region outside their former province. The opportunity to choose to attend an annual retreat in a different region of the province was also an option.

Technology was a part in building the new culture. Weekly communication was provided through *The Link*, *The Prayer Link*, and the *Social Justice Link*. A new quarterly magazine, *Faith Afire*, was created; and a new website was constructed. DVDs prepared on the Word of God, the Eucharist, and our Community Saints allowed for discussion around common themes.

Of course, there were challenges. Working out new policies that honored the procedures of the former provinces was not always an easy

task. What Sisters did for holidays, how they took care of house book-keeping, the way they organized common prayer, for example, did not seem to be major issues; but, as one larger province was formed, some Sisters felt that life was more “corporate”. There was some resistance to doing things in a new or different way; and, patience was required, along with adaptability. It became clear that it would require time to put common, acceptable procedures and practices into place. Some Sisters resisted being missioned across former provincial lines or accepting Sisters into their local communities from a former province. Yet, in all this, there was great opportunity to experience in some small way the change and uncertainty those living in poverty face every single day.

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE HOPES

The challenge of transitioning into a new province is still apparent. Trust, dialogue, and courage in decision-making will assist all in moving forward not just to “merge” former cultures but to create a new one. The Domestic, Provincial, and General Assemblies that lie ahead will give the Sisters of the Province some common ground on which to stand and vision. Hopefully, the practice of “being sent” will impel us to discover the needs of the most abandoned and underserved and to respond to those needs. During our “Transforming for the Mission” process, new local communities will form. Working through resistance with patience and sensitivity will be key as we embrace the future with hope and zeal for our ministries. The aging of our community and the decline in numbers will continue to challenge us because there will be fewer numbers and less energy to serve.

Yet, the willingness of the Sisters to be sent where the need is greatest, the opportunity to know one another’s giftedness and a deepening of our faith and trust in God, give great hope to the Sisters of the Province of St. Louise. It is apparent that God has been with the Province of St. Louise on every step of this journey. God’s Providence will continue to guide us as we go forward. In the words of St. Vincent de Paul: “Since Our Lord is the author of this work, you must often entreat Him to fill the persons who enter the Company with the Spirit He wants all of you to have, so that, by this means, you may continue the good that has been started”¹⁵.

¹⁵ St. Vincent de Paul, September 29, 1655, “Explanation of the Common Rules”, X Conference 70.

The Vincentian Family in Action

India, Haiti, Hunger Initiative, and VFCC

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY IN INDIA

Joseph Maniangat, C.M.

Visitor, India North Province

Since the time of St. Vincent, several hundred diverse groups of women and men, laity and religious were fascinated by his spirituality and his work. Consequently, they have accepted his mission, spirit and rule or adapted it to suit the cultures of various nations and peoples around the world. It is encouraging to note that men and women who are inspired by him come together to learn from one another and to continue his work much more efficiently and fruitfully through a united effort. More than a desire to come together under the patronage of the great man, it is his spirit of service to the poor and the abandoned of the society that draws the branches of the Vincentian Family close to each other. Vincentian family in India is no exception to this.

The actual formation of the Vincentian Family in India dates back to recent times – to the year 2006. A few Congregations/Societies having St. Vincent as their Founder or Patron decided to come together and get to know each other and their charism. The movement gradually gained momentum and necessitated meetings at various levels. Some seventeen Congregations/Societies/Associations have participated in the movement to this day.

The Aim of the Movement is

- To promote a spirit of mutual collaboration, solidarity and networking among the various branches of Vincentian Family in India respecting, at the same time, the autonomy of each group;
- To strengthen common apostolic endeavors among the members of the Vincentian Family;
- To recognize and become aware of the challenging reality of those who live in poverty;
- To collect and circulate information about the present day realities, needs, hopes and fears of the people living in poverty;
- To undertake common ministries in the light of the emerging realities of the people who live in poverty;

- To develop new forms of collaboration in the formation program among the members of the various branches, through our knowledge of St. Vincent and his charism;
- To ensure the participation of other branches and to organize and develop the VF in places where it is not present;
- To deepen the Vincentian spirit and charism in the light of present day needs.

Organization

The Vincentian Family gatherings and activities take place at various levels: national, regional, zonal and local. Obviously those involved at the national level are the Major superiors, whereas members (Confreres/Sisters/Lay people) from the remote parts of the country come together at the local level gathering. Each body has its own leader or co-ordinator to monitor the activities at that level. So far, seven annual gatherings at the national level have taken place in different parts of India. At other levels, meetings are called depending on the convenience of the members concerned. All these promote closer ties, unity, formation and collaboration among the members and branches of the Vincentian Family.

Activities

- The Vincentian Family in India organizes annually a 5-day on-going formation program for the members of the various branches. It has been conducted four times by now, and has seen a steady increase in the number of participants from various branches of the Family.
- A major coming together of the members of many branches was witnessed this year in Ranchi, in North India, where a seminar on Systemic Change was conducted by Fr. Robert P. Maloney and his team. A follow-up of that program is being planned.
- Various branches have come together also to realize the house-building projects of 100 families affected by the recent religious riots in the State of Odisha.
- Possibilities are being explored to start a centre to care for the HIV-AIDS patients.
- We have also published booklet containing the names and addresses of the branches of the Family and their communities in India.
- The website for the Vincentian Family in India is: www.vincentianfamilyindia.org
- There is also a News Bulletin published, named 'vinfamindia', disseminating the news of the VF.

It is our hope that besides developing a sense of belonging to a world-wide Vincentian family under the patronage of St. Vincent, we might be able to put our heads and hands together to realize the Vincentian charism of serving the most abandoned people. For the time we are getting to know each other's presence and activities across India, and for the short period since we began the movement, the result has been very encouraging.

VINCENTIAN FAMILY COLLABORATION COMMISSION REPORT

Joseph Agostino, C.M.
Coordinator, VFCC

The Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission (VFCC), created two years ago, exists to assist the Superior General in promoting collaboration among branches of the Vincentian Family. The Vincentian Family Project Design Team (PDT) has as its purpose the creation of a curriculum for formation in collaboration. It was launched at the "Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program" (CAP) in Paris on Pentecost in May 2013. Thirty-four people came from sixteen countries, representing thirteen branches of the Family. It was a great mixture of laity and religious from many walks of life, as Vincentian Family 'beginners and veterans'.

The Design Team put together a program utilizing adult learning methodologies, balanced with input and process. In its own words, their vision was "to call forth and galvanize the next generation of Vincentian family members to collaborate and help people and communities to emerge from poverty".

The program was comprised of five modules comprised of presentations, discussion, case studies and dialogue. There were pilgrimages to Vincentian sites and shrines in Paris which helped to "fill out" their understanding of the Vincentian charism. The "curriculum" of the five modules was as follows:

- *Module One: Re-awakening.* A Vincentian is a visionary who allows the charism of the Founders to be alive and incarnated in oneself. This will lead to being grounded in Vincentian roots and the tradition of collaboration.
- *Module Two: Re-rooting.* A Vincentian is a contemplative rooted in a relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ. This contemplation is a discipline of love. It roots one in the five characteristic Vincentian virtues, which guide our relationships with one another and the poor.

- *Module Three: Re-discovering.* A Vincentian re-discovers the power of collaboration as the only way to affect systemic change. As a result, a Vincentian chooses to act collaboratively to build relationships with the Vincentia family and beyond it to help us fulfill our common vision.
- *Module Four: Re-Igniting.* Vincentians will re-ignite their passion to be catalysts of change, so that they can help people and communities to emerge from poverty. Vincentians will invite and motivate others to collaborate and create new opportunities for systemic change.
- *Module Five: Re-Imagining.* Vincentians will re-imagine themselves in their ministerial roles so as to be energized in service to the poor. By adapting ways of collaboration, systemic change, and creating a personal action plan, they engage in personal transformation as better collaborators.

Based on the Commission plan and feedback from the thirty-four participants in Paris, the program will be repeated again in 2014 to “train the trainers”. They, in turn, will translate and acculturate it into Spanish, French, and Portuguese for use in subsequent years. The members of the Project Design Team represent Vincentian colleges and universities in the USA, and ministries in the Vincentian Family, specifically, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and some branches of the Vincentian Family.

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY HAITI INITIATIVE

Joseph Agostino, C.M.

Coordinator, VFHI

This is an outline of comments that will be made, giving a brief summary of the work of the Vincentian Family in Haiti, which started with a focus on **Zafen**, the micro-credit project. Our work in Haiti began as the special project to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Vincent and Louise. Upon being named its Coordinator in January 2012, I was informed that the Vincentian Family in Haiti had little contact with or use for the work that had been undertaken in the area of microfinance. Their needs, as well as that of their service populations, were much more basic.

As a result of meetings with the Vincentian Family leaders in Haiti and the VF Board, we addressed those concerns. It is no longer correct to call our efforts in Haiti by the name Zafen. Rather, we will be referring to the **Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative** from this point forward.

In collaboration with the Haitian leadership and the Board, a 3 year Strategic Plan was developed containing 4 major components:

1. ***Fostering human development through highly tailored education programs.*** We are currently collaborating with Mary's Meals of Scotland in to provide one hot meal per day to students in a consortium of schools both in and around the capital. We also hope to further enhance our efforts with the highly successful CLM program (which is currently on track to move 300 women and their families out of poverty).
2. ***Funding existing Vincentian Family projects to ensure their continued success and sustainability.*** Right now we are focused on a Bakery sponsored by the CM's and a sewing cooperative sponsored by the DC's.
3. ***Launching business initiatives, sensitive to social realities, in order to create jobs, develop job skills and generate revenue to be reinvested in other projects in Haiti.*** In the hope of moving toward the creation of economic empowerment zone, in which we will cluster these efforts, we are starting with a fish farm and a breeding center.
4. ***Continuing support for Zafèn,*** an internet-based funding mechanism to support social projects and generate capital for entrepreneurs lacking access to usual sources for loans

Furthermore, the plan calls for a National Implementation Council (NIC), which has been formed and whose work is underway. They were formally commissioned for their ministry at a Eucharistic Celebration in Haiti on February 2, 2013.

The Council is composed of 2 representatives from each branch of the Haitian Vincentian Family, appointed by local leadership. The Council helps design and evaluate strategies, offers advice to the Board for the growth of the mission, and serves as communication ambassadors to their branches of the Vincentian Family and all those we serve.

The Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative Board is composed of a representative of each branch of the Vincentian family, appointed by its international leader. The Board is responsible for safe-guarding the mission and is solely responsible for finances, in the name of the international heads of the Vincentian Family.

The members of the VFHI Board are:

- Joe Agostino, CM (Chair and Coordinator of the VFHI)
- Gene Smith (SSVDP)
- Yasmine Cajuste (JMV)
- Jacqueline Casseus (AIC)

- Joe Foley, CM
- Rosa Maria Sanchez, DC
- Raphael Verlux, CM (CM Regional Superior)

A Foundation has been formed as the legal and fiscal entity that makes this important work possible by holding funds inside the country to finance projects and enable the hopeful reinvestment of profits so this work becomes self-sustaining.

So this question remains: what can you as Visitors do, and what can your confreres and the members of the Vincentian Family in your provinces do to make the Vincentian Family Haiti Initiative a truly successful, long-lasting, and life-giving endeavor? I offer you some suggestions:

- Visit our Vincentian Haiti Initiatives website on a regular basis for news and information and visit the “Zafen” “Facebook” page and share loan opportunities with your contacts;
- Share your email address and that of your funders for our newsletter;
- Mention the Vincentian Haiti Initiatives in the public forums you attend;
- Pray for the Vincentian Haiti Initiative as well as for the Vincentian Family efforts in Haiti that we may ease their burden and empower the poor;
- Pick one of our strategic objectives that you find meaningful;
- Connect us with expert who may advance our goals;
- Alert us to funding opportunities from foundations or grants;
- Make a donation from your own province or personal resources;
- And finally, help to empower the poorest of Haitians, encouraging self-reliance, while creating long-term sustainability.

VINCENTIAN FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

Jozef Noga, C.M.

Visitor of Slovakia

In Slovakia, a community life style for the confreres developed after the fall of the Communist government in 1989. We have begun to work in parishes and in ministry for the poor. Little by little, our confreres who had for years worked as diocesan priests started to work in areas unknown to them: prisons, hospitals, homes for the sick, and, in general, areas covered by social services. The situation was similar for the

Sisters. They, too, had been able to organize a common life, open houses, create missions, and look for places that were congenial to their service.

These two branches of the Vincentian family began a close working relationship with lay Vincentian groups. Gradually they too created their own structures, defined their role in the environment of the world of the poor, and enriched their perspective by international experience. "From the one who to whom much is given, much will be demanded" (Lk. 12:48). Aware of this fact, we have sought to help those most in need of our help. We have sought, as a result, and found possibilities of close collaboration and unity to help at least some of them.

Why these two countries?

The answer to this is simple: for practical reasons. One of the Sisters had worked as a missionary in Haiti. It made sense that her friends in the Vincentian Family wanted to help her. And our confreres began a mission in Honduras, which needed money for various projects. Haiti and Honduras are the two poorest countries in Latin America. The people experience hunger. The majority of the population knows extreme poverty, both material and spiritual. It is amazing to realize how many illiterate people there are. Daily life in Haiti is marked by various hurricanes that have made the situation after the 2010 earthquake even worse. Our Sisters are carrying out major projects of feeding, education, and even hygiene.

Fund raising

Fund raising began in 2007 with an initiative of the Vincentian Family. Today, we have reached our seventh year, and in the last six years, we have raised **1,536,675** Euros for the poor. The fundraising efforts are being done not only from a practical perspective, but also from a spiritual one. At the beginning of each year, a Mass is celebrated for this intention. The members of the Vincentian Family pray for all the people involved.

Division of the funds

In Haiti, at the time of the January 2010 earthquake, some 300,000 people died, and more than 100,000 simply disappeared. Millions there still live in temporary tents. About half of the population has no clean water, and a third of the children are malnourished. In Honduras, help has been given to the Slovak mission who has been in Honduras for the last five years. In the last two years, it is working in the parish of Sangrelaya, in the diocese of Trujillo. The effort is to support agricul-

tural projects, beginning with a sewing program for abused girls and woman, then a fishing program, a clean-water project, cooking lessons, and management skills for a barber shop. In the near future, we are thinking about beginning an English course and social work.

Participating in the collection

“Fight against Hunger” happens through the sale of small honey candies in the shape of hearts. The entire process takes place with the help of volunteers. Many members of the various branches of the Vincentian family, both young and old, prepare, package, and sell them. On the streets, in front of major supermarkets, in ordinary places. They also go to schools, recreation centers, universities, etc. In this way, the union of the Vincentian family in Slovakia is being strengthened.

In recent years, a report was prepared for Catholic radio, Lumen, as well as a program for TV Lux. Journalists were able to meet the organizers of *“Fight against Hunger”* and concluded with a meeting with the apostolic nuncio who had done his diplomatic work in Haiti. Interestingly, young people also took part in the major music festival in Slovakia, Pohoda. It must be said that the majority of those attending were not inclined toward the church. In other words, this was a dangerous and unbelieving environment. A woman, the former prime minister of the government, took an interest in this work.

Slovakian Mission in Honduras

In the past, our province had no overseas mission. In the 1990s, we answered a challenge from the general curia to help Christians in Eastern Europe, especially in Ukraine. This was a foreign mission, where many confreres experienced this kind of service.

Honduras is another matter entirely. We did not look for it. We can say that this has enriched our province. Despite difficulties and various weaknesses, we can still serve needy people. In 2008, the first two missionaries arrived there from our country: Fr. Jaroslav Jaško and Brother Ján Zemanovič. They found people of three ethnicities: Garifuna, Indichena, and Miskito. The territory of the parish lies in a region often struck by tropical storms and hurricanes. This is the poorest part of Honduras; people here live from agriculture, cattle raising, fishing, and, unfortunately, from trafficking in weapons and drugs.

After long years of service in the parish of Sangrelaya, where the Daughters of Charity are now working, and where our Spanish confreres from the province of Barcelona worked from 1912 to 1970, our men built a fine wooden church. They also founded an old priests' residence that had completely fallen apart. After some years, with the

help of God and several donors, now there is a house that welcomes lay volunteers and the parishioners.

Our missionaries are working not only in the spiritual field but also in social and educational formation. To reduce a high level of criminality, they are taking an interest in human dignity, in the development of a culture, and of personal growth. They are working in a project of a kitchen for hungry children. At the same time, they are working on the development of infrastructures. In close collaboration with the government, they have begun building a bridge, and are now talking about an aqueduct for the people. With these little steps, they are trying to help the people who lack roads and bridges. In our mission center, they are thinking about preparing two multi-use classrooms for teaching English and the rudiments of computer literacy. The residence has room for lay collaborators, in close collaboration with Doctors without Borders. In our parishes, AIC and Miraculous Medal Association groups are growing.

Working with the Vincentian Family is bringing concrete results in the parish, but especially in the daily life of the poor.

The French School of Spirituality



A Conference sponsored by the Oratorians, Sulpicians, Eudists, Foreign Missions of Paris, and Congregation of the Mission. As heirs of this tradition, this conference will promote dialogue, so together we can meet today's challenges in our world.

Monday, June 30 at lunch to Friday, July 4 evening

**Conference held at the Congregation of the Mission
95 rue de Sèvres, 75006 Paris. Confreres welcome to stay
Conference will be tri-lingual: English, Spanish, and French**

Objectives:

- To explore foundations and historical unfolding of each charism;
- To exchange ideas on pastoral practices of various institutes.

Organization of each day:

- Morning: Sessions at CM Mother House, rue de Sèvres;
- Afternoon: Visit various places (Issy, St. Sulpice, St. Magloire, Foreign Missions of Paris, Vincentians, Oratory, Aubervilliers, Clichy);
- Evening: Mutual sharing about our founders, institutes, and practices.

**To register, please contact P. Elie Delplace, C.M. Visitor
95 rue de Sèvres - 75006 Paris**

paris.com@wanadoo.com or parprov@cmglobal.org

Limited spaces available, so please register soon!

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Monday, 30 June / Opening Luncheon

Topic:

“Contexts and transmissions of the French School of Spirituality”

- Opening Panel discussion
- What is the French School of Spirituality?
- What this school done over the centuries?
- Which stakes of this heritage for today?

Tuesday 1 July / Wednesday, 2 July

Topic:

“From the figure of a founder, to a tradition and a spiritual family”

- Cardinal de Berulle
- St. Vincent de Paul
- St. John Eudes
- Jean-Jacques Olier
- MEP: Pierre Lambert de la Motte, François Pallu, and François de Laval
- Final Synthesis

Thursday, July 3 – Morning

Topic:

“The French School of Spirituality and issues for the Mission Today”

- What worlds to evangelize?
- Round table with six presenters chosen among the participants
- Afternoon: Time to explore Paris!

Friday, July 4

Topic:

“The French School of Spirituality; issues for training today”

- Afternoon: Final document
- Visit to St. Sulpice with celebration
- Closing Dinner

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