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Vincentian Ongoing Formation

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Holy Father in the Father's House. John Paul II, the 263rd successor of the Apostle Peter in the Episcopal See of Rome, died on 2 April at 9:37 p.m. His pontificate, of almost 27 years, was the third longest in the history of the Church. Karol Józef Wojtyła, known as John Paul II since his election to the papacy in October 1978, was born in Wadowice, a small city 50 kilometers from Kraków, on 18 May 1920. He was ordained to the priesthood on 1 November 1946 in Kraków. He received a doctorate in theology in 1948 in Rome, under the direction of the French Dominican, Garrigou-Lagrange. On 4 July 1958, he was named Auxiliary Bishop of Kraków by Pius XII. He received episcopal ordination on 28 September 1958 in the Cathedral of Wawel (Kraków), from the hands of Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak. On 13 January 1964, he was named Archbishop of Kraków by Paul VI, who made him cardinal on 26 June 1967. He participated at Vatican Council II (1962-1965), with an important contribution in the drafting of the Constitution, Gaudium et Spes, and took part in all the Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. From the beginning of his pontificate on 16 October 1978, Pope John Paul II made 104 pastoral trips outside Italy and 146 within Italy. As Bishop of Rome, he visited 317 of the 333 Roman parishes. Among his principal documents are: 14 Encyclicals, 14 Apostolic Exhortations, 11 Apostolic Constitutions and 45 Apostolic Letters. The Pope published five books: Crossing the Threshold of Hope (October 1994); Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination (November 1996); The Poetry of John Paul II - Roman Triptych: Meditations (March 2003); Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way (May 2004); and Memory and Identity (February 2005). John Paul II presided 147 beatification ceremonies and 51 canonizations, with a total of 482 saints. He celebrated nine Consistories, during which he created 231 Cardinals (as well as one “in pectore”). He presided six Plenary Assemblies of the College of Cardinals. He presided 15 Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops (six Ordinary; one General Extraordinary and eight Special). He has been defined as a “tireless advocate for peace,” a “great promoter of the values of humanity,” a “spiritual guide of more than a thousand million people,” a “pioneer of dialogue among the various beliefs and a critical force of the Church's self-evaluation,” and a “spiritual leader and statesman... with a moral authority for the world,” a man who “labored tirelessly
to promote peace and unite peoples of all races, nations and religions,” a “man of great courage and humility,” a “servant of peace and justice,” a “man of faith, a “man of faith, passionate for the cause of Jesus Christ,” an “example of priestly fidelity,” a “friend,” a “spiritual father,” a “witness of the love of God for the poor,”... an “angel of God among us.” May he rest in peace!

Vincentian Missionary named Bishop. The Holy Father, named Fr. Luis Solé Fa, C.M., pastor and Episcopal Vicar of the Vicariate of the Mosquitia (Diocese of Trujillo) as Bishop of Trujillo (Department of Colón y Gracias a Dios, Honduras). Fr. Solé is a member of the Province of Barcelona. He was born on 23 July 1946 in Tarragona (Spain). He entered the Congregation on 30 April 1968. He made vows on 31 May 1972. He was ordained a priest on 29 December 1973. The Holy See announced his appointment as bishop on 18 March. The diocese has a surface area of 250,00 km², a population of 280,000 people of whom 230,000 are Catholic. It has 17 priests and 23 religious.

Habemus Papam! A humble, simple man of deep conviction. The life of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was marked by world wars and by the Nazi persecution. He was born on 16 April 1927 in Markt am Inn (Germany). He was the youngest of three children, son of Joseph and Maria. His family, out of necessity, moved several times to different cities. In 1933, Hitler rose to power. Cardinal Ratzinger experienced the Nazi persecution against Catholics. He made his First Communion in 1935. In 1937, he and his family moved to Hufschlang (outside Traunstein), where he spent his adolescence. There he began his studies in classical languages. In 1939, he entered the minor seminary in Traunstein. In 1943, he was recruited into the Flak (antiaircraft squadron) in Munich. He experienced firsthand the aerial attacks against the city. In 1945, he deserted the army. He was taken by the Americans for several months. Cardinal Ratzinger entered the seminary of Freising. In 1947, he began to study theology in Munich. On 29 June 1951, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, he was ordained a priest together with his brother. He was sent to Precious Blood Parish in Munich. In 1952, he began giving classes in the seminary. In 1956, he met Karl Rahner. In 1957, he received a doctorate with a thesis entitled: The People and House of God in St. Augustine's doctrine of the Church. After teaching dogmatic and fundamental theology in the Higher School of Philosophy and Theology in Freising, he continued his teaching activity in Bonn, from 1959-1963; in Münster, from 1963-1966; and in Tubinga, from 1966-1969. In this last year, he went to being professor of dogmatic theology and history of dogma in the University of Regensburg. From 1962-1965 he made a contribution to
the Vatican Council as an “expert”; he went as a theological consultor of Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne. His intense scientific activity led him to carry out important responsibilities at the service of the German Episcopal Conference and on the International Theological Commission. In 1972, together with Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac and other theologians, he began the magazine “Communio.” On 24 March 1977, he was named Archbishop of Munich and Freising by Pope Paul VI, and he received episcopal ordination on 28 May. He chose as his episcopal motto: Cooperatores veritatis (Collaborators of the truth). Paul VI created him Cardinal in the Consistory of 27 June of that year. John Paul II named him, on 25 November 1981, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and of the Pontifical International Theological Commission. He was president of the commission for the preparation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Among his numerous publications, several books stand out: Introduction to Christianity (1968); Dogma and Preaching (1973); Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church (1985); Salt of the Earth (1996), among others. In November 2002, the Pope approved his election as Dean of the College of Cardinals. In the Roman Curia, until the death of John Paul II, he was a member of the Council of the Secretariat of State for Relations with States; of the Congregations for Oriental Churches, Divine Worship and the Sacraments, Bishops, Evangelization of Peoples, Catholic Education, as well as the Pontifical Councils for Christian Unity and Culture; and of the Commissions for Latin America and Ecclesia Dei. He was elected Pope on 19 April 2005, becoming Pontiff number 265, successor to John Paul II. He chose the name Benedict XVI. On 24 April, 5th Sunday of Easter, he began his ministry as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church.
My brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family

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

I would like to share with you an update of the situation in Southern India and the Solidarity Project. Below you will find a report from Fr. Sebastian Anthikad, who is Director of Social Works of the South Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission. On 1 March he sent me the following e-mail:

Greetings from Enikepadu, India. At the outset let me thank you sincerely for all the troubles that you take upon yourself for the victims of Tsunami which encourages us to do more for the poor victims. Please find here below a report on the activities of the members of the South Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission with the victims of Tsunami.

As you know the killer and devastating Tsunami hit the Indian shore in the morning hours of 26th December 2004. Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the two mostly affected states in India. More than 10,000 people died and more than 200,000 dwelling units were completely destroyed, besides innumerable fishing craft and housing utensils and other belongings.

Immediately after the incident confreres from Keralapuram in Kollam district in Kerala and Amminjakarai in Tamil Nadu rushed to the closest affected areas with emergency relief materials and distributed food stuff, cloth and cooking utensils to the people.

The director of social works of the Province visited Kanyakumari village in Tamil Nadu and Azheekal village in Kerala to study the situation with the intention of taking up rehabilitation projects for the affected people of these two villages.

The plan of the Province is to construct 100 houses each in these two villages and supply fishing craft to 200 families in
the same villages. The cost of one house would come to approximately Rs. 1,55,737.00 ($3621) and a set of fishing craft (which consists of one catamaran, one fishing net and one motor engine) is estimated at Rs. 1,25,000.00 ($2906). So the total cost of 200 houses and 200 sets of fishing craft alone will cost: Rs. 56,147,400.00 ($1,305,753). Other expenses like transportation, staff salary and maintenance, energy and water charges, administrative expenses, unforeseen expenses and conveyance to the staff also should be added to the principal expenditure. It would amount 10% (approximately) of the principal expenditure, i.e., Rs. 5,614,740.00 ($130,575). We hope to get some financial assistance from Malteser, Germany, and Manos Unidas, Spain, but until today they have not made any positive commitment to our request. With the financial help that you have given to us the team members of the rehabilitation programme are going to move to the two villages on the 10th of March. We plan to carry out the following programmes.

1. Make a detailed survey (random survey was taken some time back) of these two villages.

2. Organize kindergarten centre for the children between the age group of 4 to 8. The children would be given snack at 9 a.m. and lunch at 12 noon.

3. Offer counseling among the people to get rid of the psychological trauma and the fear the people, especially women and children have until today, due to tsunami from which they have not recovered yet.

4. If any damaged houses could be repaired we are going to take up that project.

5. Awareness-building and consciousness-raising programmes for the affected people, through the means of workshops, kits, street plays etc., are to be conducted.

Our team consists of the Director, one conferee and one regent brother together with four lay staff in each centre. I shall be in touch with you again after 15 March.

So far, there has been a generous response from provinces, as well as individual confères and other members of the Vincentian Family. Below you can find some information about how you can make a donation for this project, if you would like.

1) Check made payable to: “Congregazione della Missione” and with “Deposit Only” written on the back, along with a note saying this money is for the Tsunami Relief Project of the Province of Southern India.
This can be sent to:

Elmer Bauer III, C.M.
Treasurer General
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Roma
Italy

2) Other arrangements can be made via the Provincial Treasurer, who will be acquainted with various methods of transfer.

When the project itself is finished, we will send each of the donors a financial report from the General Curia, in order to indicate how your donation was used. The means of communication that we are employing here serves as an update to all the donors at this point in time.

Please continue your prayers for the efforts of the Vincentian Family striving to support the victims of the tsunami in the different countries that were affected. We join our solidarity and prayers as well with the poor in many parts of the world where they have been marginalized and are suffering as a result of natural disasters, war, civil strife, hunger, malaria, AIDS: all those new forms of poverty which continue to be living expressions of the ongoing crucifixion of Jesus Christ today.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

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

From 21-24 February, the General Council met in an extraordinary session to reflect on different aspects of the General Assembly which was held in July 2004. At that meeting we talked about the Final Document, the Ordinances, the Decrees, the Postulates, and the thorough evaluation of the General Assembly.

We began the meeting in the context of prayer with the lectio divina of Luke 5:1-11, in which is contained the phrase that the Pope himself directed to us in his letter to our General Assembly: Duc in altum.

The main purpose of this extraordinary meeting was to study the different aspects of the General Assembly in order to listen to the voice of the Congregation that was expressed in and through its delegates and, as a council, to try to be obedient to what we heard. We considered this extraordinary meeting as a way of helping us to set the direction that we want to take as a council in these next six years, being faithful to the promptings of the Spirit that came forward in the different aspects of the General Assembly.

I. Ordinances

1. The Ordinance of 1999 with regard to languages, in which we ask all our students, during their time of formation, to study a second language, either English, French or Spanish, with the goal of being able to understand and speak it. The purpose of this ordinance is twofold. The ability to speak other languages is a wonderful missionary asset. It helps to enhance our capability to be pastorally effective. At the same time, it is a great help in terms of our own gatherings as a Congregation.

A second aspect that we discussed with regard to languages was with regard to promoting the right to intervene and be heard in our General Assembly for the non-official-language speakers. Our official languages at the General Assembly will continue to be English, Spanish and French with simultaneous and written translation in these languages. Nonetheless, we decided to...
formalize the relay-translation system. **Decision:** At our next General Assembly, we will add Italian as one of the spoken languages of the Assembly and have available at all times a confrere who would translate from Italian to one of the official languages. For those confreres who wish to speak and are unable to do so in English, Spanish, French, or Italian, we will also use the relay-translation system, determining beforehand who are the confreres who need this assistance and in what languages.

2. **The Ordinance of 2001 with regard to the Finance Committee to be established in each province of the Congregation.** This is an ordinance which can help us be faithful to our vow of poverty, to use the patrimony of the poor in the best possible way in our evangelization and service of the poor.

**Decisions of the Superior General and council:**

- I will be asking each of the provinces for a report on the standing of the Finance Committee in its particular province.
- The Treasurer General also will be encouraging the ongoing development of these Finance Committees in different regional gatherings.
- The Assistants, when they make canonical visits of the provinces, will also animate each of the provinces to further develop the sense of this ordinance.
- It is a topic that will be touched on during the New Visitors' Meetings,
- as well as the meeting of all the Visitors, along with other business having to do with finances.

**II. The Final Document**

We need to see the Constitutions as a force to push us into the future. Among other topics, we spoke about what we consider to be our values as a Congregation to help us to live our identity. These would be our four vows and the five characteristic virtues. We also spoke about the makeup of the Congregation itself being a challenge, both multiculturally and internationally.

Aside from the document itself, one of the richer parts of our dialogue is the role that the Conferences of Visitors/Provinces are beginning to take on, as was evident in our General Assembly.
III. The five Decrees of the Congregation of the Mission*

This is Decree Five, approved by the General Assembly of 2004: The Superior General with his council will devise, in consultation with the Visitors, a method of consultation in preparation for the election of the Superior General at the next General Assembly. The purpose of this method will be to provide to the members of the next General Assembly a list of those suggested for the office of Superior General, as well as information about these persons and their availability. The members of the General Assembly will always remain free to vote for other confreres.

Most of our energy was spent on this Decree. We talked about a number of ways of obtaining information about the different candidates for Superior General. We worked out a timeline for consulting the Visitors in terms of a new process.

IV. The Postulates

1. Postulates which were approved by the General Assembly and require action by the Superior General and his council.

Postulate 32 — content: election process for Superior General. Decision: The content of this postulate is summarized in Decree Number Five.

Postulate 33 — content: a commission to modify the Statutes of the CM. Decision: the commission will be named in a tempo forte in the near future.

2. Postulates which were submitted to the attention of the Superior General and his council.

Postulate 5 — content: pronouncements of the Congregation of the Mission with regard to worldwide situations. Decision: in general we are in agreement to state our position with prudence from the perspective of the poor. Out of the discussion came a need for an analysis of the reality, either at our various tempo forte council meetings or even as part of the process of the next General Assembly.

Postulate 9 — content: status of laymen who live in our community houses (oblates). Decision: will be studied by the commission on Statutes.

Postulates 21 and 24 — content: our principal Vincentian sites. Decision: 1) to write to the Provinces of Rome and Poland in

* The complete texts can be found in Vincentiana (July-October 2004), pages 350-351.
order to obtain clarification; 2) to write to the Visitors of the Provinces of France to obtain more information about the situation of the principal Vincentian sites there.

Postulate 28 — content: the establishment of an office in the Curia for Africa. Our concern is how to enhance the sense of participation on the part of the confreres from COVIAM in the general government of the Congregation. **Decision:** During the meeting of COVIAM in April, Fr. José Antonio Ubillús and the Superior General will ask that this issue be discussed.

3. Postulates that the Assembly submitted to the Superior General and his council with regard to the next General Assembly.

Postulates 7, 10, 16, and 17 — content: the vow of stability. **Decision:** will be presented to the commission that will be studying the Statutes in preparation for the General Assembly of 2010.

4. Postulates which were not approved by the General Assembly, but most likely will be taken into account in the context of Postulate 33.

Postulates 2, 4 and 37 — content: relationship of the Congregation of the Mission with the Vincentian Family. **Decision:** the commission on the Statutes will focus on Statute 7 in order to enhance our sense of collaboration with the Vincentian Family.

5. Postulates that the General Assembly submitted to the consideration of the Conferences of Visitors.

Postulates 1, 14, 18, 19, 20, and 30 — content: various. **Decision:** address a letter to the Presidents of the Conferences asking that they take these postulates into consideration as was recommended by the General Assembly.

6. Postulates that the General Assembly decided not to take into consideration.

Postulate 6 — content: instruction on the five virtues of the Congregation of the Mission. **Decision:** one of the next issues of *Vincentiana* will be dedicated to this topic.

Postulate 34 — content: the Assistants General. **Decision:** the commission on the Statutes will take a special look at Statute 57.
V. The Evaluation

We discussed the major points of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the Assembly.

**Most appreciated:**

1. the work of the secretary and deputy secretary. **Decision:** include role of deputy secretary in the Directory.
2. the work of the secretariat itself, making special recognition of the great contribution that was made on the part of the Secretary General, Sr. Ann Mary, Sr. Teresa, Brother Adam and Fr. Orlando in conjunction with the facilitator of the Assembly, the Central Commission and the Secretary and Sub-secretary of the Assembly.
3. the Commission on the Postulates. **Decision:** will take it into consideration as a model for the future.
4. the work of the chronicler. He was not only creative, but he was also faithful to the happenings in the Assembly. Special thanks to Fr. Celestino.
5. the report of the General Treasurer. Clarity and precision, detailed work.
6. Among other positive aspects, without any additional comment: Fr. Maloney’s talk on the role of the Superior General, Fr. Corpus Delgado’s on the Directory, Sr. Evelyne’s talk, the report of the Secretary General, the work of the Redaction Commission (although we talked at some length about how that might be reorganized to have an official language from which the others would be translated).

VI. Other Topics

1. **What kind of General Assembly we want in 2010.** Discussion: whether it is important that the Assembly write a document or not, more sharing of experiences that would help us learn from each other in the living out of our lives as Vincentians.
2. The need to rework the Directory, especially to have a run through or a more detailed orientation on the Directory at the start of the Assembly.
3. The process of choosing moderators for the Assembly.
4. How to choose a Central Commission that would be representative of the whole Congregation.
5. The role of the facilitator. A highly discussed topic during the Assembly and also in the evaluation. Discussion: For the running of the Assembly itself, the order of hierarchy is: the President, the Central Commission and Moderators. The facilitator would
simply be present to coordinate among the President, the Central Commission, the Secretary, and the secretariat.

6. **Languages and cultures.** In the next General Assembly, we hope to enhance occasions for mixing at the beginning of the Assembly, so that we are able to get to know one another. It is important that at the General Assembly, which is the supreme authority of the Congregation, we think and live as one. Our main concern, as a General Assembly, is the worldwide Congregation.

Our discussion on the evaluation was rich and enlightening and provided good ideas for the planning of the next General Assembly. The evaluation was presented by Fr. Manuel Ginete, who acted as our facilitator during the General Assembly. We thank him for the fine job that he did on the final evaluation with its concluding observations, which helped to stimulate our dialogue as a General Council, as we reflected back on what occurred in July.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

*Superior General*
Circular

Rome, 24 March 2005

25th Anniversary of the Martyrdom Bishop Oscar Romero
Bishop of San Salvador

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

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

This circular concerns some of the decisions of our tempo forte from 7-11 March.

1. We discussed the importance of doing an analysis of the reality at the beginning of each tempo forte session. We decided to designate 90 minutes to the presentation and discussion of a theme for reflection. In the months of June and December, we will study matters relative to the reality of the Congregation of the Mission. In October and March we will study matters related to the world reality. The theme at our next tempo forte in June will be the “reality of youth and initial formation in consecrated life.” All members of the Curia are invited to participate in the analysis of the reality.

2. We approved the 2004 Financial Report which was presented by the Treasurer General, Elmer Bauer.

3. We studied a number of diverse reports:
   - from the Postulator General, Fr. Giuseppe Guerra
   - from the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office, Brother Peter Campbell, who was present here in Rome to make his report. He informed us that, between 1 January 2003 and March 2005, the Vincentian Solidarity Office has achieved approval and funding of ten complete projects and two partial projects, raising in this period of time over $270,000.
   - from the webmaster, Fr. John Freund. Many of the results of this report can be witnessed in the innovations done on the Vincentian Family website, especially in English. The new access to the CM page of the site is www.cmglobal.org. Once again, I encourage all members of the Congregation to continue to use this means of communication for many reasons: deepening our own identity, aiding our own formation, helping us to draw closer to other branches of the Vincentian Family, enabling us to dialogue with each other
so that we might generate new and creative ideas in serving the poor.

- from the Executive Secretary of SIEV, Fr. Roberto Lovera, as well as correspondence from each of its present members, wherein they submitted names for possible future candidates for this Secretariat of the Congregation of the Mission.

4. Three other reports of offices of the Congregation of the Mission were also discussed and a process of evaluation begun with regard to them: the CIF program, the Vincentian NGO at the United Nations and the Office of the Delegate for the Vincentian Family. In the next tempo forte in June, a detailed evaluation of each will be carried out.

5. We studied our missions

- reviewing the list of volunteers for service either this year or in 2006

- Fr. José Antonio Ubillús presented his work plan as Assistant for the Missions. His main goal is to animate, accompany and serve our confreres who are working in mission territories, whether they be missions ad gentes or international missions, etc.

- We took particular care in discussing our international mission in El Alto, Bolivia, which has recently suffered the death of its superior, Fr. Franc Pavlič. We initiated the process of consulting the confreres of El Alto for the naming of a new superior and we are doing a search for possible candidates to continue the work that Franc had begun there.

These are among the major issues that were discussed and decided on in our most recent tempo forte.

I wish each member of the Congregation a very Happy Easter. May God fill you with much hope and joy in the Resurrection of his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General
Ongoing formation is a priority in every human, business, religious, and ecclesial organization. Our Congregation is not exempt from this requirement. In this feature on Vincentian Ongoing Formation, we offer a series of reflections on this fundamental theme.

Hugh F. O'Donnell, C.M., in his article, “What Is Ongoing Formation?,” recalls the necessity for updating in all human fields. Although our vocation “is a vocation rooted in the divine mystery of the love of God,” we have to show ourselves “capable and competent in guiding and serving the people of God.” Vatican II invited us to revive and renew our Vincentian charism in light of the demands of the present time. Ongoing formation falls in this dynamic. It leads to change and to personal, communal and congregational conversion.

In the article, “The Dimensions of Ongoing Vincentian Formation,” Álvaro Panqueva Abella, C.M., describes the praxis of St. Vincent in the formation of the young men who arrived in the Company. “The very work of St. Vincent was that of the formation of his missionaries for everyday life.” It presents some characteristics of the formative work of St. Vincent in various dimensions: human, Christian, communal and priestly.

Corpus J. Delgado Rubio, C.M., in his article, “The Time of Ongoing Formation,” describes for us the different phases in the life of the Vincentian missionary: the first years of the missionary, the
“crisis” stage, the mature age, the phase of old age and infirmity, and ongoing formation in relation to the seasonal rhythms of life. We keep in mind that “ongoing formation is a difficult journey throughout one's entire life and has a relationship with time in its diverse rhythms.”

In his article, “The Duties and the Ongoing Formation of the Formators,” Stanislaw Wypych, C.M., presents to us the tasks of formators, the fundamental elements of the personality of the formator, the importance of the preparation of formators, and the aspects and modalities of the ongoing formation of formators.

Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M., in his article, “Ongoing Formation as Creative Fidelity,” invites us to reflect on ongoing formation as an element that favors Vincentian fidelity and thus can respond with inventiveness and boldness to the new poverties of our time.

(Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M., translator)
Ongoing formation is a process for keeping up with the times in one's chosen profession. Initial formation and professional training are only the foundations of a lifelong process of being current and up-to-date. It is consequently a professional responsibility to be committed to ongoing formation. Professionals owe it to the people they profess to serve and to themselves as responsible professionals. No one wants bypass surgery or a hip replacement from a surgeon who is ten years behind the times.

Many professions, particularly in the medical field, require in-service training and recertification on a regular basis. This is often done by a group of peers. The Church and religious communities in principle do not have this practice beyond occasional workshops, annual meetings, and sabbaticals, which, generally, however, do not make demands beyond participation or personal discretion. Some communities certainly are more advanced and intentional in this area than others. Sometimes the meetings are used as a stage in diocesan or religious planning processes. I think it is also fair to say that participation in contemporary movements, like Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Focolare, Neo-Catechumenate and Journaling, on the one hand, and professional training in psychology, pastoral counseling, social work, organizational development and management on the other, manifest a deeper interior longing to be up-to-date, relevant, effective and professional.

The use of the word "professional" may disturb some readers, since we are talking about the Church, priesthood, religious communities and communities of apostolic life. Ours is not a profession, it is a vocation rooted in the Divine Mystery of God's Love and the intangible elements that constitute the heart of our lifelong commitment. Still, there is a professional side to our vocation. We publicly put ourselves forward as capable and competent in leading and serving the People of God and in proclaiming the Good News to people of good will. We profess to be evangelizers and pastors capable of breaking the Bread of Life to those who hunger for God's Word. We are presumed to be leaders experienced in forming communities of dedicated disciples. We are expected to be prepared
to accompany mature Christians in the ups and downs of their faith journey. Being professional means we have to take responsibility for the public role we profess in the service of others.

When Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council he coined the expression "aggiornamento," meaning "bringing up to date." It was his perception that the Church had fallen behind the times and needed to catch up with the contemporary world in order to relate to it and preach the Gospel in it effectively. His vision was prophetic. He anticipated where God was leading his people. On the day the Council opened, 11 October 1962, he said in his homily, "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relationships." It became clear later that the new order would be one in which people did not rely on violence to settle difficulties and build human community.

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II followed the same path when they called for a "New Evangelization." The Church needed, in their vision, to renew her spiritual energies and use new methods and a new vocabulary suited to the people of today. This implies a shift in the meaning of fidelity. Fidelity now embraces not only what God has revealed in the past but also responsiveness to what God is doing in the present and openness to what God is preparing for us in the future.

My initial formation took place in the 1950s in a world which was soon to pass away. The formation I received resembled much more what had gone before than what was to follow. Our philosophy and theology texts were in Latin and expressed unchanging meanings of dogma, moral and philosophy through a language no longer in daily use — which was considered an advantage. It suited the essentialist world of meanings in which we were formed. It was a specialized vocabulary that we hoped others might share so they could also grasp with the same reassuring certainty the foundational truths which were to guide our lives. It had many benefits and we often profited from it in later life, but it taught us little about historical consciousness and the contemporary scientific mindset. It was interested in the unchanging essence of things, while science had for a long time already been trying to explain the changing and observable accidents that our essentialist thinking left aside. Our formation was an instance of classical consciousness.

The world of classical consciousness had been under strain already for a long time and had to yield to the world of historical consciousness, most dramatically in and after the Second Vatican Council. In Catholic circles throughout the 20th century Scripture studies led the way into the world of historicity, historical consciousness, development and positive regard for change. Patristic studies and liturgical research in their turn shed new light on the
developmental and historical nature of belief and worship. Theology was slow in reentering the field of inquiry, but eventually did so through the pioneering work of Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, von Balthasar, and Lonergan among others. After all, Judeo-Christian religion is an historical religion in the most intimate sense of the word; our God is the God of history.

Besides embracing the historical, changing and developmental nature of life in the world, we have had to face two other realities. One is the unprecedented rate of change in our times; the other is the realization that one age is ending and another beginning.

The word “conversion” in the past almost always pointed to a singular, and often dramatic, change in the direction of one’s life, from a life of sin to one of obedience to God or from one religion to another. Today we speak of “continual conversion” or “ongoing conversion.” Conversion, while it still sometimes refers to a dramatic change, more often refers to the frequent, even daily, turning to God in new circumstances. Bernard Lonergan points out that the journey to authenticity, both as a person and as believer, calls for daily fidelity to the five laws of being human which lead to religious, moral, intellectual, psychic and social conversion. It is a lifelong process engaged in day by day. The five laws are: Be Attentive, Be Intelligent, Be Reasonable, Be Responsible and Be in Love with God.

In addition to being called to continual conversion, we are also called to be lifelong learners. We can learn through reading and study, through events and people, through the circumstances of daily life, through listening, through collaboration with others, through attentiveness to the Church’s ongoing dialogue with the world. There is a tidal wave of information coming our way. It calls for a habit of critical reflection. To this end ongoing formation can be a special blessing. It helps us sort things out and keep our focus.

The Second Vatican Council had a double thrust; one was “ressourcement,” going back to the sources, and the other was “aggiornamento,” catching up with the times, and, in this way, recasting our relationship with the world. The Council called religious communities, among whom we were grouped at the time, to go back to our founders and foundresses and reappropriate our charism, eventually renewing our charism in our own times. Continuing education and ongoing formation involve us in the same dynamic.

**Reappropriating the charism of St. Vincent.** Perhaps future generations of Vincentians will learn in initial formation all they need to know about St. Vincent’s life, works and charism, but for the present it is certain that the Council’s challenge to retrieve the charism of Vincent, purified and whole, is still underway. However much we may regret the passage of two and a half centuries between
the death of Vincent and the publication of Pierre Coste’s 14 volumes of Vincent’s letters, conferences and documents, and their translation into other languages, we are nevertheless living in a graced time for getting back to the sources and reappropriating Vincent’s gift to us and to the world.

The 60 years since the Second World War (1945-2005) have been fruitful in revealing the face of Vincent anew. It has been said that traditional images of Vincent often hide more than they reveal about the saint. Deepening appreciation of the treasures in Coste and in the archives of the Congregation, further understanding of the history and habits of his times, seeing Vincent in context, in relation to the events and circumstances to which he responded and in which he discerned providential guidance, all these have cracked open the “sanctity” mold which imprisoned him and revealed the humanity and genius of Vincent. They even give an occasional glimpse into the sanctuary of his interior life of mystical communion with the Christ of Charity. It is clear that for our present generation the life and charism of St. Vincent constitute a necessary and integral part of ongoing formation.

**Staying up with the times.** This is the other and more obvious dimension of ongoing formation and one we share with many others in the Church. The times have changed and the rate of change has been extraordinary. In just ten years there are, for example, one billion users of the internet, among whom we count ourselves. In addition, there have emerged a “world consciousness” and an “historical consciousness.” Bernard Lonergan writes, “We are aware of many very different cultures existing at the present time, and we are aware of the great differences that separate present from past cultures.”

When there was one culture and that, for all practical purposes, was European, we who belonged to that world, directly or derivatively, had a fixed point from which to view and assess the rest of the world. The realization that there is no one normative culture, but that there are many cultures and they are self-validating, not validated externally through another culture, inevitably has created a revolution in our way of thinking and feeling. Each culture has its own authentic identity and set of meanings and values. In this regard the international character of the Congregation and of CIF are a great blessing. The confreres come from all over the world and are apostles to the whole world. This, of course, means we are called to an ongoing conversion of unexpected dimensions in terms of historical and cultural consciousness.

**Formation and Transformation.** Continuing education and ongoing formation are not the same thing, but they are often used

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interchangeably. Without trying to sort out these terms, I believe formation points to and anticipates transformation in a way education usually does not. I think of education, also training, in terms of information, insight and skills, whereas formation implies changes that are more personal, changes in attitude, outlook, understanding and eventual decision. Rosemary Haughton in her wonderful book on conversion many years ago identified the difference between formation and transformation and their relationship to each other. Formation aims at transformation but can never achieve it. Programs can provide formation, but transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit and the individual person freely responding to the lead of the Spirit. Formation makes the materials and tools of transformation available — the bricks and mortar, the steel and stone — but cannot build the building. Formation nevertheless has its important role. It can be that, when someone is ready to build for the future, nothing is available but a few discarded timbers and chipped stones.

Transformation goes by different names in the East and West. In the East it is called “Enlightenment,” in the West “Conversion.” Enlightenment comes at the end of a long process of purification and involves being tuned into all that is. In Buddhism, at least in some forms, Enlightenment is expressed in these words: “All is Emptiness, all is Compassion.” There is boundless compassion for all beings, especially all sentient and living beings. Thomas Merton saw this on the faces of the giant Buddhas in Sri Lanka. Emptiness creates the space for endless compassion. Daoism is a religion which aims at being completely tuned into the Way (the Dao or Tao) of all things. Though the comparison limps in a number of ways, you can think of St. Vincent being tuned into Divine Providence or tuned into Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is clear that there is detachment from a smaller personal view of things and surrender to something transcendent. In the West and particularly in the Gospel tradition, transformation is spoken of in terms of metanoia or conversion. John the Baptist called for metanoia and Jesus after him proclaimed: “Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand!” When the people were struck by Peter’s preaching on Pentecost Sunday, they asked what they were to do. Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized...”

Sometimes formation programs are thought of as a vacation by those who come, and perhaps more often by those who do not. And there may be an element of truth in it, which I will talk about below. The real issue is the hidden dimension of the changes and transformations that are taking place in the individual participant. In the end, it is about conversion of mind and heart in the individual participant.
Bernard Lonergan places conversion at the heart of the theological enterprise and ultimately at the heart of the human journey to authenticity. There is a threefold conversion: a religious conversion, a moral conversion and an intellectual conversion. Some add a psychic or affective conversion and a socio-political conversion, but maybe that is for another day. What has always struck me about these three conversions is their order. The religious conversion is first. All our efforts to place religious conversion as the natural outcome of getting our act together humanly, psychologically, socially, philosophically have come up short — like the tower of Babel not tall enough to reach heaven. I would like to reflect on ongoing formation in terms of these three conversions, not in the sense of what a formation program promises to do for participants, but from the other side, what participants might do for themselves with the Spirit on their journey to authenticity today.
The Dimensions of Ongoing Vincentian Formation

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Introduction

The theme proposed to me: The Dimensions of Ongoing Vincentian Formation spans almost all of St. Vincent’s activity as the head of his Lazariste community, for it was he who brought it together, encouraged it, educated it, sent forth and sustained in the mission the handful of formed people who were with him.

Young people also arrived to be “formed for the mission,” and the Saint received them and placed them with his strongest collaborators, and he himself helped in their formation from above. But St. Vincent’s real work was the formation of his missionaries in the daily life of St. Lazare through common prayer, liturgical celebrations, spiritual-pastoral conferences, repetitions of prayer, spiritual retreats, dialogues and personal meetings and all the complex and multifaceted administration of the extensive priory of St. Lazare. At the same time his letters, to which the solicitous Vincent gave much time and attention, and the visits to the most remote houses of Paris spread his formative message. It is surprising, when one looks at the indexes of his works in the last ten years of his life, that his formative messages are more numerous and solid: he was fully conscious of his responsibility, of the weight of his authority and of the acceptance he enjoyed: He had a burning and perceptive pastoral zeal which allowed him to see the reality of his family in the global perspective of past, present and future, as well as in the pedagogical perception of an individual case and of the formative detail in his local communities. So all the formation that emanated from Vincent was ongoing formation aimed at maturing, feeding, preserving, correcting and promoting the missionaries already initiated in “Vincentian” life and work.

Let us briefly analyze some of the characteristics and dimensions of our founder’s formative labors.
1. Above all, a HUMAN FORMATION

The Saint was aware that the group of his immediate collaborators was deficient in the human values of culture, human relations and education in general as we say today. They were poor country people whom the Lord took from behind the flock to place them in the work of evangelizing the people and forming good priests. For this reason, from his awareness of their human conditions, he busied himself in forming them well in attitudes and human relations worthy of the priestly ministry, and in correcting in them the manners and conduct that smacked of installation or sensual and worldly comfort in the priestly office. There are texts that give us a full-length portrait of his efforts to form priests who were pure, gentlemanly, hard working and service oriented. For example: those who did not want so much work or diversity in the missions were: “Idlers, lazy missionaries, guided by the love of their own comfort and rest ...”. As a good formator he had and he offered prospects for growth and maturity: “If the Company, while still in its cradle is like that, with much greater reason will it be that way when it has grown older and gained greater strength than it has now.” In a repetition of prayer in July 1655 he cried out: “We look for the shade; we do not want to out in the sun; we like our comfort so much; we cry for help when we are asked to do a tiny bit more work than we are used to. My room, my books, my mass... and all that. Enough! Being a missionary means wanting everything just so? God is our provider. He succors us in our needs and with more than we need. He gives us comfort and more.... I do not know if we think enough about thanking him for it.”

A true man should be a man who works, diligent and able. Listen to Vincent: “Mr. Duval, a great doctor of the church, used to say that an ecclesiastic should have more work than he could do; for when idleness and laziness take over an ecclesiastic, all vices rain down on him from every side.... We were made to work... and a missionary, a true missionary, a man of God, a man who has the Spirit of God, everything seems good and possible to him, he undertakes everything, he can do everything...”. The idea of the priest as a man of work is a fundamental characteristic of the Vincentian image of the ideal priest.

The Saint makes an important distinction in the area of human values for the priest: one must think not so much in his doing as in his being. What counts in the person is his being, the virtues, the

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 157.
4 Ibid., 159.
prayer, the giving himself to God. The doing flows from that, and can even happen artificially apart from true existence; but this evaporates, it has no consistency, no real weight. Let us go on reading: “A missionary who thought of nothing but learning, of preaching well, of speaking marvels in a place, of moving a whole town to compunction... such a man, who neglects his prayer and the other exercises of the Rule, is such a man a missionary? NO! He is missing the principal thing, which is his own perfection.” It is a matter, by valuing life in that way, of becoming worthy to help others. It is beautiful to look at priestly ministry in this way: it is not a matter of rites and words, of influences and an atmosphere of piety, but rather of service to grace and to the Spirit, of mediating between the Christian person and the world of his graces and charisms. Where the Saint best expresses his option for true human values is in the famous conference of 6 December 1658, on the end of the Congregation, already cited, where, at the end of the talk, he asks: “But... who will be the one who is going to separate us from the good we have begun? It will be the libertine spirits, the libertines, the libertines who seek only to amuse themselves, and as long as there is something to eat, do not worry about anything else. Who will they be? They will be... it is better not to say it. They will be the installed kind — (as he said this, he put his hands under his armpits as lazy people do) — the kind who have only a limited horizon and limit their perspective and their life project to a certain circle in which they shut themselves and do not want to go out from it. And if someone shows them a goal beyond that and they bother themselves to look at it, later they return to their circle like snails to their shell...” A man, then, should be free, enthusiastic about his work, happy and animated to do it, overcoming those human failings so well described in words and gestures in the Saint’s conference.

2. Then a CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Following his most Christian teachers and formators, the Saint placed prayer as the peak and the synthesis of Christian values. In it we open ourselves to God to welcome him and listen to him and hand over to him what we have and are and to beg him for what we need with faith and the surety of hope, with heartfelt love for him more than for self-defense and concern for myself.

In the repetition of prayer on 10 August 1657, the Saint sums up the values of good prayer in our life: “And so, let us all give ourselves very well to this practice of prayer, for it is from it that all good things

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5 Ibid., 497.
6 Ibid., 509.
come. If we persevere in our vocation, it is thanks to prayer; if we are successful in our work, it is thanks to prayer. If we do not fall into sin, it is thanks to prayer; if we persevere in charity, if we are saved, it is all thanks to God and to prayer. God, just as he refuses nothing to prayer, gives nothing without prayer."

Ever the realist, the Saint knows from his own experience and his missionary and community ministry, that formation takes sin into account and must face temptation if it is to be real and human, Christian and progressive. Therefore when he chooses the five virtues and the evangelical maxims, he does so to achieve in his sons true Christian freedom. He says word for word in the conference of 22 August 1659: “The sons of God are those who enjoy true and perfect freedom, for it is only in the love of God that it can be found. The maxims can be reduced to three points: love of poverty, mortification of pleasures and submission to God’s will. These put the person in Christian freedom.” One would not expect such an interesting anthropocentric focus on the five virtues from a man as selfless and detached from human and earthly values as St. Vincent was. But the fact is that his faith is contemplation of the work of God and he can do no less than discover in it the care for man that is always present in the mind and in the works of God. So simplicity triumphs over lying and duplicity, and causes God’s love to shine through in our works and triumph in our lives. Humility is also God’s love which triumphs over our pride and self-love and destroys at its root vanity and the valuing of worthless things. Meekness the Saint calls sweetness, remembering St. Francis de Sales, and he sums it up saying it is “putting up with our neighbor in his weaknesses” and not losing patience in the extremes of discomfort and annoyance. Mortification, for the Saint, is the way to achieve the first three virtues and to live well in community and for the mission. Zeal is a love in the heart which moves us to seek to be pleasing to God and very useful to our neighbor: “If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is what is most pure in the love of God.” Notice well, then, how St. Vincent, as a true former of a community now mature in years and advanced in pastoral experience, takes from the gospel and the Christian tradition the values and characteristics of the missionary and tries to inculcate them and project them into the life and mission of his sons. It is ongoing formation in its purest and most genuine form. For ourselves, what or whom do we have today at the head of our already formed communities to fill this vacuum left by St. Vincent? It is a

7 Ibid., 369-370.  
8 Ibid., 721.  
9 Ibid., 728.
question I cannot help but ask myself when I realize the enormous weight the presence and the formative labor of the Founder had for the nascent Vincentian community; and, on the other hand, how poor, routine and inconsistent are the means we have today for ongoing formation. We shall see how we react!

3. A COMMUNITY FORMATION

Very important for Vincentian humility and for the legal and ecclesial realism in which we live is the distinction our Saint so often repeats that the bishops and religious of solemn vows are in a state of acquired perfection and we are in a state of seeking and tending towards perfection. But, going beyond legal frameworks, the Saint uses all his resources for the love of perfection and promotes with all his strength the search for what is best for his community. It is enough to look at the Common Rules to perceive the Saint's clamor for Christian perfection, the search for Christian perfection in his community. I liked very much a part of the conference of 7 November 1659 (probable date). He says: "The vows distance us from all these things, from the goods — temporal ones — that are the cause of the loss of so many souls. One of the advantages there is in this state is the rest which one enjoys when he renounces all these things." The Saint channeled the esteeming of freedom of the spirit into pastoral zeal in order to organize charity and to dedicate himself to prayer in community. But how demanding and tough he was in his conferences and his admonitions as superior in demanding the observance of the internal rules of the community. Let us listen to some of them: "Now this house of St. Lazare is for receiving sinners sick with spiritual leprosy who are cured by the grace of God.... But what a motive for shame if we become unworthy of such a grace.... And what would be the cause of this? If one asks a lax missionary: Sir, would you like to help a retreatant during his exercises? This would be a great annoyance for such a missionary. If he does not excuse himself, he will do no more than drag the broom.... He has such a desire to please himself and such annoyance at losing an hour of his time to help a retreatant, an hour that would be the best used hour of his day."  

The Saint was a formator fully and efficiently: he did not silence what had to be corrected and at the same time he valued the atmosphere of seeking perfection which he found in the community.

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10 Ibid., 790-791.
11 Ibid., 792.
12 Ibid., 877-878.
4. PRIESTLY DIMENSION

For St. Vincent, the founding of the Congregation of the Mission responded to two factors within his reality which worried him enormously: Firstly, the situation of the poor, especially in the small villages and the countryside battered by wars and their consequences — hunger, extreme poverty, the abandonment by those who could and should help them: government, society and Church. Secondly, the deteriorated situation of the clergy: it was the refuge of people without education or vocation, with no formation nor pastoral perspective, without discipline nor theological training, who "placed" themselves in the profession of clerics as a place to prosper and find the economic solution for their life's worries. Of course, instead of teaching doctrine, they caused scandal; instead of helping the people, they exploited them; instead of sanctifying them, they corrupted them with their anti-testimony. They were a nightmare for their bishops and the hierarchy anxious for an ecclesial renewal. For that reason, St. Vincent added another goal to his Little Company besides the evangelization of the poor: the formation of the diocesan clergy. His complaints and assessments of the evil bad priests do to the Church are impressive. Let us listen: "Oh my brothers — he exclaims in a conference at St. Lazare in September 1655 — how we should pray to God about this and how we should work to face this great need of the Church which is being ruined in many places because of the bad life of the priests. They are the ones who cause its loss and ruin! And it is quite certain that the depravation of the ecclesiastical state is the ruin of the Church of God. Recently I was in a meeting in which seven prelates participated; and they, reflecting on the evils to be seen in the Church, clearly said that the ecclesiastics are the principal cause of them." Then he makes a geographical and sociopolitical summary of the countries of Europe to analyze phenomena such as heresy and religious wars that undermine the bases of the Christian faith. He was a well-informed man, current with the ecclesiastical problems and with a vision and a heart open to seeking solutions to this delicate matter.

In almost the same words he repeats the same thing three years later (conference of 6 December 1658) speaking of the end of the Congregation of the Mission: "One could think that all the ills we see in our world could be attributed to the priests. To say that might scandalize some, but it is necessary for me to show the greatness of the problem in order to bring out the importance of the solution. The Church has no greater enemies than the priests themselves; from them heresies come forth... Luther, Calvin.... Because of them heresies prevail, vice reigns and ignorance sets up its throne in the midst of the poor people."

13 Ibid., 266.
14 Ibid., 502.
But that disquiet and rigor flow from the great appreciation of
the faith and charity of the priestly ministry that the Saint had:
"Recognize, my brothers, how much superior the office of ecclesiastics
is to other earthly dignities and how we should hold in high esteem
priests whose character is a participation in the eternal priesthood of
the Son of God who gave them powers...." From all this, negative in
its criticism and positive in its praises and assessments, must spring
up a concern and a clearly defined task for the formation of the
clergy in the seminaries and in his community: "O Savior, — he
exclaimed in a conference in July 1655 — if a good priest can do so
much good, how much evil a bad one can do if he puts his mind to it.
O God, and how difficult it is to return them to a positive state. O my
Savior, how necessary it is for our poor missionaries to give themselves
to you in order to contribute to the formation of good priests since this
is the most difficult task, the highest and most important for the
salvation of souls and the progress of Christianity."

Let us pause to consider — it is worth the trouble — a priestly
ministry that always has high priority and is basic to pastoral work,
and today more than ever is emphasized by Vatican II — the
preaching of God's word. Real workshops in sacred oratory were held
in St. Lazare according to a repetition of prayer on 16 August 1655. The
Saint programmed meetings to listen to and critique experiences
and models of sermons. It was there, on 20 August 1655, that he
presented and defended the famous Little Method: "It consists in
preaching like an apostle, with a common way of speaking, as well as
you can, with simplicity and familiarity, as the disciples and apostles
preached, as Christ himself preached: it is a great grace that God has
done to this small and poor company that we have the happiness to
imitate him in this." He gladly repeated what the people of Paris
said in the parishes and in the court itself: "This priest preaches well,
he preaches like a missionary, like an apostle — like a missionary,
like an apostle. And so, my brothers, simplicity. Let us preach Jesus
Christ to souls; let us say what we have to say, as well as we can,
humbly, but with force and charity; let us not seek to satisfy ourselves,
but rather God... all the rest is nothing but vanity and pride, pure
arrogance...." Recently a preacher was speaking to me about this
and he said: "Sir, when a preacher seeks honor and popular acclaim, he
hands himself over to the tyranny of the public, and dreaming about

15 Ibid., 505.
16 Ibid., 867.
17 Ibid., 209 ff.
18 Ibid., 215.
19 Ibid., 436.
becoming famous for his beautiful discourses, he becomes a slave to reputation."^{29}

We can say in conclusion that the Saint knew how to use all the tools to work for the formation of the clergy, as much in initial formation in the seminaries, as in ongoing formation in retreats, conferences, study sessions, personal interviews and letters. Some tools were, we might say, spiritual, like prayer, giving good example, spoken and written counseling; others were structural or pastoral, like the Tuesday Conferences, the seminaries, the meetings, retreats and formation courses for older priests, the brotherly welcome in St. Lazare and in the houses of the Congregation. But in both areas, in the spiritual and in the pedagogical, in that of grace and that of technique, in the mystical and the practical, the Saint devoted all his spiritual strength and all his capacity for persuasion to the formation of good priests and the reform and betterment of older priests whom he received in St. Lazare, whether they were of his Community or diocesan clergy. The Saint used every means, human as well as Christian, of psychology and grace, personal and communal and undertook the immense and arduous task of reforming — forming again, giving a second and definitive formation — to the French clergy of his time.

I have neither the time nor the ability to project to the present day situation of our clergy the little I have managed to present about ongoing Vincentian formation of a clergy already committed to pastoral practice and aware of its own limits, successes and failures in that practice. I would just like to present two simple conclusions:

1. The amount and intensity of Vincentian work for the formation of the clergy were poured into the ongoing formation of a clergy mature in years, rich in life experience, anxious to rediscover their faded pastoral ideals, but open to the grace of conversion and change which called it to retake the reins of a truly pastoral life.

2. That ongoing formation had very clear characteristics and dimensions in the human, Christian, spiritual, communal and pastoral aspects of priestly life; it took into account the full image of the priest and returned to the Church a clergy that was skilled in human values, fervent and grounded in the spiritual life, integrated into the presbyterial communion, and with a vision and a fruitful missionary commitment to pastoral ministry.

(JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M., translator)

^{29} Ibid., 638.
The Time of Ongoing Formation

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The Instruction, *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002), speaks about ongoing formation as a life's journey in its relationship with time (day, week, month, and year).¹

In this context, I want to reflect on the time for ongoing formation from two complementary perspectives:

a) Ongoing formation as a life-long journey;

b) Ongoing formation in its relationship with physical time.

### 1. The time of ongoing formation is a lifetime: the entire life in all its stages and periods

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, in defining formation as a *continuous process*, affirm that *the formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life.*²

The Instruction, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, points out the motive why ongoing formation must last one's entire life: "*If, in fact, consecrated life is in itself a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ, it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person, heart, mind, and strength (cf. Mt 22:37) reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity.*"³

Other Church documents have also insisted on ongoing formation as *lifelong journey*. The exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*,

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² C 81. Cf. C 77, "*Our formation, in a continuous process, should have as its purpose that the members, animated by the spirit of St. Vincent, become suitable to carry on the mission of the Congregation. They should therefore grow daily in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the center of our life and the rule of the Congregation.*" Also the Constitutions of The Daughters of Charity speak about formation as a life task, and assure that the sisters must be convinced of this continuous formation (C 58).

³ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 15.
states: "At no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness; just as there is no age at which a person has completely achieved maturity." 4 In specific reference to the ongoing formation of priests the exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis, states: "Permanent or ongoing formation, precisely because it is 'permanent,' should always be a part of the priest's life." 5

A process which lasts all life long, ongoing formation has specific characteristics in each one of the life stages.

1.1. Ongoing formation in the first years of vocation

We know that in the Congregation of the Mission initial formation ends with the incorporation of the confrere into a local community other than the seminary or the scholasticate. Brothers have made vows and their specific formation and priests have completed their ecclesiastical studies. All, brothers and priests, begin a ministry in a local community.

These first years of vocation lived completely in a local community can be the years best suited for the confreres (brothers or priests) to embark on specialized professional, pastoral, theological, spiritual and Vincentian studies. Both the Congregation and the confrere realize and agree on the importance of this preparation for a more effective service to the mission in following Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor.

Ongoing formation in the first years of vocation arises from a decision on the part of the Visitor and his council in dialogue with the confrere to value:

- Choosing a local community where the confrere will be placed. Besides the geographical setting where he will study, more importance should be given to the quality of the community life: human, pastoral, spiritual and Vincentian.
- The adequate personal accompaniment of the confrere either by the local superior or another confrere in the community with whom he will meet on a regular basis in a dialogue of faith and spiritual and apostolic reflection.
- Choosing studies suited to the specific needs of each confrere, keeping in mind his qualifications, the needs of

the province, the more urgent needs of service to the poor,
and the new forms of poverty.

Ongoing formation in these first years of vocation must include periodic meetings with other confreres who are at the same stage. This will require provincial or interprovincial planning: the teams responsible together with the Visitor; plans and programs; support systems, resources, etc.

In these meetings, the confreres (I resist referring to them as young confreres since their chronological age may not always coincide with the reality of the stage) can help each other immeasurably, sharing experiences and reflections, animating each other to live in faithful creativity the ideals which they embraced in the seminary, and even enjoying time for recreation and relaxation.

The gospel scene of sending the disciples out two by two (Lk 10:1) can shed some light on ongoing formation during this stage of their lives: the disciples depart with joy and hope to announce the Good News. They live intensively the sense of their mission, the joy of communion with the Lord, and the need to encounter him to share the fruits of their labor.

1.2. Ongoing formation in the crisis of “realism”

It is not easy to separate the above stage with this one which we call “the crisis of realism.” We could say that ongoing formation in the first years of vocation can be extended during six, eight, ten or 12 years of vocation, depending on the person and place and will end when the confrere assumes specific responsibilities in the community or ministry (for example, he is named superior, or director, etc.). The boundaries between one stage and the other are not so much chronological but existential.

This new stage of the life of the missionary, which can be extended approximately from ten years vocation to the time when he reaches middle age, is a period when he will take up greater responsibilities. Ministry assignments become more frequent, and ministry tasks are greater and more complex.

During this time the confrere may experience a sense of disappointment and the risk of routine in his ministry, either because confronting “reality” produces a dissatisfaction in his community and pastoral life, or because of the monotony of doing over and over again the same things without a clear future vision. The lack of tangible results and confronting the “harsh reality” may bring about certain debility and lack of motivation.

During this time ongoing formation needs to direct the missionary to:
- Learn to **find the essence** of his vocation and mission: The Only One necessary is Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, who has called and summoned him to prolong his mission in fraternal community.

- Cultivate a **unity of life** in such way that his ministry, in unity with Christ, and his community life mutually support and feed on each other.

- Revise his **original option** and his Vincentian vocational inspiration so that he is able to live a radical and total giving of himself without relying so much on immediate results.

- Recover the taste for the **relationship with** the One who is the Rule of his life, Christ, the Rule of the Mission.

- Develop an adequate **balance** between prayer, commitments, fraternity, rest, friendship, work, solitude, etc.

For ongoing formation during this stage, the province or the Congregation could offer meetings according to ministries or responsibilities (for example, missionaries who work as advisors of lay groups, or in formation or in parishes, etc.; for local superiors, for administrators, etc.). Besides the themes selected for these meetings, special attention should be given to the atmosphere so that those gathered may experience the opportunity to seek those things which are essential in this moment of their lives and recover the taste for silence, reflection and study in finding Christ, as if choosing him all over again.

The support of the local community, the proximity of the Visitor, and the implementation of necessary formation means, must be equally decisive.

The response of Peter to Jesus: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69), can serve as a motivating experience during this stage of ongoing formation.

### 1.3. Ongoing formation at middle age

For this stage of ongoing formation the boundaries of age do not appear exact. During this time the life of the missionary is characterized by intensive activity, and **leadership** in community, social and ecclesial activities. It is the time of great apostolic realizations. This period can be prolonged according to personal, cultural and environmental circumstances. It can also be suddenly interrupted because of unexpected illness.

The exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* points out the dangers which the priest can experiment during this time: "... can be tempted
to presume he can manage on his own, as if his own personal experience, which has seem trustworthy to that point, needs no contact with anything or anyone else. Often enough, the older priest has a sort of interior fatigue which is dangerous. It can be a sign of a resigned disillusionment in the face of difficulties and failures.\(^6\)

The exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, also points out other risks which can appear during this time: "The danger of a certain individualism, accompanied either by a fear of not being in line with the times, or by forms of inflexibility, self-centredness or diminished enthusiasm."\(^7\)

The presumption of not needing formation because one has lived and knows everything, the temptation of individualism, inflexibility or diminished enthusiasm, can provoke small or great affective compromises which may lead to accommodating behaviors, and even to living a "double life."

Ongoing formation which corresponds to this particular period of the life of the confrere must address:

- The sincere and impartial review of himself and the activity in which he is involved.
- The constant search for adequate means and motivations for the mission entrusted to him.
- The availability to respond to new calls of the poor.
- The cultivating of a positive and favorable attitude towards ongoing formation, and to other means that the community, the Congregation, and the Church may offer him.
- The purification of those personality features which distance him from his Vincentian vocation.
- The recuperation of the spiritual and missionary disposition without adopting bourgeois and worldly ways.
- The joyful experience of participation in the redemptive work of Christ to help the poor to walk from conditions less human to conditions more human.

To accomplish this, it will necessary that the confrere will set aside several consecutive months or one year, away from his habitual work, so that he may be able to examine his life from a distance, make the proper readjustments, update his vocational response, and dispose himself to assume for the rest of his life a serene and purified participation in the mission of Christ.

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\(^6\) PDV, 77.
\(^7\) VC, 70.
The question Jesus asked Peter three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (Jn 21:16) is the question which the confrere, striped of all ambiguity, would be able to answer once he has reached the grace of ongoing formation proper to this stage.

1.4. Ongoing formation at retirement age or illness

Not all missionaries experience illness at the same age. There are missionaries 70 and 80 years old who still have strength to work. Others have to abandon their direct participation in ministry much earlier. All of us must dispose ourselves for our definite encounter with the Father.

These diverse situations in which the missionary encounters himself are also stages of ongoing formation.

The gradual withdrawal from activity, sometimes caused by sickness or forced immobility, can be a very formative experience. Often a time of suffering, advanced age nonetheless offers to elderly consecrated persons the chance to be transformed by the Paschal experience, by being configured to the Crucified Christ who fulfils the Father’s will in all things and abandons himself into the Father’s hands.⁸

The ongoing formation of the confrere during this time must address:

- His participation, according to his means, in the mission of the community and the province.
- The animation of the community with serenity, life experience and vision of faith.
- The cultivation of the conviction that he can be a participant in the mission of the Congregation and the Church.
- The development of qualities for dialogue, personal meetings, and welcoming within the community for all those who draw close to it.
- The professional support adapted to diverse situations.

“When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (Jn 21:18). This announcement of Jesus to Peter can help the confrere to enter into those attitudes of ongoing formation proper to this stage.

⁸ VC, 70.
1.5. Ongoing formation in the different phases of each person

Speaking on ongoing formation in each of the stages of one's life we noted that is not easy to determine chronologically its duration. Beyond the life stages, the person, the concrete person who is the confrere, can experience critical situations due to external factors (assignments, change of ministry, being misunderstood) or personal factors (illness, crisis of faith, temptations, and relational problems).

These are phases which a person lives and which require a rethinking of ongoing formation.

The proximity of the superior or the Visitor, the quality of fraternal communion, the help of experts and professionals, and personalized accompaniment are means which can make the crisis an opportunity for growth and maturing, a real occasion for ongoing formation. "The trial itself will appear as a providential means of being formed by the Father's hands." ⁹

Not only periods of crisis and trials, but also those times of euphoria, optimism, recognition, and triumph, when lived and interpreted from the perspective of the following of Christ, will be other opportunities to center our lives and vitalize the faithfulness of our response.

Ongoing formation cannot be understood as a course or a series of meetings in determined moments of our lives, but it must be the permanent disposition to become more like Christ, in acquiring his very attitudes and dispositions, a task which must last our whole life. In the words of Vincent de Paul: "Remember, Father, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ." ¹⁰

2. The time of ongoing formation and its rhythms: each day, each week, each month, and each year

With specific characteristics in each stage of life, ongoing formation embraces all life, as we had just seen. Ongoing formation not only embraces all life, but it must adapt itself to the rhythms of life: days, weeks, months, years.¹¹

The Instruction, Starting Afresh from Christ, points out: People in ongoing formation take advantage of time, they don't submit to it. They

⁹ VC, 70.
¹¹ Based on A. CENCINI, La Formación Permanente, San Pablo, Madrid 2002.
accept it as a gift and wisely enter into the various rhythms of life itself (days, weeks, months, years) with wisdom, seeking the harmony between them and the rhythm, fixed by an immutable and eternal God which marks the days, centuries and times. In a very unique way consecrated persons learn to allow themselves to be moulded by the liturgical year in which the mysteries of the life of the Son of God are relived in order to start afresh from Christ and from his death and resurrection everyday of their lives. 

The goal of this process is that each day, each week, each month, each year, we conform ourselves to Jesus Christ, becoming more Christ-like.

What steps can we take in order to ensure that we become more like Christ? How should we live the rhythms of our own time so that they are a time of ongoing formation for growing in becoming more like Christ?

2.1. The daily rhythm of ongoing formation

Each day the missionary prays, gathers with his community in diverse situations, offers different services, welcomes people. Each of these actions can be lived as routine or as a response to God’s calling; and so, each of these actions can be a heavy burden or a growth experience in following Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor. The grace of each day, hidden in the ordinary, can transform each daily circumstance into a time of ongoing formation.

Each day the missionary needs to know how to apply a balanced discipline between work and rest, prayer, fraternity and mission. Fidelity to this discipline guarantees a healthy life for personal growth. On the contrary, losing this balance will result, sooner or later, in serious difficulties to make a time and space in his own life for growth in Christ.

2.2. The weekly rhythm of ongoing formation

Each week the missionary must set aside a day off, Sunday, or (if the ministry requires it) another day of the week. The Bible is explicit in claiming one day a week for the Lord, for rest, for charity.

In this way the confrere will show that the Lord is more important than his work, and will set aside necessary time for rest, reading, interpersonal relations, quiet prayer, more lively celebrations and that peace which makes his ministry fruitful and his fraternal love creative.

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"Starting Afresh from Christ," 15.
2.3. The monthly rhythm of ongoing formation

The Vincentian tradition offers a means which has given and can continue to give much fruit in the process of conforming oneself to Christ: the **monthly retreat**.

The monthly retreats give the missionary the opportunity to straighten up his life, distance himself from daily activities, and review (look again) each month his existence from the Lord's perspective. It is also a time to put interior and exterior order in his life, to live from within, to recover the spiritual and vocational tone of life.

If this monthly retreat is held with the community, it will offer it an opportunity to recognize community difficulties, a time for healing and reconciliation and communal animation.

2.4. The annual rhythm of ongoing formation

Contemplating and celebrating Christ's mysteries from the Paschal Mystery and toward the Paschal Mystery, the confrere tastes his own vocation and mission. He allows himself to be formed by the **liturgical year**, deepening his life in Christ, allowing himself to be questioned by him, whom he goes out to meet through his Word, and who invites him to grow "from age to age."

The **retreat**, which *we must faithfully make every year,*

puts us in a climate of truth, which helps us to concretize our Life Project for the year; a project which will be the instrument for growth in Christ and ongoing formation.

The contemplation of **Mary throughout the year**, particularly on her feasts, will put before our eyes she who: "More than all other believers, penetrated the meaning and lived out the teaching of the gospel."

2.5. The sustained rhythm of ongoing formation

Ongoing formation does not consist in an extraordinary effort which is realized on a few intensive days of activity, or in the heroic exercise of hours snatched for rest, or in a rush escape for annual gatherings. Ongoing formation is more like "a long-distance race" where it is more important to keep the pace and not let up in the sustained rhythm.

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13 C 47, 2.
14 Cf. C 49.
15 C 49, 1.
Vincent de Paul, from his own experience, gives us the key so that the rhythm of our ongoing formation will have the same rhythm as our lives, and so that our identification with Christ will be a process with sustained rhythm: "Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true model and the great invisible picture on which we must form all our actions." And he suggests the means to accomplish this: "Another thing to which we must give special attention is to feel always dependent on the conduct of the Son of God; that is to say, that when I have to do something I need to make this reflection: 'Is this that I do in conformity with the maxims of the Son of God?' If you believe so, say: 'Then, good, let us do it'; on the contrary, if it is not, say: 'I will not do it.' Besides, when you are to do a good work, tell the Son of God: 'Lord, if you were in my place, what would you do on this occasion? How would you instruct this people? How would you console this person who is sick of body and soul?"'

Vincentian mysticism of contemplation in action is surely the fullest fruit of this sustained rhythm of ongoing formation.

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(PRUDENCIO RODRIGUEZ, C.M., translator)

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18 Repetition of Prayer 1 August 1655, SV XI, 212; cf. also, XI, 130.
The Duties and the Ongoing Formation of the Formators

by Stanisław Wypych, C.M.
Province of Poland

Introduction

There does not exist any profession or occupation or work which does not demand a continuous perfecting of one's ability.¹ The necessity of a continuous development in our times finds its justification in the fast changes in social and cultural conditions and in the new acquisitions of the sciences, both profane and ecclesiastical, and of the history and spirituality of our Congregation. Ongoing formation consents to maintain the "youth" of the spirit which each and every single member should take care of in himself. Only he who keeps alive the desire to learn and to grow maintains this "youthfulness."²

Therefore nobody is allowed to renounce his own growth, be it human or religious. At no phase of our lives are we allowed to consider ourselves so secure and fervent that we can exclude from our attention guaranteeing perseverance in fidelity, as if there is an age where we can say that our human maturation is complete and fulfilled.³

¹ Cf. Pastores dabo vobis (PDV), 70; see other documents of the Church in which the need for ongoing formation is highlighted; decrees of Vatican II: Optatam totius (OT), Perfectae caritatis (PC), Presbyterorum ordinis (PO); also: Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis (RFIS), 1985, Potissimum Institutioni (PI), 1990, Directives pour la préparation des éducateurs de séminaires (DPE), 1993, the Apostolic Exhortation Vita consecrata (VC), 1996; also: "Ratio formationis pour le Séminaire Interne" (RFSI), in Vincentiana 27 (1983), 224-226, 245-262; "Ratio formationis vincentianae pour le Grand Séminaire de la Congrégation de la Mission" (RFGS), in Vincentiana 32 (1988), 211-238.

² Cf. PDV, 79.

³ Cf. VC, 69. In our Constitutions we read: "The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life" (C 81; cf. S 42).
The Christian matures in the aspiration toward the full knowledge of the Son of God, toward the state of the perfect human being, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature. St. Paul admonishes Timothy: “Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you, which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the elders laid their hands on you... Keep on doing these things, because if you do, you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”

Since the future of the evangelization and the renewal of community life depends on ongoing formation, it is necessary that the persons concerned are offered the opportunity for continuous growth in fidelity to the charism and the mission of their own institute. If the so-called indications are valid for all those who have answered the call of Christ, then these concern first of all the formators and teachers. The educators and teachers must be aware that the formation of the students depends much on their way of thinking and acting, that this formation is tied to their mature and strong personality as seen under the human and evangelical profile and, in our case, also from the viewpoint of the charism of our Founder. The duties entrusted to the formators are indications of the need of a continuous formation.

1. The duties of the formators

The growth of a particular person in maturity and sanctity of life requires a suitable atmosphere in the seminary and a determined attitude on the part of the persons involved in the formative process of the personality of the student and in the formation of his conscience. The community responsible for the formation consists of the rector, director or spiritual director, superiors and teachers. In our Constitutions it is written: “Moderators and students should form a true educative community by being open to mutual understanding and trust and by maintaining a constant and active contact with each other.” Under the guidance of the director they form a strict unity of spirit and action; among them and the students they form a kind of family bond which nourishes in the students the joy of their own vocation. The unity of the educators not only helps the educational program to be put into practice properly, but also and above all it

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4 Ephesians 4:13.
5 I Timothy 4:14-16.
6 Cf. VC, 65.
7 Cf. OT, 5.
8 Cf. PDV, 66.
9 C 95, § 1.
10 Cf. OT, 5.
The Duties and the Ongoing Formation of the Formators

offers candidates for the priesthood a significant example and a practical introduction to that ecclesial communion which is a fundamental value of Christian living and of the pastoral ministry. This indication regarding priestly formation is also valid and assumes a particular value for the formative process of the students of the Congregation. In the community they experience Vincentian life. Since the charism is not transmitted theoretically, but rather will be sought after, discovered and lived within the community, that community becomes its epiphany. The educators united around the director must aspire towards the same goal, especially if it is a matter of establishing an educational program and of maintaining the harmony of its realization. The director, however, is not the only one responsible for the success of formation, but the whole formation team.

The formator is for the candidate to community the representative of the Church and of the Congregation; he represents visibly Christ the evangelizer of the poor. Christ calls those he wants to follow him in conformity with the charism of the Founder and indicates concrete persons for the formation of his followers. The formator’s love for the Church and for the Congregation should have a very high degree of zeal and profundity in order to be able to share it also with the students. Being a representative of the Church and of the Congregation, the educator presents himself to the candidate as a father and a friend. He is father because of his prestige, experience and care for the integral formation of the young men; he is friend because of his intimacy, benevolence and constant availability. As father, he gives advice, demands and forgives. In the role of friend he accompanies the student, works together with him and helps him in the process of self-formation. In the student’s life the role of master and guide develops too. It is obvious that Christ, the evangelizer of the poor and the Rule of the Congregation, is the sole master. The principal task of the formator consists in accompanying the student to meet Christ for a dialogue with him about his life, his vocation and the quality of his mission. The spiritual aid given to the student during his formation is expressed mostly through prayer, spiritual sacrifices and personal witnessing of life. A profound knowledge of each student, of his character, his ability, his attachment and his behavior in various situations, is the important task of the formators. It is necessary to know the student continuously and personally.

11 Cf. PDV, 66.
13 Cf. C 79.
16 Cf. SV XII, 130.
through discussions and an attentive observation of his conduct in the concrete situations of everyday life. It is also necessary to know the environment from which the candidate comes. The formators' common activities must make the student's education process become an ever more profound self-formation.\textsuperscript{15} It must be noted that self-formation is based on three rules: knowing oneself, accepting oneself and transcending oneself. The student will be helped in this process, but at the same time it is necessary to awaken his conviction that self-formation does not mean having the monopoly to direct himself. The candidate for the Congregation confirms his liberty in the best way when he permits the Holy Spirit to form him, as well as when he accepts willingly the mediators of whom the Spirit makes use. The efforts of the formators are really and fully effective only when the candidate collaborates with them sincerely and with conviction.\textsuperscript{16} Undoubtedly it is very important that, when educators fulfill their duties, there be mutual confidence between formators and students. A good guide knows how to foresee the obstacles, warn about them and remove them as far as possible. In his attitude he must keep in mind the rule: \textit{suaviter in foro, fortiter in re}. Even the toughest demands will be realized if made with tact.

It would be useful to consider the duties of the particular formators. The \textbf{rector/director} is responsible for the direction of the community and also for the global formation of the students, for the conditions most suited for formation, for collaboration with the moderators, for relations with the educators and with the employees of the seminary, with the students and other persons who participate in the process of formation. Within the circle of educators the director is considered as the "sign of unity" \textit{(signum unitatis)}; he takes care that, under his direction the teachers and moderators, united in a community of spirit and action, are able to construct together with the students a friendly relationship. Even if some of these duties can be entrusted to collaborators, it is the director who supervises their realization. The director takes care that the students' formation conforms to the rules defined by the Church and to the directives approved by the Congregation. He is also responsible to his superiors for making an overall evaluation of the candidates' dispositions at the time of their admission into the seminary, as well as during the different phases of their education: before making vows and before priestly ordination. In our \textit{Ratio formationis}\textsuperscript{17} we read: \textit{The director has the main task in the formation community, in order to}

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. PDV, 69.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} RFSI, IV, 2.
animate and to coordinate the activity and the objectives, as a
guarantee of the fulfillment of the Internal Seminary's end.

The director fulfills particularly delicate tasks regarding the
students. In conformity with each candidate's age and development
he examines accurately the righteousness of his intentions, his
freedom of choice, his spiritual, moral and intellectual suitability,
physical condition and psychological aptness, but also his
preparation to endure a hard life and to exercise activities of the
Congregation. In the sphere of the director's duties is included also
collaboration with the communities which have an impact on the
perseverance and development of the candidate's vocation. In
particular this is about his family, his parish of origin and also the
associations and youth movements where the student received his
fundamental Christian formation and with which he remains in
contact.

It is written in our Statutes that: "In houses of formation, care
should be given to provide suitable confreres who will function as
confessors and spiritual directors, as the need demands." In the area
of the spiritual director's service it is necessary to distinguish two
levels: the communitarian and the individual. His activity with regard
to the community is expressed in taking care of the animation
relative to the spirituality of all students by means of retreats and
days of recollection, of conferences on the spiritual life, and of the
liturgy and prayer in common. On the individual level the spiritual
director fulfills his duties with regard to certain students, who choose
him as spiritual director during the formation of their conscience,
the discernment of their vocation and the development of their
spiritual life.

The confessors take part in the formation of the interior life of
the students. They must be easily accessible and must come regularly
to the seminary at the times fixed to serve the students in the
Sacrament of Reconciliation. The tasks of the confessors regard the
sacramental dimension.

In conformity with the directives of the Church, the teachers
must consider themselves as real and proper educators: "Experience
teaches that they often have a greater influence on the development of
the priest's personality than other educators." It is not sufficient to
have an academic degree in the chosen subject, but a spiritual,
didactical, pedagogical formation is necessary and a sense of integral
formation. The teacher educates with his own character, with what
he teaches and in the way he teaches. A theologian, although he uses

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18 S 50.
19 Cf. PDV, 67.
the scientific preparation of his subject, realizes his task on behalf of the Church, of the Congregation and he takes part together with the moderators in formation. He must avoid a subjective and individual standpoint. It is up to the teachers to work together in harmony with other formators, in order to secure an adequate level of teaching and to improve their own qualifications and professional ability.

2. The personality of the formator

Nobody is born as a formator, but he must have suitable dispositions. It is obvious that the effect of the formation depends to a large extent on the accurate choice of educators. St. Vincent was convinced that the formation of priests is an *ars artium, regimen animarum* (St. Gregory the Great) and that this task is the most noble. The most difficult part is to choose for this work the best and well prepared confreres. Confreres are chosen for this service who are distinguished for a certain experience of life, human maturity, balanced spirit, ability to listen and dialogue, positive opinion, but at the same time critical of modern culture, secure in their own vocation, with knowledge and love of the charism. The formator must first of all be a man of prayer, with a strong supernatural sense, a profound spiritual life, exemplary behavior and suitable and varied experience in pastoral work.

The formator is characterized by an adequate critical distance with regard to himself; he is willing to recognize and correct the demands he makes on himself and others, taking into account fatigue and human limitations. A mature educator does not draw others to his own person.

3. The preparation of formators

It is very important not only to choose the right formators but also to prepare them and help them toward a constant development of their professional capability in such a way that they may better

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21 *The happiness of Christianity depends on priests.... Oh, how we must try to make them all good, because that is our job, and priesthood is something very held up!... O my Savior! how much the poor missionaries must give themselves to you in order to contribute to forming good ecclesiastics, because it is the most difficult work, the highest, the more important for the salvation of souls and for the advent of Christianity!* (SV XI, 7-8).


fulfill the work entrusted to them. "The task of formation of candidates for the priesthood requires not only a certain special preparation of those to whom this work is entrusted, one that is professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological, but also a spirit of communion and of cooperating together to carry out the program, so that the unity of the pastoral action of the seminary is always maintained under the leadership of the rector." Already in the decree Optatam totius it is written that the educators of the seminary must be carefully prepared in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training. In the Code of Canon Law we find the advice to continue for our entire life spiritual, doctrinal, and practical formation. In our Constitutions we read: "Since the formation of students depends primarily on suitable educators, moderators and teachers should be prepared with solid doctrine, suitable pastoral experience, and special training."

In the exhortation Pastores dabo vobis the suitable preparation of formators is mentioned in first place, a preparation of a professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological type, but also the need to protect the spirit of community, collaboration and agreement in carrying out the program. The preparation regards an introductory period, if possible, before taking on the functions and also ongoing formation.

4. The aspects of ongoing formation

Ongoing formation consists in continuing the integral process of ongoing maturation, in deepening each dimension of formation. We deal here with the goal itself, the aspects and the means: human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, communitarian and Vincentian. The knowledge of the world of young people is very important. Deepening of formation must first deal with its human dimension, which constitutes necessarily the foundation. In this sphere there are characteristics which are particularly important like interior freedom, affective maturity, ability to keep in contact with people,

24 Cf. PDV, 66.
25 Cf. DPE, 2.
26 Canon 661.
27 C 94. In our Ratio formationis we read: "The role of the Director and of the Formators demands preparation. The Visitor must see to it that the confreres are prepared for this function" (RFSI, V, 2).
28 Cf. PDV, 66.
29 Cf. P. LAGHI, op. cit.
30 Cf. PC, 18.
31 LAGHI, op. cit., pp. 251-257.
32 Cf. PDV, 43.
serenity, sensitivity to the suffering of others, love for truth and uniformity between words and actions. Active pedagogy and the perfecting of knowing how to work in groups are necessary.

In **spiritual formation** we deal with living faith in a profound way. The purpose of the Congregation orients and unites our formation: "This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members... make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR I, 3), in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (CR XII, 13). This means uniting oneself with God, seeking Christ in faithful meditation on the Word of God, in the Eucharist, in prayer, in the poor and in the sick, in the needy from both a material and moral point of view.

The third aspect consists of **intellectual formation**. This regards, among others, the analysis of the documents of the Church, in particular those on social and religious conditions, on the exhortation to organize works of mercy, on the reasons for poverty, but also documents which give answers to the new forms of poverty. It is necessary to keep oneself updated with regard to important new publications in the biblical field, theology, pastoral studies, pedagogy and Vincentian studies. In the latter case it is necessary to study the Rules, the Constitutions, the Statutes, documents of the Congregation and of the Vincentian Family.

It is also necessary to deepen **pastoral experience** within the social reality, which is undergoing rapid change, of the Church and the Congregation. Here too, the purpose of the Congregation orients our formation: they "work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned; help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor." Here is treated direct contact with the poor, letting oneself be evangelized by them, getting to know the works of the Vincentian Family, studying the causes of poverty and, together with international organizations, seeking means to find solutions.

**Formation to community.** The dynamics of community life constitute a further field of formation. In the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* we read: "Common life, fashioned on the model of the early Church..., and given new force by the teaching of the Gospel, the sacred liturgy and especially the Eucharist, should continue to be lived in

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33 Cf. C 1.
34 St. Vincent says: "It is necessary then, Father, that you empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ" (SV XI, 343).
35 Cf. C 1, 1°.
36 Cf. PDV, 45.
37 Ibid.
38 C 1, 2° and 3°.
We are not surprised, therefore, that the Church wishes that the persons who live in community be true experts of communion and [to] practise the spirituality of communion as "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design." The people of God desire fraternal community to be the sign and testimony of the community of goods and fraternal feelings, of the community of prayer and common mission. And so, formators must continuously and tirelessly carry out the divine-human work of constructing the fraternal community; because this allows one to acquire the experience of life and of joy in living together. The community is built up on the base of prayer in common, liturgy and, above all, the Eucharist. It is also necessary to emphasize the need to develop useful characteristics in all human relations like good education, gentleness, sincerity, calmness, delicateness and the capability of putting all in common. The formator must know how to celebrate together with other persons, find time for recreation together; he must protect his own serenity, peace and joy.

A very important aspect is Vincentian formation. The relationship with the Founder and with the charism transmitted by him, deepened and developed from generation to generation, constitutes a fundamental factor. The charism of the Founder signifies an "experience of the Spirit," transmitted to [his] disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. The director of formation has the obligation not only to know and respect healthy traditions, spirituality, the charism and mission of the Congregation, but also to provide that, in the programs of formation, study and prayerful reflection, the person of the Founder and his charism find a place. The identity understood in such a way allows one to proceed with various creative activities, which can respond to the signs of the times emerging in today's world and make the charism more alive and up-to-date.

A dominating element of the charism is formed by a profound eagerness of the soul to configure itself to Christ the evangelizer of the poor, the Rule of the Congregation, the healthy traditions of the Congregation, the spirit of the Rule, of the Constitutions and of the Statutes.

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39 PC, 15.
40 Cf. VC, 46.
41 Cf. VC, 47.
42 Mutuae Relationes, 11.
43 Cf. VC, 37.
44 Cf. VC, 36.
5. The modality of the ongoing formation of formators

The task of the formation of our confreres cannot be realized without union with the universal and local Church. The need exists to create apt structures of ongoing formation of the educators and to exercise a certain alertness. Within the sphere of the obligations of bishops and superiors is included the creation of projects and possibilities for ongoing formation. They are the ones who have to organize short or long periods to favor this. This obligation, however, is put above all on the shoulders of each educator. The formation must last for the whole life and each moment (we may say) is a favorable moment.

It is important to define the plan of ongoing formation which regards the whole life. On the institutional level this will constitute a part of a plan of integral formation. There exist various modalities for carrying out the ongoing formation for formators. Under the sponsorship of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Association of Rectors of Clerical Colleges has organized for some years monthly summer courses for the formation of formators. It is useful also to mention two others of universal scope: a) the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ by means of the Queen of the Apostles Pontifical University organizes every year a monthly course for formators of seminaries, in which persons coming from around the world take part; b) the Congregation, in collaboration with Institutes of Spirituality and Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, has created at that university an interdisciplinary course for formators of students, for young priests and for consecrated persons. The course takes a year and at the end a certificate is given. Interested persons have the possibility of continuing the study, completing the program's material, writing a thesis (two years of study) and at the end obtaining the diploma in spiritual theology with a specialization in priestly formation. In various countries and regions the bishops' conferences and those of major superiors organize sessions on the ongoing formation of formators. An example can be given from the organization of formation for formators in Poland. For the past few years, a special school for formators operates under the sponsorship of the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy. It has prepared two cycles of formation. First of all, it organized a two-year cycle for the formation of spiritual directors (1996-1997) and then another two-year cycle for the formation of other formators (1998-1999). After this experience a two-year cycle was created at the Formation Centre administered by the Society of the Divine Savior. It is a two-year school which takes

45 Cf. VC, 66.
46 Cf. C 15, 81; S 42.
care of the integral formation for all those responsible for formation. The planning council, which is made up of representatives of the episcopacy, of institutes of consecrated life and of members of the above-mentioned Society, has prepared a two-year cycle. The program is adapted to the needs of the formators' preparation and to their ongoing formation.

An other element which is useful for ongoing formation concerns the organization of congresses, diocesan courses, study centers, theological and pastoral libraries, cycles of conferences, retreats, meetings for reflection and verification on the pastoral way.47

In this place it is necessary to mention the noteworthy initiatives of our Superiors General which consist in the organization of months of formation for the confreres engaged in the formation of our students like, for example, that of 1987.48 For this purpose, the sessions of the International Formation Center in Paris and those in various countries and regions also serve; likewise, the reflections on the part of individual formation communities.

Formation is not carried out only through exceptional occasions or extraordinary activities. The formator learns, grows and matures also by means of the ordinary tasks which belong to his ministry. Ongoing formation is like respiration which accompanies man throughout his entire life in its extraordinary and ordinary events, i.e. every day. Respiration must be regular; when it is disturbed, anxiety follows.

It is necessary to emphasize that the ongoing formation is a work of the Holy Spirit and not only of human effort. However, this demands that one opens oneself and that there is an effort on the part of man. Formation is carried out and deepened throughout an entire life through a serious and systematic study and the observation of the development of science and culture. The basic modality of ongoing formation is made up of personal prayer. An important instrument for the formation of the missionary regards the practice of the five virtues which are like the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for souls.49 The simplicity and humility of the educator lead to the conviction that the intellectual possibilities, knowledge and wisdom which he possesses are gifts from God and must serve to deepen and transmit the truth to others. Respect for the Gospel, whose purpose is union with Christ in a chaste, poor and obedient life constitutes another important modality. This practice is useful

47 Cf. PDV, 79.
48 For the conferences given, see Vincentiana 31 (1987), n. 4, 5 and 6.
49 CR II, 14; C 7.
for the maturing of the personality and of liberty of spirit and also for the purification of the heart and strengthening of love. A further modality and instrument for carrying out formation concerns asceticism. Within the area of the modalities relative to asceticism we must mention self-discipline which helps to develop the personality in a harmonious way. We should not forget reconciliation, examination of conscience and spiritual direction. Conversion is helped by a frequent behavior check during the examination of conscience. Spiritual direction responds in a generous, trustful and modest way to the initiatives of the Holy Spirit within us. We must also emphasize attention to maintaining the formators’ psychophysical condition. An important modality of formation is also constituted by the moderate and programmed use of mass media.

Conclusion

We are convinced of the need for ongoing formation for all, but in particular way for formators. There are not yet well-outlined courses by which they could journey securely to the determined goal. That is why conscience is not the only thing needed. One must also have spiritual transparency tied to a concrete attitude which transcends a passive aptitude of the interested person: his full and active commitment, his being open to the Holy Spirit, to beauty and truth, and the ability to be in contact with people and with the surrounding reality in a moderate way. Nevertheless, there are always new incentives in order that the task of the formation of formators of seminaries be initiated and developed by all those to whom the Church and the Congregation entrusts one of the most important and delicate responsibilities. Since, however, as we mentioned above, the “youthfulness of the spirit,” the level of basic formation and also the renewal of our life and activity will depend on the ongoing formation of the formators, it is worth promoting it.

(Victor Bieler, C.M., translator)
Ongoing Formation as Creative Fidelity

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

1. Introduction

Ongoing formation and fidelity to the Vincentian charism make up "the pillars" of the spiritual and apostolic renewal of the Congregation.

Our Constitutions speak to this regard: "... In addition, members should afford spiritual assistance to priests both in the work of their ongoing formation and in promoting their pastoral zeal. They should work to encourage in them the desire of fulfilling the Church's option for the poor" (C 15); "The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life" (C 81).

Ongoing formation helps us to know how to respond to the demands of our mission and the challenges of the present world. God uses us as apt and effective ministers in order to respond to the rapid and profound changes of our world that place upon us an obligation to reflect upon that reality and that of our own lives in order to see what things we ought to modify within ourselves and to modify our own concepts, attitudes, and methods. This critical approach will allow us to raise the level of our own vocation and see it as a gift from God. It does not deal only with theoretic, academic, or practical perfection in a way that might seem like intellectual or professional recycling, but rather as something much more profound and extensive, because ongoing formation is based in the deepest recesses of our spirit and desires to adapt itself as much as possible and in every possible way to present circumstances and to anticipate, to the extent that it be possible, the future. Ongoing formation implies a constant dedication and effort for spiritual, intellectual, practical, and professional renewal so that it permit us to understand and respond to the new

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1 In the documents of the Congregation and the Church, the expressions "ongoing formation" and "permanent formation" are used almost with the same significance. Others make a distinction which could be useful: they prefer to use the expression "ongoing formation" to refer to formation as a incessant and progressive process of personal and apostolic integration, and "permanent formation" when one speaks of intensive formation periods that take place occasionally in life and outside one's own community, as would be sabbatical time, recycling, courses, workshops, and the participation in various meetings.
realities of the ever-changing world, and transmit the word of God to men and women of our time; it deals with an ongoing process of "continual conversion" that is most coherent with our Vincentian identity.

2. Ongoing formation as a requirement of our creative fidelity

From the time of Vatican Council II we have received the call for new ways of priestly and religious formation. The concept of formation in general and the notion of ongoing formation have evolved according to the various formational experiences that the very same Council had begun. This evolution and understanding of formation have been reflected in the Congregation, for example in the documents concerning initial formation.

The letter of the 1992 General Assembly that was directed to the confreres affirms the following: "Community renewal itself requires an integral formation, initial and ongoing, of its members. The principle of this formation is: 'Following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor.' Therefore: we commit ourselves to an energetic program of integral formation in which each confrere will be responsible and accountable for his own formation for the mission; we also commit ourselves to preparing with care true animators of Vincentian communities.'

Formation never ends and takes into account all dimensions and stages of the person, and gives priority to life in the Spirit as an aspect that structures and gives meaning to others. In the "Little

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2 Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC), 18 and *Optatam Totius* (OT), 22. The concept of education and formation in the civil area has evolved from a scholastic and professional model, which reduced education or formation predominantly to the professional and technical field and which would be realized once in a lifetime, to another model that considers all aspects of the person and his/her overall development. In the ecclesial area, we have passed from a formation concept, which also insisted fundamentally on the academic and which was given in the first years of the seminary or religious life, to a formation model centered on the whole person and which is developed throughout one's entire life; cf. PC, 18. Since Vatican II, the various documents on formation for the priesthood, religious and consecrated life insist on and develop the integral, global, and ongoing concept of formation.


4 This formation concept is clearly expressed in the various documents of the Church on formation to the consecrated life; cf. *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life As Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, 46; OT, 22; *Basic Norms for the Formation of Priests, 100; Vita Consecrata (VC), 65.*
Company” we find two distinct phases: initial formation and permanent or ongoing formation. This is not a remedial measure due to problems in initial formation, neither is it its complement, perfection or adaptation. On the contrary, primary formation ought to be ordered toward ongoing formation; as a preparation for a life of ongoing formation, albeit, the former possesses a relative autonomy and its own requirements since it is a stage of testing and a period of initiation into religious life. Initial formation is the first stage of a life of ongoing formation, and ought to create the taste for, the intellectual curiosity toward, and the acquisition of the attitudes and skills that might favor apostolic discernment, qualification and constant adaptation to the continuous changes, and growth implied by them.

Human life is by its very nature continuous and changing and, when these elements are harmonized, they guarantee maturity and development of the person. Ongoing formation enables persons to live change in continuity and continuity amidst changes. This vital dynamic is expressed by the word “fidelity” that implies a constant adherence to perennial values and their appropriation and incarnation in the diverse circumstances and stages of life. On this account one grows and matures, human life is built up, as a process of qualitative growth, as a perfection that supposes inventiveness and creativity. Ongoing formation, understood in this way, helps integrate creativity with fidelity, especially since our vocation requires dynamic growth and a faithful response to the Lord’s calls discerned in the signs of the times. The quality of our apostolic service depends on this. It refers to a faithfulness and dynamic that must reproduce with courage, the creativity and the sanctity of the founders and foundresses as a response to the signs of the times that arise in today’s world, to carry out what St. Vincent would do today, in faithfulness to the Spirit in order to respond to the apostolic demands of our time.

3. The basis and the integral aspects of ongoing formation
a) The basis of ongoing formation

The need for ongoing formation is a requirement of the religious and apostolic vocation itself; we need to revive continually the gift we have received, to maintain it always alive and keep fresh the

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5 In the Apostolic Exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV), the Pope affirms that ongoing formation is the natural and necessary continuation of the process of building the personality which began in initial formation... ongoing formation is prepared for by initial formation, which motivates and assures the conditions for its realization cf. 71.

6 The Pope speaks of creative and dynamic fidelity in VC, 37.
permanent newness of God's gift. The following of Christ implies a dynamism that needs to be nourished and renewed constantly and his call to follow him is repeated in each moment. This asks of us a constant effort in order to clothe ourselves progressively in his dispositions toward the Father, albeit since we are sinners we can never expect to achieve fully the gestation of that new man that we experience within ourselves, nor to possess in all the circumstances of our lives the sentiments of Christ. From this perspective, ongoing formation implies living in a continuous process of conversion and spiritual renewal.

On the other hand, our mission is a living grace that we receive and live in unrecorded moments; we have to preserve it, deepen it, and appropriate it constantly in harmony with the Church. This requires of us a continual spiritual and apostolic renewal. We will not have anything to offer the poor, society and to dialogue with others if we are not imbued with fidelity to the Vincentian charism, not for the purpose of mechanical repetition, but rather in order to recreate it in the here and now, for the service of the poor, the Church and the world.

b) Aspects of ongoing formation

What areas or aspects ought to be covered and undertaken by ongoing formation? Ongoing formation is global in scope: Formation “should involve the whole person... so that... every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God.... For formation to be complete, it must include every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects.” Reducing ongoing formation only to the intellectual dimension by a type of recycling, sabbatical years, courses and participation in diverse meetings, is to return to a concept of formation already surpassed, as has been mentioned previously. Intellectual renewal is formative in the measure in which we also mature and grow in personal integration as persons and as Vincentian missionaries, and we go on to integrate into the body of the Congregation, in a progressive manner.

Given that the subject of ongoing formation is the person with all his dimensions in each stage of life, the end or the terminus of

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7 Cf. 2 Tm 1:6; Potissimum Institutioni (PI), 67; PDV, 7.
8 Cf. VC, 65 and 69. With regard to priest, the Pope affirms that the proper foundation and original motivation for ongoing formation is contained in the dynamism of the sacrament of holy orders (PDV, 70).
9 VC, 65.
formation is the totality of the human person, and includes five fundamental aspects:

a) Life in the Spirit holds the primacy, in which apostolic discernment occupies an essential place. Vincent would say to be "interior men." Ongoing formation is achieved principally through the constant evaluation and reflection on one's own apostolate seen by the light of faith and with the help of the apostolic community. Thus, ongoing formation is situated within a context of mission and presents it as an integral, essential dimension of our apostolic and missionary life that ought to be evaluated and discerned through the Word of God and the contemplation of the world, in a prayerful dialogue with the Lord. This is part of a process of continuous discernment. If the discernment takes place in common, it is much better.

b) The human and fraternal dimension supposes a constant effort in order to grow in our personal and communal maturity and integration. It is indispensable to continue growing in self-knowledge and in the capacity to reveal ourselves and to let ourselves be known, by self-esteem, in empathy and sympathy with those with whom we live and share the mission. Special attention should be given to understanding the deepest desires and the growth in the capacity of self-disclosure and thus to openness to the grace to identify oneself ever more with the sentiments of Christ. Hence communal and apostolic solidarity will grow, as well as the sense of belonging to the Congregation.

c) The third aspect is the apostolic and missionary dimension that, in practice, requires updating in the apostolic and missionary objectives and methods, in faithfulness to our charism, our mission and the proper style of the Vincentian missionary.

d) The intellectual dimension, based upon a solid theological formation needed for personal and apostolic discernment, asks of us a continual updating in the various ministries and works in which are concretized the actual mission of the Congregation and the concrete mission that each one has received.

e) The last dimension is that of our Vincentian charism. This requires study, reflection, and internalization of all the riches of the Vincentian heritage that we possess. It presupposes that we have the know-how to make a synthesis in our life, to apply

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10 Cf. VC, 71. Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata, in proposing these five dimensions of ongoing formation, continues and concretizes the orientations already contained in some Church documents on the formation of religious, especially in Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (PI) and Fraternal Life in Community (VFC).
Vincentian spirituality and teaching to our daily lives as sons of St. Vincent, to renew constantly our baptismal "consecration" as expressed in the living out of our vows, particularly that of "stability." This requires a deepening of the lived Vincentian charism through inculturation, as an integral and essential element of our ongoing formation. We are Vincentians with our feet planted firmly in a context in which "we concretize" the Vincentian charism.

4. Applications and those responsible for ongoing formation

a) **The community as the privileged place for ongoing formation**

A privileged place for ongoing formation is the apostolic community as expressed in some documents of the Church. In it the Vincentian finds the necessary support and motivation. Apostolic works, the provinces, the Visitors' Conferences also ought to initiate and offer subject matter for ongoing formation, since this is a requirement for all Vincentian missionaries as for the entire Congregation. Let us ask ourselves if our communities sincerely want to motivate and maintain ongoing formation. Is it not activism that identifies all kinds of activity and work with the apostolic mission, the lack of a sense of belonging, isolation, individualism and prevailing subjectivism in many of our communities with major obstacles for ongoing formation, which is not a merely individual and temporary activity?

We are community for the mission. Many times we have experienced fruitfulness as regards the mission, in the measure that we feel part of a living community, of a province with vision, of a Congregation that takes up the challenges that the new forms of poverty present. In these (community, province, and Congregation), her members find spaces for fraternal dialogue, for reflection and prayer. A community, a province and a Congregation in which, by way of personal and spiritual communication, the sense of co-responsibility for one another and mutual help in order to discover the way in which we ought to proceed grow. Thus a community is converted in a place of formation par excellence through the deepening and appropriation of our charism and mission, where "... broad guidelines are implemented concretely,

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11 "Religious community is, for everyone, the place and the natural setting of the process of growth, where all become co-responsible for the growth of others" VFC, 43; cf. also VC, 67 and PI, 27.

12 Cf. VFC, 43.

13 The Union of Superiors General, in its document for the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life, affirms that a new model of apostolic...
through patient and persevering daily efforts... also... where, day by day, members help one another to respond as consecrated persons, bearing a common charism, to the needs of the least and to the challenges of the new society."\(^{14}\)

It is a requirement of our mission and an integral part of it to create an "apostolic community," since the community is of itself missionary, announcement and proclamation of God by means of brotherly love and the witness of communion, and because through it the universal mission of the Congregation is concretized and its realization is made possible. We must convince ourselves that our mission and its apostolic priorities, as they were proposed in the last General Assembly and, little by little, as they are concretized on the provincial level, will be vain efforts if the local community does not translate them into a community plan. The plan is not limited to noting some minimal communal activities and the community's schedule and calendar, but rather encourages a process of approbation of the values of being Vincentian, of communal missionary discernment and assuring space for ongoing formation.

b) **Those responsible for ongoing formation**

Through a number of General Assemblies, the Congregation of the Mission has manifested its concern for offering and assuring ongoing formation for the missionaries. It has promoted two organisms on the congregational level: the International Center for Formation in Paris\(^ {15}\) and the International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies.\(^ {16}\)

At the provincial level the Visitor is responsible for ongoing formation; hence the affirmation of our Statues: "Individual provinces, through the help of their formation commission, should...

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\(^{14}\) VFC, 43.


\(^{16}\) Cf. "International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies (S.I.E.V.)," in *Vincentiana* 2 (March-April 2000), 139-141.
organize and promote both common and personal continuing formation" (S 42).

The local superior is responsible for promoting ongoing formation in the community and among the individual members, especially through the example of his dedication to his own formation. He needs to promote the drafting, execution and evaluation of the community plan, which needs to include ongoing formation as an essential element.

One must also take into account that prior to the role of the superior, the individual Vincentian missionary is responsible for his own ongoing formation and that a community plan or a program of the provincial commission is useless if the individual himself is not convinced of the need for it. The future of many ministries will depend, possibly, not so much on the number of missionaries, but rather on the level of expertise and the apostolic vision to confront the challenges of a changing culture and on the participation of the Vincentian laity in our works, services, and apostolates. It will be necessary that each Vincentian missionary, in his personal life plan, define his priorities, among which ongoing formation must hold a important place.

The Superior General and his council also play a decisive role, since they are responsible for applying the conclusions, commitments and decisions, which the General Assembly makes about ongoing formation. In this way when canonical visitations take place, they

17 The Constitutions say that "Each community should work at developing a community plan, according to the Constitutions, Statutes, and the provincial norms" (C 27). This plan will keep present the ordering of our life and work, the holding of council meetings, and the periodic evaluation of our life and activity. This constitutional arrangement is complemented by the Statute which says: "The community plan, which each community draws up for itself as far as possible at the beginning of its work year, should include all of the following: apostolic activity, prayer, the use of goods, Christian witness where we work, ongoing formation, times for groups reflection, necessary time for relaxation and study, and an order of day. All these should be revised periodically" (S 16).

18 "In a certain sense, it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for ongoing formation. Truly each priest has the duty, rooted in the sacrament of holy orders, to be faithful to the gift God has given him and to respond to the call for daily conversion which comes with the gift itself. The regulations and norms established by Church authority, as also the example given by other priests, are not enough to make permanent formation attractive unless the individual priest is personally convinced of its need and is determined to make use of the opportunities, times and forms in which it comes" (PDV, 79).

ought to ask each missionary how does ongoing formation take place, and verify that the community and the province supports and favors it.

It may prove beneficial that, at the level of the Visitors’ Conferences, one person or a commission be delegated for matters concerning ongoing formation. There exist organisms in the Congregation that can promote, more decidedly, ongoing formation in the various continents, regions or countries. Without a doubt in the various provinces there exists a strong commitment that favors missionary formation of its members, but perhaps it may be necessary to encourage more interprovincial collaboration in this area.

5. Resources and stages of ongoing formation

a) Resources for Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation implies an effort to maximize coherence with the demands of our present mission that will permit us to do better that which we already do and to be more creative and bold apostolically. For this, the suitable means of our way of proceeding are the most adequate for living in creative fidelity.

Ongoing formation also implies an assiduous dedication to reading and to the deepening of our Vincentian charism and to pastoral-theological and biblical reflection. This requires setting aside

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30 Asian-Pacific Conference of Visitors (APVC); European Conference of Visitors of the Mission (CEVIM); Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI); Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar (COVIAM) and the National Conference of Visitors of the United States (NCV).

31 Commission of Vincentian Studies of Colombia (CEVCO); Vincentian Animation Center (CAVI) in Peru; Vincentian Animation and Missionary Center (CAVIM) in Chile; Vincentian Studies Institute (VSI) in the United States; Central European Vincentian Studies Group (MEGVIS); Vincentian Animation Group (GAV) in Italy; Vincentian Studies Week in Salamanca (Spain); Research and Vincentian Animation Group (GRAV) in France; International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies (SIEV), International Formation Center (CIF) in Paris. We recommend the article of ÉMERIC AMYOT D’INVILLIE, “The Structure of Vincentian Studies and Animation,” in Vincentiana 2 (March-April 2000), 128-138.

32 We could say that among the simple and accessible means for our creative fidelity we have: the daily Eucharist, personal and community prayer, the sacrament of reconciliation, spiritual direction, monthly retreats, study meetings, the apostolate, the mission, etc. All these impel us toward a growing creativity in fidelity, and should have a privileged place in the personal and community plan. We ask ourselves if, really, we use, as we should, these simple and ordinary means of ongoing formation proper to our community life and what we must do to make better use of them.
time for qualification and professional and intellectual “aggiornamento.” Personal study and shared reflection in community ought to be the integrating factor of our life as Vincentian missionaries. At the time of a ministerial change, it is desirable that updating occur in preparation for the newly assigned ministry. This is a proper time for renewal and acquisition of skills. It is an investment that gives returns in a better service of the poor. In this respect, the Practical Guide for the Visitor says: “Without in any way trying to lesson creativity in the task of ongoing formation, a number of possibilities are cited here: professional courses, organized formation days for the province, study weeks at different levels, the preparation of a provincial library to facilitate pastoral and Vincentian studies, acquiring magazines and promoting their reading, and in general, to have available for all the members of the province all the means necessary for their ongoing formation.”

There are, without a doubt, diverse activities, events and programs in ongoing formation on the provincial, regional, and congregational levels that constitute very adequate means for ongoing formation. If, in truth, we desire to offer “skilled” service to the poor, then we need to invest in ongoing formation.

b) Stages in ongoing formation

Formation refers to a life-long process that takes into account the various “life cycles” by means of which a person continues to grow and work. “There is a youthfulness of spirit which lasts through time; it arises from the fact that at every stage of life a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfill, a particular way of being, of serving and of loving.” Ongoing formation ought to take into consideration these stages along with the opportunities and challenges they present and adapt itself to them.

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34 VC, 70.

The Pope distinguishes the following phases or life cycles: 1) the first years of full insertion in apostolic activity; 2) the successive phase, which can present the risk of tiredness, routine and the frustration of arriving at few results; 3) the mature age, with the danger of individualism, inflexibility, self-centeredness and the fear of not being in line with the times; 4) advanced age, characterized by the decline in physical and mental strength and the gradual withdrawal from activity; and 5) the moment of uniting oneself with the supreme hour of the Lord’s passion. The Pope also speaks of moments of crisis, when fidelity is more difficulty, and affirms the need for a superior and the qualified help of a brother. These moments of trial “will appear as a providential means of being formed by the Father’s hands, and as a struggle which is not only psychological, carried out by the ‘I’ in relation to itself and its weaknesses, but also religious, touched each day by the presence of God and the power of the Cross!” cf. VC 70.
The period that makes up the first years after ordination or initial formation, more or less, is dealt with in various provinces.

In the period called "the age of maturity" that tends to include the time between 45 and 65 years of age, it is possible that, together with personal growth, there is a strong tendency toward individualism, accompanied by occasional fears of not being in line with the times and the feeling of a certain routine, tiredness and frustration for not having achieved the goals imagined during youth. For that reason, ongoing formation must focus on a deeper spiritual experience that permits recovering one's personal history in God's light and seeing the present as a moment of grace, with the hope that, in later years, all will be possible with the strength that comes from God. It is also most probable that lived community and apostolic struggles will awaken the need for a greater deepening and acquiring of the values of our way of life for a "second conversion" and a new apostolic impetus, together with the purification of certain aspects of the personality, and thus enable one to offer oneself to God more genuinely and with greater generosity. It is an appropriate time to interrupt one's work and take a sabbatical that includes academic and pastoral updating, as a preparation for a concrete assignment in the years ahead. When the time of retirement draws near, another period of human and spiritual formation are called for in order to assume with joy and greater meaning this time of declining activity. Some new apostolic experiences can also help to identify a ministry that is amenable to this age.

The care of the elderly and infirm confreres holds a relevant part in the life of the Congregation. Besides the affection and gratitude that we feel and express for our brothers who have spent themselves in the service of the Lord in the person of the poor, and in the Congregation in the Church, we say to them too that the evening and night of life have a mission and for that reason it is necessary to live this stage in a state of ongoing formation. These confreres are a blessing for our houses and Provinces. It is desirable that elderly Vincentian missionaries remain in an apostolic community while they require no extraordinary help, and that they have a work adequate to their personal situation, in order to experience in this stage of life what the psalmist says, speaking of the just man

26 Cf. VC, 70.
27 "Sick, infirm, and aging confreres should have a special place in our hearts, since their presence is a blessing on our houses. Consequently, besides medical care and personal attention, we should provide for them the means to share in our daily lives and in our apostolate" (C 26, § 1).
and comparing him with a cedar of Lebanon: "They shall bear fruit even in old age, always vigorous and sturdy, as they proclaim: 'The Lord is just....'".28

6. Conclusion

This reflection concludes with a synthesis that gathers together the most practical aspects for carrying out ongoing formation. All ought to assume responsibility for it with sincerity and generosity, since the quality of our apostolate, the existence of many of our apostolic works and the future of our service to the Church depend in great measure on our ongoing formation. Each Vincentian missionary ought to ask himself in what ways he is using his God-given talents and how he is preparing himself to be an apt instrument in God's hands. The response ought to be clearly expressed in his personal plan of life that he has to discern with his local superior. In the same way, each community has to draft a plan that includes ongoing formation as an essential component, approved by the provincial. One ought to use better the means offered by our Congregation, such as, spiritual direction, sacramental life and prayer, communal apostolic discernment supported by a constant renewal and by means of apostolic and pastoral training through assiduous study and personal reflection, sabbatical times that are well prepared and organized, and participation in various meetings on the provincial, regional and congregational levels. These meetings ought always to include elements of study and reflection about some theme that prepares for a better and fuller apostolic commitment.

Initial formation of our own members has to prepare the Vincentian missionary in order to live always the dynamic of formation. It is necessary to guarantee an integral, ongoing formation in creative fidelity to the mission that God has confided to the "little" Company.29

(GREGORY J. SEMENIUK, C.M., translator)

28 Psalm 92:15-16. In the "third age" it is still possible to organize some meetings of spiritual support adapted to the rhythm of human and apostolic life, which could help the elderly and infirm remain active in the measure of their strength and support them in their difficulties and accompany them so as not to fall into the temptation of lack of interest, apathy and isolation.

29 We are invited to renew ongoing formation in the Congregation. We have begun a small survey to understand our reality in this respect. When the time comes, we will let you know the results, and it will stimulate us to renew it.
“MARTYR OF CHARITY”

Blessed Sr. Rosalie (1786-1856)

by Jean-Pierre Renouard, C.M.
Province of Toulouse

“A martyr of Charity!” The phrase comes from St. Vincent. He spoke one day to the Daughters of Charity of Sr. Marie-Joseph from Étampes, one of the first sisters, and said of her: “This good daughter may be called a martyr of charity. Do you think that the only martyrs are those who spill their blood for the faith? For example, those daughters who went to find the queen, that is a martyrdom; for, while they did not die, they were exposed to the danger of death, and they did that willingly for the love of God; like so many good Daughters who have given their lives in the service of the poor, that is a martyrdom.”

Sr Rosalie was of that kind. By her life, her works, her spirituality, she embodied this vision painted by the saint of charity; you could say that she was the perfect realisation of what he taught: “Whoever gives her life for God may be deemed a martyr. And it is certain that your lives

1 Coste X, 510.
are shortened by the work which you do; and, as such, you are martyrs."  
Even apart from the imperfect clichés which we have of her, a trained eye sees on her face the marks which indicate tenacity and strength: the set lips and the piercing eyes. How could one not think of the phrase of St. Luke: *Jesus resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem*? This was an audacious woman who offered herself willingly. She is right at the heart of the "Vincentian 'do more.'"

Who is she?  
What did she do?  
What is the relevance of her message?  
These are the questions we must consider.

I. A soul that was out of the ordinary

Jeanne-Marie Rendu was born on 9 November 1786 in the village of Confort, in the Jura. She was the eldest of four daughters of whom one, Jeanne-Françoise, died young. The parents, owners of mountain land and of simple life, enjoyed a certain ease and were held in esteem in the area. They were a family of farmers living in a splendid house dominating the Jura foothills and the Valserine valley. Jeanne-Marie was baptised on the day of her birth in the parochial church of Lancrans. Her godfather by proxy was Jacques Emery, a friend of the family and a future Superior General of the Sulpicians in Paris. Her mother was a model of faith and charity; she raised her children after the premature death of M. Rendu in 1796. The child was seen to be lively, believing, good and mischievous, teasing, even capricious. She loved the poor.

The French Revolution, with the years of the Terror, was felt even in the little village of Confort. An uncle was shot in Gex. The priests, who refused to take the Constitutional Oath, had to hide themselves or emigrate to escape prison and the scaffold. Many were guillotined. The Rendu house welcomed those who fled. Once, it was the Bishop of Geneva, Msgr. Marie-Joseph Paget, who came seeking asylum. He served as the gardener and was known as Pierre. Jeanne-Marie was intrigued, since it seemed to her that this worker was not treated like the others. And so it was that she discovered that this gardener celebrated Mass. She did not dare to speak of what she had discovered. But one day, after an argument with one of her sisters, when her mother was about to punish her, she cried out: "If you punish me, I will tell everyone that Pierre is not Pierre." Mme. Rendu held back, conscious of the danger. If her daughter were to talk, the house would

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1 Coste IX, 460.  
be commandeered, the family and the hiding priests arrested and shot. I like what Sr. Elisabeth Charpy, who has presented the blessed on different occasions, has said on this subject: *With a tenderness touched with firmness, Mme. Rendu explained the situation to her little seven-year-old daughter. Though young, Jeanne-Marie was to share the family secrets. She would learn what she could and could not say. Her personality was forged during these rough years. Her Christian formation, received in the course of this difficult time, was solid. Jeanne-Marie was to remember her First Communion received at night during a Mass celebrated in the cellar. In April 1793, the Bishop was able to return to Piedmont, to the house of the Vincentians in Turin. One was already 'part of the family.'*

When the Terror was over, and minds began to calm down little by little, life resumed its normal course. Mme. Rendu, mindful of the education of her eldest daughter, sent her to the former Ursuline Sisters in Gex, on the recommendation of Sr. Suzanne, superior of the Daughters of Charity of the hospital there and a friend of Mme. Rendu. Jeanne-Marie remained in this boarding school for one year; then was moved to a boarding school for young ladies set up by the clergy of Carouge, near Geneva. She developed intellectually, without ever being an intellectual.

But she had one desire only, to join the hospital where the Daughters of Charity of Gex took care of the sick. An idea arose; to spend six months with the sisters in order to take care of the sick. It was a first turning point and then an event is going to hasten her decision. Jeanne-Marie learned that Armande Jacquinot, a young girl from Lancrans, a village near Confort, was about to leave for Paris to become a Daughter of Charity. She now had only one desire: to join her there. Jeanne-Marie jumped at the occasion and begged her mother to let her leave. Even the habit of the sisters attracted her! Having questioned the parish priest, Dean of Gex, Mme. Rendu, happy but very moved at the vocation of her daughter, agreed to her request. She left her home and her countryside of Gex forever, with no particular state of mind, happy to be already on her way.

Presented by her godfather, M. Emery, the friend of her grandfather, who lived as a layman on the Rue St. Jacques, she met with Mother Deleau, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity; on 25 May 1802, she entered the novitiate of the Motherhouse, still at Rue du Vieux Colombier in Paris.* She was about to turn 16.

The restoration of the sisters to their full rights let to a tightening of the Rule. A lot was expected of each person; in face of the dispersion

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*11 Rue du Vieux Colombier, is today a station of the Paris Fire Brigade, near the church of St. Sulpice. The chapel had just been opened and the body of St. Louise had been brought there on 4 May of that year.
of the Priests of the Mission, M. Emery helped in the resurgence. He was Providence himself for his goddaughter: "I regarded him as an oracle," she wrote. And he taught her this phrase, which has become memorable: *My child, a priest or a Sister of Charity must be like a milestone at the corner of the street on which all who pass can rest themselves and lay down the burdens that they carry.*

The strong determination of the young novice to answer the demands of her new life and the lack of physical exercise took its toll on her health. She was extremely sensitive, physically and morally. In this she was like the foundress of her congregation, Louise de Marillac. The doctor they consulted prescribed a change of air. Her godfather, M. Emery, suggested that they allow her some activity among the poor. They would be the ones to restore her balance. Her generous nature would find strength there; she would be "completely given to God in the service of the Poor." So, Jeanne-Marie was sent to the house of the Daughters of Charity in the Rue des Francs Bourgeois. There she would have, as superior, an intelligent and understanding woman, Sr. Marie-Madeleine Tardy. As for herself, she received the name of Sr. Rosalie.

From then on, she was going to live and work in a neighbourhood, marked by extreme poverty. One needs to reread the work of Claude Dinnat which describes the famous Mouffetard neighbourhood. There were workers who were deprived of the freedom to work, at everyone's beck and call; unemployment was rife, insecurity total. It was the Paris of hunger. It was commonly considered that the population was savage, barbarous, nomadic, "a people horrible to look at; haggard, jaundiced, weather-beaten." To that could be added the cabarets, sources of drunkenness and fights, prostitution, theft and robbery. A high-risk neighbourhood, we would say today. Sr. Rosalie went to live in these backwaters, which is now the fifth arrondissement of Paris.

She began by teaching, even if she herself had only rudimentary knowledge! She was able to teach the children of the poor to read and write and also visit the poor in their homes. This was her paradise. However, a trial awaited her: she was asked to help a priest who was considered mad, indeed, possessed. As soon as he approached her, she fled! It was a healthy reflex; almost at the same time, her obedience

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5 She experienced palpitations and always had a slight fever but never surrendered her involvement with the poor. That is what saved her.

6 *LOUIS CHEVALIER, Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses, Paris, 1958.*

7 The territory reserved to Blessed Rosalie was, at that time, the 46th neighbourhood of Paris, the second of the 12th arrondissement (Faubourg St. Médard or St. Marcel or St. Marceau). The name, Mouffetard neighbourhood, comes from the old Roman road which goes towards Italy, via Fontainebleau and Lyons.
Blessed Sr. Rosalie (1786-1856)

was tested. The Sister Assistant called her to the Motherhouse; she stayed there ten days, happy and devoted, but suddenly she was sent back whence she came by the Superioress General.

Dressed in a black cape — the habit had not yet been restored — young Rosalie, with emotion and profound joy, surrounded by the sisters of her community, committed herself for the first time by vows to the service of God and of the poor in 1807 at the age of 21. Witnesses were to speak of what seemed to emanate from her: fervour, courage, energy, dedication, which were all in conformity with her own nature, now transformed by grace. Sr. Rosalie was to work in the Mouffetard neighbourhood until her death in 1856, 54 years later.

II. The period of work

She carried on regardless of the whims of the Emperor with regard to the accompaniment of the Daughters of Charity by the Superior General of the Priests of the Mission, M. Hanon. For her part, she took care, most of all, that the poor were served; these were "our lords and masters." The rest was upheavals of history which was, in any case, heading for collapse. Of the Napoleonic era, she knew the downside especially.

After a brief interim with Sr. Tardy, she became superior while the community moved in the neighbourhood to the rue de l'Épee de Bois in 1817. The premises were bigger.

She had found her true vocation, to be a sister of the streets! She excelled at it and became a model.

She surrounded herself with devoted and efficient collaborators. She gathered together money, a great deal of money, to be used in the service of the poor.

She set up a real social services office which provided food, clothes and money. Her first collaborators were the Ladies of Charity.

The sick became her first priority; for example, in 1848, in a report sent to M. Étienne, Bursar of the Vincentians, she noted 475 visits to the sick. It was a sacred duty for her and her immediate companions.

She responded, tirelessly, to all the miseries of that time, and they were many. Misery had become a common place in the Paris of Louis-Philippe. The history of France records the revolts of 1830, of 1848.... She was above all the conflicts, a pacifying element. The terrible cholera epidemic of 1832, which ravaged those neighbourhoods, made her one of the most representative embodiments of Christian charity. Her famous "parlour" allowed her to exercise a real "Ministry of Charity." Those who came grew daily more numerous, the priest in search of advice rubbed shoulders with the vagabond looking for help, the bishop there met the tramp, the Marshal of France came across
the fruit and vegetable merchant. Charles X, Queen Amélie, General Cavaignac, Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie frequented her office. Many important people supported her undertakings, like Lamennais with whom she had frequent discussions. Later still, she no longer managed to dialogue with him; a mystery of souls which cross each other's path.

She did not criticize anyone's influence. What did it matter, as long as the poor benefited. In this, she was the exact copy of the life and works of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

To come to the aid of all those who suffered, and of the different forms of poverty, sister opened a dispensary, a pharmacy, a school (221 students and two sisters as teachers), an orphanage, a day nursery, a workshop for young girls and poor women, a youth club for young working women, and a home for the indigent elderly. Soon, an entire network of charitable works was combatting a misery which was constantly renewing itself.

She even came to the aid of several congregations: the Society of St. François Régis, poor priests, the Daughters of Our Lady of Loreto, the Augustinian Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary, young people seeking a vocation or direction, and many clerics who came to find her to listen to her advice, notably several sick, dismissed or despairing priests....

By the time of the revolution of July 1830, when she was 44, her outreach was immense. But she wanted to do yet more. King Charles X was headstrong and launched his famously unpopular ordinances which set off three days of rioting. An antireligious wave arose and some congregations were specifically aimed at: the Vincentians, the Missionaries de France, the Mission Étrangères and the Spiritans (Holy Ghost Fathers). One could say that the renown of the Daughters of Charity and their impact on society saved them all. Sr. Rosalie's house did not suffer from this murderous flame but it received the wounded and the dying, a real "ambulance"! It is said of Blessed Rosalie: "Sister Rosalie did not leave the barricades." She was a white cornette in the middle of the fighting. She hid the revolutionaries; she took care of the wounded from both sides. But the years which followed the three glorious days were bad years; cholera appeared and took 18,000 dead, of whom 12,733 died in the month of April 1832. Even Casimir Perier, President of the Council, died in this epidemic. Especially in the years 1842 and 1846, the devotion and the risks taken by our blessed and her sisters fired the imagination. She was seen herself gathering the abandoned bodies in the streets. Furthermore, her fame quickly went beyond her own neighbourhood and reached the whole capital and even the provinces.

Under the July Monarchy, things got worse. The condition of the workers worsened; but new ideas were rising, the embryos of Catholic social action....
It was to be in the Mouffetard neighbourhood that she was to meet with a team of young men, including Emmanuel Bailly and Frederick Ozanam, two of the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. They hoped to dedicate themselves to helping the poor, the workers and the sick. She would be for them a teacher who was most effective since she, a daughter of “Monsieur Vincent,” was filled with the spirit of the founder. She indicated what families to visit, giving them, at least at the beginning, some money and good bread, offering them, without preaching or exhortation, practical and concrete advice. The influence of this sister was determinative in the development of the spiritual, charitable and social vocation of this newborn little Society of St. Vincent de Paul. This is not the place to go into the whole development but we can say, with the French National President of the Society, Jean Cherville, that she was, truly, the co-foundress: “It was Sr. Rosalie, and no one else, who gave to the intellectual, to the thinker, to the man of prayer, Frederick, the practical dimension which he lacked.... In this sense then, yes, Blessed Rosalie Rendu has the right to the title of Co-Foundress of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.”

For the moment, she founded the day nursery St. Marcel, following an idea thrown out by a certain Marbeau, in order to take care of the new-borns of the workingwomen of the area. Today, it is clear that, for her time, this was a major innovation. And she remained working on all fronts.

For example, the Superior of Bon Sauveur at Caen sent her numerous persons to help. She herself sent sick people to Caen: 115 letters were addressed to this woman. They concern priests, “lost” religious, people lacking work. She knew every file, every case and indicated both treatment and the cost of lodging for them. Exactitude and organisation were her mistresses and queens. She never allowed herself to be overwhelmed by the enormous task. She knew how to surround herself with ever more numerous devoted and efficient co-workers. Gifts flowed in for the rich could not resist this persuasive woman.

She was now approaching 50 and her health changed, giving her constant colds and fevers which hampered her work. Sometimes exhausted, she never gave in. This woman was made of iron.

Then, 1848 erupted and the proclamation of the Republic overthrew the July monarchy. “Paris is a volcano,” Rosalie noted. Enthusiasm was all and one thought of a velvet revolution since there seemed to be such consensus between the Church and the State but one soon became disenchanted. On 15 May, it all collapsed and it was the end of a republic built on fraternity. On 22 June, the national workshops, considered a school of fanaticism and sedition, were

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suppressed. The attack on the barricades by the forces of order was horrific, notably at the famous barricade of St. Antoine.

The cost was heavy: a thousand dead among the victors, several thousand among the insurgents and 11,000 deported or imprisoned. The height of the horror was the death of Msgr. Affre, struck by a bullet on the barricade of St. Antoine on 25 May. Sr. Rosalie was doing everything for everyone, once again. To those who berated her for her actions, she replied: "I serve God."

The most significant episode is represented by an engraving which is like "an image of Épinal"; she stops the revolutionaries who are seeking to kill an officer of the Civil Guard at her house: "We do not kill here." On bended knees, she wins grace for the man. And her home becomes a place of succour for the insurgents and the wounded; obviously she is always on the side of the weak, in the manner of St. Vincent.

She was even to resist General Cavaignac who would become President of the Council after the riots. And she was present, powerless but firm in condemning the method, at the departure of the insurgents (almost 4,000 of them) for Algeria and the Marquises Islands, an action blessed, alas, by the clergy. Order reigned but injustice remained: "Silence the poor," Lamennais stated. The year 1848 ended with the election, on 10 December, of the President of the Republic, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. The Second Republic had only two years to live.

True to form, Sr. Rosalie stayed at her post and fought again against cholera. It ravaged all around. After such events, she needed to tend to the orphans and take charge of the house at the orphanage on the Rue Pascal, opened by Mme. Jules Mallet and transferred to Ménilmontant; there were 79 children there. She helped too in the setting up of youth clubs (both for boys and girls) with the cooperation

9 At the Motherhouse of the sisters, coffins followed each other as many as three at a time; 52 Daughters of Charity died, while all the sisters of the Rue de l'Épee survived, bar one and she was the only one who did not have contact with the sick!
of the newborn Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Brothers of Christian Schools. For girls who could not pursue their studies, she created workshops. Apart from the day nurseries, of which we have already spoken, she set up old people’s homes, retirement homes before the term became popular. M. Dinnat seems to sum it all up in this pithy description: *There was nothing which existed in the area of charity, or of popular catechesis, of which this humble Daughter of Charity was not either the initiator or a much sought-after and ardent collaborator.*

So we see what she had done with her community of eight or 12 sisters and the support of 42 sisters, passing trainees, whose names we know, since many postulants were confided to her. The years passed. Napoleon III decided in 1852 to give her the Légion d’Honneur; she was ready to refuse this personal honour but M. Étienne, Superior General of the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, obliged her to accept it.

We are now in 1854. Her health changed. She had to rein in her activities. She was practically blind, due to a cataract which would seem benign today. Operations were undertaken, but in vain. On 4 February, she was gripped by the fierce cold; the doctor diagnosed pleurisy... several hours of suffering followed and, at six in the evening, she received the Last Rites. The following day, 7 February, she passed away in her sleep.

Consternation was widespread. The entire neighbourhood came to the glowing chapel and the press announced it in headlines. The funeral took place on 9 February. An immense crowd thronged, emotional, recollected, as though paralysed, following the cross carried through the streets of Paris, what a symbol! as far as the Montparnasse Cemetery. Only one Vincentian followed the cortege.... There is a lot for us to consider in this official ostracism.... Her body was placed in the sisters’ plot and some months later, in the face of fruitless searches by the public, they erected a tomb near the principal entrance; it is always visited and decked in flowers. Like God, the people know by instinct! On this absolutely simple grave, surmounted by a large cross, are engraved the words: “To Sr. Rosalie, from her grateful friends, the rich and the poor.”

Always outside time, the Church takes her own time. The diocesan process lasted from 20 January until 10 February 1953. The Roman process opened on 24 November 1953 and on 9 November 2003, John Paul II proclaimed Sr Rosalie blessed.

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11 News of this event can be found in the November 2003 issue of *Nuntia*, on the occasion of the beatification (editor’s note).
III. A message for our time

What does she teach us today? A great deal. I will summarize in some lessons that which each of you may extend in your own meditation.

1. Firstly, the relevance of the dedicated life. One will only succeed in life to the degree that one is open to others. To live for the poorest is the summit of Christian and Vincentian life. She embraces the teaching of her master, Vincent de Paul: “Affective love must become effective love, which is the exercise of the works of charity, the service of the poor undertaken with joy, courage, constancy and love.” She loved to carry “the burden of the poor,” calling them by name, loving them for themselves and Christ Jesus. She knew, without any theorising, that in them hid the Christ who is always suffering and always worthy of love and respect. She sends us back to this vision which brings our true blessing, as Abbé Pierre, who is only taking up her message when he urges us to get off our couches and sets before us this evangelical call: “Maybe we can surrender some of our comfort in order to make a place for those who have no comfort at all. It does not mean that we will lose our own, but will make it more worthy.” She was “totally given to the service of the poor,” even to excess and in that she is an icon of Jesus Christ, living love “to the very end.”

2. This woman — and it is interesting today to insist on this noun: “this woman” — also teaches us to help others to take responsibility. With her involvement with the poor in the Mouffetard neighbourhood, it was a whole system that was put in place. Rich, poor, intellectuals, lowly people, women, men, everyone was pressed into service. The poor are the masters of all and oblige one another to equality. She also teaches us to work in a network. We know today that the most effective actions are those which are collective in nature. Associations prove this. By allowing the young in particular to gather together in order to give a meaning to their faith by the foundation of the Society of

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12 Coste IX, 593.

13 A new challenge on the 50th anniversary of the Challenge of Winter '54.
Blessed Sr. Rosalie (1786-1856) 189

St. Vincent de Paul, Sr. Rosalie becomes a witness and a leader for our times. And, towering above all is respect. Dignity precedes help. To the sisters in her community and to the young students from the Sorbonne who came to help her, she constantly explained: "Remember that the poor person is more sensitive to proper treatment than help. One of the major means of helping him is the consideration one gives him. Even if you have something with which to reproach him, studiously avoid all hurtful and cutting words."

3. She transmits a prophetic witness. Rosalie lived in a world of death and violence and misery. But she consistently shared in the joys and sufferings of her time. She lived out what John Paul II, in his document on consecrated life, said: "In our world, where it often seems that the signs of God's presence have been lost from sight, a convincing prophetic witness on the part of consecrated persons is increasingly necessary.... Prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from consistency between proclamation and life."

4. Rosalie calls us to be inventive. It is possibly in this regard that she most resembles St. Vincent and St. Louise. These two saints, faithful to events and to the needs of the poor, always responded in ways which were pertinent to the needs of their times; and so to did the sister of the Mouffetard neighbourhood. She invented, originated, created, concretised; as soon as she saw a need, she came up with an appropriate response, ready to shake up, even annoy, officials and superiors. She recognised only the needs of the poor and she knew that "charity is above all rules." In this, she is deeply Vincentian. Who could forget M. Vincent paying, by an exile of six months, for the truths he told to the Cardinal Prime Minister, or the thanks he was given by the Council of Conscience, or even his wrangles with the clergy of Paris? True charity is always disturbing and unsettling. The poor stop honest people from dozing off!

5. Who could forget that Sr. Rosalie was a person of prayer and that she sends us to our knees in contemplation of Christ? As a true Daughter of Charity, she immersed herself daily in prayer and willingly went to in the chapel, either for the community exercises or for daily Mass. She knew M. Vincent's "leave God for God" but if an emergency presented itself, she hastened to say "Let us begin our prayer!" Many of the sisters spoke of her doggedness in prayer and, especially, of her teaching. She, who was also Sister Servant, and who had not had much formal training, well knew how to "draw out the lesson" and "encourage others to virtue." And she set humility, charity and simplicity above all. She loved to say that you had to be Christian before you were a Daughter of Charity. Both in this and in community life, she was an excellent formator. She calls us to a renewal of our...

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14 John Paul II, Vita Consecrata, 85.
community life. It is important to serve, but we must do so together, as a cell of the Church, in order to please God whom we contemplate in his chosen friends, the poor!

Charity was her battleground. She suffered and was martyred for it. She calls us to what is best in our vocation: laity, priests, those living consecrated lives, we are all called to imitate her. Every martyr is a prophet and every prophet draws us towards the heights. Sr. Rosalie invites us to excel in following Christ the Servant, raised up in glory!

If I might conclude with some words of Sr. Elisabeth Charpy, who has written some wonderfully life-enhancing words on her:

The great charity of Sr. Rosalie, which was recognised by all, found its source, at one and the same time, in her faith in Christ incarnate and in the richness of his humanity. Her meetings with all classes of society, allowed many people to discover the reality of misery and poverty and the limitations of "traditional charity." Sr. Rosalie thus helped bring about the birth of Catholic social action which would denounce the conditions of the working classes as a new form of slavery and the reduction of the worker to the level of a machine. Every social action is rooted in an evangelical mysticism.

Here we see the very essence of her message for today: our Vincentian action can never be anything other than evangelical.

Short Bibliography


Special thanks are due to M. Dinnat from whom this text has borrowed greatly. A larger choice of books is to be found at the end of his work.

(EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)
GÉRARD CARROLL

Un portrait du prêtre
Les retraites de 10 jours pour les ordinands
Preface by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Published by Pierre Téqui, Paris, France, 2004, 347 pages

This work "constitutes the first volume of three manuscripts that date from the 17th century and includes the morning and evening conferences given during The Ten-Day Retreats. Preached for the first time by St. Vincent and two doctors of the Sorbonne for the Diocese of Beauvais in 1628, these conferences were rewritten by St. Vincent, with the help of Jean-Jacques Olier, François Perocchel, Antoine Godeau and Nicolas Pavillon. These Ten-Day Retreats have played a considerable role in the history of the Church in France, notably in the establishment of seminaries, and have contributed, thanks to the impulse of the Council of Trent, in restoring the image of the priest, which has remained down to our days. Thanks to the immense work of Fr. Gerard Carroll, an Irish priest, these texts appear for the first time in the history of the Church" (taken from the back cover of the book).

NELIO PEREIRA PITA, C.M.

El seguimiento de Jesús en San Vicente de Paúl
Published by CEME, Salamanca, Spain, 2004, 174 pages

The subject of the following of Jesus has been interpreted and lived out in different ways. Thousands of men and women, in a given moment of history, have responded to Jesus' invitation and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have made current this following of Jesus. In this book — which is a partial publication of a thesis for a Degree in Spiritual Theology presented at the Pontifical Comillas University in Madrid — the author attempts to respond to the
following questions: How did St. Vincent respond to the call of Jesus? How did he experience it? and How did he propose it for the men of his time? In the first chapter, he analyzes “following” in the New Testament and in the history of spirituality. In the second, in a diachronic perspective, he studies the existential and spiritual itinerary of Vincent de Paul with a view to characterizing the different stages in his process of following Jesus. Finally, in the last chapter, the entire process of following Jesus according to St. Vincent de Paul is presented in a more systematic form: What Christ is to be followed? What steps are to be taken? What is, in short, in the perspective of Vincent de Paul, the attitude to life that the follower must assume? As the adviser of the thesis, Luis González-Carbajal, emphasizes in the presentation of the book, the subject is “thought-provoking,” but still more “deed-provoking.”

VINCENT DE PAUL

Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity

Volume 9

Published by New City Press, Hyde Park, New York, USA, 2005, 562 pages

Volume 9, the first of two volumes of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of the Charity has been published! As it says in the introduction: In these pages we see the complete picture of Saint Vincent of Paul.... His language is warm and lively, simple and conversational, convincing and shrewd, instructive and practical.... These talks were the vehicle that the founder used for the group formation of the first sisters in the spirit and the virtues of “true” Daughters of the Charity. Vincent encouraged the participation of the sisters through the use of questions and answers, an innovative method for the 17th century and a way to assure that they understood that which was presented to them: “Sister, you who are in the back, please tell us your thoughts.” Even after almost 400 years, the prudence and wisdom of Vincent, as found in these conferences and in the Conferences to the Congregation of the Mission enrich and delight the reader of 21st century.

Volumes 1-8 are available for US $39.00 each, plus shipping. Volume 9 (Conferences, Daughters of the Charity), is available for US $39.00, plus shipping. Volumes 13a/b Documents (collection) are available for US $69.95, plus shipping. All books are distributed by: Vincentian Translation Project: 333 South Seton Avenue; Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727; USA. Telephone: (1) 301 447-3121 Extension 3545. Fax: (1) 301 447-7079 E-mail: mpoole@doc.org
MISEVI

Nuevos horizontes para los laicos. MISEVI
Published by La Milagrosa, Madrid, Spain, 2004, 197 pages

This book is a collection of the principal talks and the Final Document from the First International Meeting of MISEVI (Lay Vincentian Missionaries), which was held in Mexico City from 31 July to 3 August 2003. The text also includes other related articles with materials such as a missionary formation plan, a model for national statutes and some guidelines for a missionary agreement when lay persons are sent on mission. In the preface of this book, Fr. Maloney states that this publication “contains much valuable, fundamental information about MISEVI. I trust that it will be especially helpful to lay Vincentians throughout the world as they attempt to nourish and concretize their missionary vocation.” The publisher, La Milagrosa, with the collaboration, as in the case of the present edition, of the Vincentian Family Office in Rome, recently published similar material for the AMM (Association of the Miraculous Medal) and intends to publish anything comparable relating to the other Associations of the Vincentian Family.

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