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creative fidelity to the mission
assemblée générale  asamblea general  general assembly
CMPARIS'10
350th anniversary of the death of St. Vincent de Paul

41st General Assembly
of the Congregation of the Mission

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA
Explanation of the Logo

The proposed logo for the General Assembly is based on the circle, a basic geometric figure, filled with great symbolic value from time immemorial: time, life, creation, evolution, heaven, the future, the heavenly Jerusalem.... It is concepts such as these, among others, that the circle can represent graphically.

The "circle" is traversed by a cross which gives it its "orientation": in this way it symbolises the world, the four cardinal points, history.... It is in this world that the missioners, attentive to the signs of the times, reveals the presence of the Lord in every aspect of society and seeks, with creativity and fidelity to the Word of God, to build into every human being the call of the Father to live according to the Spirit.

Each differently coloured small circle represents the missioners of the Congregation who, in every corner of the world respond to the Gospel with courage and joy. Each circle also represents the many cultures, the diverse societies, the different countries, the histories, the issues into which the missioner places himself in order to respond to the challenges which confront him.

The cross, which orders the circle, is a cross of light recalling that the Lord is the Way, the Truth and the Life... the Lord to whom each missioner has given his "yes" and continues to work for a more just and united world.

The symbol is also meant to be a tribute to France, the country which hosts this General Assembly. The rose windows of the Gothic cathedrals, above the west portal, remind pilgrims, visitors and believers that life does not stop and that God's desire is that man should live and have life in abundance.

The logo does not pretend to be exhaustive in its interpretation. It is possible that, alone, the Crucifix of Christ, without any other picture, can transmit design and choice which the Congregation of Mission made to remain always attentive to the signs of time and to fit, of a in a creative but faithful manner, in the challenges of the society where it is present.

It is the Crucifix of Christ the able only one of reminding the human being that God made a choice for the humanity waits that this choice renews itself every day.

The logo is accompanied with a text and with the slogan of the Assembly: a reference is also made in jubilee year: 350th birthday of the death of the Founder, which continues living as witness of this choice and as answer which the humanity continues giving on the plan of God.

ALEXIS CERQUERA TRUJILLO, C.M.
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I - PRIOR TO G.A. 2010

PRAYER

God, merciful Father,
you have sent your Son as savior of the world
and evangelizer of the poor.
You have chosen us to announce the Good News to the poor,
our lords and masters.
We give you thanks for having called us to this vocation
as Vincentian missionaries.

In this time of the 41st General Assembly,
we ask you to give us the light of the Holy Spirit to lead us,
strengthen our weaknesses and make us docile to your inspirations,
so that we can be attentive to the calls of the gospel,
of the church and of the signs of the times.

Open our hearts to your Divine Grace.
May this be a time of listening and dialog, of communion and joy,
so that we can give prophetic witness
of your love in the whole world.
Living in this state of on-going renewal,
we can then be signs of creative fidelity to the mission.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal,
mother of our missionary vocation,
during this 350th anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent
and Saint Louise, grant us your love and protection.
Make us in today's world faithful missionary disciples of your Son,
Jesus, servant and evangelizer of the poor.

Amen
# List of Participants

**General Assembly 2010**

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## General Curia

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### COMMUNICATION

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LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE PARTICIPANTS

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.

Rome, 30 March 2010

To the Delegates of the 41st General Assembly
of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Confreres,

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

One can read of Vincent’s great joy at reporting on the work of the confreres to his local community, or his warm welcome of those who had been carrying on the mission in distant places. He loved to be with the confreres and to hear their stories and their striving to make the Gospel better known to the poor both in word and action. And he loved to offer his encouragement.

From June 28 - July 16, 2010, many of us will know that joy and have the opportunity to offer that encouragement to one another as we gather for the 41st General Assembly of the Congregation in Paris, France. How appropriate that we will have this gathering during the 350th Anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent and St. Louise in that city which they loved!

For almost two years we have been preparing for this Assembly. Our motto (“350 Years and Beyond — the Mission Continues”) has reminded us of our journey; our theme (“Faithful to the gospel... attentive to the signs of the times... open up new ways and use new means... remain in a continual state of renewal”), drawn from our Constitutions, has kept us attentive to our direction.

Among the items in this mailing is a “Consultation Document” which reflects your input in the preparation for this Assembly in light of our goal of “Creative Fidelity to the Mission.” As the document itself states, its purpose is “to stimulate the reflection, the research, and the study which each member of the Assembly is called to make before and during the Assembly itself.” I ask that you give special
attention to this material and come to the Assembly prepared to
listen and speak on that which is most important for our mission and
ministry. Open and respectful dialogue aimed at moving hearts and
hands will characterize this Assembly.

A most important preparation for this Assembly will be prayer. Please keep our gathering in mind as you approach the Lord in these coming months. Let us ask that God's Holy Spirit may enliven us and help us to respond faithfully to the divine will. And, as always, we ask for the intercession of Mary, our blessed mother, and of St. Vincent and St. Louise on our behalf.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
Ec 4:1-10; Ps 33; 2 Cor 8:7-9; Lc 4:16-22

The Word of God is a two-edged sword, and my heart has been pierced by what the Lord has said to us today in these readings as we begin this 41st General Assembly, invoking the presence of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

Our goal: creative fidelity to the mission. It is the Spirit that has anointed us to be good news to the poor as the Spirit has anointed Jesus Christ. Vincent de Paul invites his missionaries to do what the Lord Jesus did when he was here on this earth. I was challenged by the comments of the author of the first reading. He speaks about "the tears of the victims with none to comfort them."

My brothers, as a Congregation, where are we? Are we running to the victims of oppression, war and violence to come to their aid? Or are we among the victimizers? It is easy to determine if we are oppressors from a direct position; it is more difficult to be able to say if we are among those who oppress in an indirect way, either by our protecting our own comfort zones and living a style of life that therefore makes life difficult for others, or simply for sins of omission.

Have we become so entrenched in our apostolic experiences, in our mission, doing the same old thing? Has the salt lost its flavor? Sometimes such is the case. I have seen it in my travels throughout the Congregation, I have reflected a great deal with the Council on different issues and situations throughout. Many times it comes down to the fact that we are only interested in doing our own thing. We are that "solitary man with no companion." The reading concludes by saying, "Woe to the solitary man, for if he shall fall, he has no one to lift him up."
Yes, my brothers, let the Word of God challenge us today, because it says two are better than one. “If the one falls the other will lift up his companion.” And I say that three is better than two. And the whole community united in its support one of another is the best of all. Our Constitutions call us to look at the mission in this way. Community for mission.

The second reading from Saint Paul’s letter to the Corinthians challenges us to look beyond our own personal interests, testing the genuineness of our concern for others. As Jesus became poor, we are called to become poor, poor with the poor. Not that we are called to share their same misery, but rather to feel their misery, to show our solidarity, and then rather than give them a hand out, give them a hand up. So let us look beyond our own interests, see the situation of the poor today, of those who are oppressed; become one with them and therefore, with Jesus, become rich in His love.

From an historical perspective one might say that Saint Vincent de Paul was led to God by his experience of the poor. Yet when we look more deeply into the life of the Saint, we can say from the perspective of faith that it was God who led Vincent to the poor. And it was God’s love that enabled him to experience more deeply in his oneness with them.

My brothers, God continually leads us to the poor. That’s our vocation. That’s why the Spirit of the Lord has come upon us. We have been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor. We pray that in this General Assembly we let it be the Spirit of the Lord Jesus that leads us to an ever greater commitment as brothers, united in the evangelization and service of the poor. And may we do so in a way that is creatively faithful.

As we gather around the table of the Lord, to be nourished by his Word and nourished by the gift of the Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to strengthen our love one for another, that love He first had for us, as we go forth to proclaim “a year acceptable to the Lord.” May He help us to stretch that year into at least the next six years.
ON THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL APOSTLES

CARDINAL ANDRÉ VINGT-TROIS
Archbishop of Paris

Eph 2:19-22; Ps 116:1-2; Jn 20:24-29

Dear Friends,

to encounter the Risen Christ makes one part of the college of apostles. And Thomas, who was absent on Easter evening, has the benefit of a fresh encounter to take his place in this college. The accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ show this reality present all through the Gospel: Jesus gathers his apostles around himself, and he establishes them as a people organised and built around his person.

For us who do not see Christ, communion with the risen one is lived through the experience of faith. But it is indeed the presence of Christ who builds the Church across the centuries as a special people in the midst of the peoples of the earth. If the Church is international — just like your General Assembly — it does not exist simply through the exercise of mutual tolerance, or of a kind of "gentleman's agreement," it is not a matter of persons of all races, peoples and cultures living together, accepting not to judge each other, respecting and letting their differences coexist.

To the extent that geographic distances are wiped out and that cultures and civilizations meet more easily — at least virtually through the means of communication — this balancing of relations between human groups becomes more and more necessary. But the Church is called not simply to be the sign of a best achieved democracy and to practice the necessary rules of prudence so that peoples live in peace. Our communion in Christ and our Tradition permit us to go further, in the way Saint Paul invites us to in the letter to the Ephesians: "We are no longer foreigners or people passing through. We are citizens of a Holy People, members of the family of God. For we are members of the household of God which has for its foundation the apostles and the prophets" Eph 2:19-20. This perspective of a holy people assimilated into one family permits us to go beyond simple peaceful respect or polite coexistence. It gives
us entrance to a household in which each member brings his contribution to a unique work.

The progress of fraternal life in this body depends, therefore, on the central place we give to Christ. It is only our communion with the risen one which allows us to hold our place all together in the family of God. Therefore, our international experience in the life of the Church is more than a juxtaposition of cultures and traditions. It is the place of the generation of a new family culture to which each brings what he is, but where a new identity is also discovered. The very essence of the people that we form is not the addition of particular identities but that which communion in Christ gives us.

The aim of this is not just a good ordering of internal life of the Church, but an essential constitutive dimension of the mission we have been given. For, since the day of the Ascension, Christ’s disciples are called to know him by faith, to believe in him without seeing him. But they do have something they can see: not the person of Jesus, but the fruit of his presence in the heart of the Church. The ties and the connections of love which we develop in our ecclesial life, the progressive building up of a culture of family in the Church and in all the communities which make it up, are a visible sign of the invisible presence of the risen Christ.

The mission for which we are sent is not simply to announce the message of the Gospel, nor even only, the person of Christ. We are charged with making him seen through and in the relations built among the members of his Church. Charity lived in the heart of the community is a constitutive element of the proclamation of the Gospel. It is in seeing how you love each other, that they will understand who it is who has sent you. To take up the missionary dimension of the ties which unite us, avoids closing ourselves in on our internal questions, and helps us to discover how concern and commitment to the organization of our family life opens a new way for humanity, which is not just a way of respect, but the way of love.

Amen.
We are here in the Rue du Bac in this sanctuary, familiar to you, where Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Labouré. We are, in a manner of speaking in Mary's house. Not, the house of Nazareth but rather her heavenly home; heaven is symbolised by these blue mosaics which are before your eyes.

In this place, different races, languages and nations sit side by side in the same way as we do at the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, or of the Little Company, as St. Vincent, whose heart you can see on your right, used to call it.

Here was revealed the Medal which has toured the world and touched so many hearts with its understanding of the faith. This understanding and these hearts speak their message here every day and at this moment we are part of it too.

We have come here then to honour Mary our Holy Mother. We want to be humbly touched by her heart which is here beside her Son's so that we too might say as the motto of the Daughters of Charity says "The love of Jesus crucified is our driving force."

All this brings us back to the risen Christ, the crucified one, signified by that bare cross on the reverse side of the medal. And near to it, at its foot, Mary is still found, his mother, this mother who is given to us through the person of St. John by the last sign of the Fourth Gospel. But, let us return to the first sign which we have just read in the account of the Wedding Feast of Cana.

Here Christ the evangeliser of the poor can change the insipid taste of life into another taste, one of joy which is like the wine of the feast. Urged on by his mother, he begins by telling us to fill up, look around and taste. This is the kindness of the Lord. He urges us to do this with the means at our disposal, in our world, in spite of the permeating pain (the crown of thorns) which is our daily experience and which also affects the Church.

In this month of July, we are going to celebrate the 140 years since the first apparition of Mary to St. Catherine. In spite of the changing of our liturgical calendar, let us not forget that this apparition took place on the night of the 19th July 1830, the feast day of the Saint of Charity. Vincent always watched over Catherine and guided her,
having shown her his heart and having told her that the moment for receiving her special and specific mission was near.

And so the young novice found herself called to the chapel to see there the Immaculate One and, to talk with her for two hours and, to hear that St. Vincent de Paul had obtained the favour, by his heavenly intercession, that his spiritual daughters on earth would be given the task of reviving faith and trust by the Miraculous Medal. This is what happened three months later, on Saturday 27th November at 17:30. The trusted confidante of the Immaculate One will receive the design of this medal and the responsibility of making it known across the whole world. As a true daughter of Monsieur Vincent, the young sister is going to accept this mission. Her patience and her faithfulness will overcome all the resistances and all the obstacles.

Silently Sister Laboure will follow for her entire life the ideals of her spiritual father, in humility and service of the poor.

And for the fifty years that Sister Catherine will live, the medal will tour the world. Marvellous happenings will abound which will bring about God’s will and the wishes of St. Vincent. May all those who love the Miraculous Medal — and we all love it do we not? know that we owe this gift from heaven, in large measure, to the love and intercession of St. Vincent. By the little Medal, the Apostle of Charity and the Servant of our Lady continues his work among us, his untiring evangelisation and his reaching out to those who need a hand.

Yes, the saints are always active in heaven. Near to God, like Mary, they pursue the mission that they had on earth. So, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac and Catherine Labouré are here present in this chapel; it is up to us to work with them, firing ourselves up with their lives and their work, because as St. Vincent appearing in the guise of an old man said to the young Catherine “God has a plan for you!”

Translation: KIERAN MAGOVERN, C.M.
CLOSING OF THE ASSEMBLY

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.
Superior General

"To be or not to be, that is the question?" so wrote Shakespeare. And what is our question? From the perspective of this General Assembly, from the motivation of its theme Creative Fidelity to the Mission, I would dare to say that our question is to do or not to do? Yes, that is our question, my brothers, to do or not to do the mission that the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to us as missionaries, priests and brothers, in the Congregation of the Mission.

"He went about doing good." Our historians claim that this is the first motto that Saint Vincent de Paul chose for the Congregation of the Mission. In imitation of Jesus Christ, focused on the Word of God, Vincent de Paul was struck by this phrase from the Acts of the Apostles. It was Peter who proclaimed how God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and "he went about doing good."

My brothers, "doing good" is what we have focused on in this General Assembly: how we have done good, how we can be better at doing good, and in what ways we might be able to accomplish that good, being faithful to our heritage and yet ever creative in its expressions. In my report to the General Assembly on the state of the Congregation of the Mission in these past six years, I said simply but clearly that one of the most important developments, not only for the Congregation but also for the Vincentian Family that we had worked on with much intensity, was and is the question of systemic change. Systemic change, as I said, is a contemporary way that we live out that which motivates us to do good, the charity of Jesus Christ crucified.

Fears have been expressed, saying that with such a focus on systemic change we might become like another NGO. Such is not the case when we have clear what it is, Who it is that motivates us to do what we do. The need is for us to make that connection, that integral relationship between contemplating the goodness of the Lord, deepening our knowledge of His love for us, and transforming that to loving action for the poor both by word and by deed, through evangelization and service of the poor.

Gentlemen, let me recall for you what Saint Vincent has said to the Congregation about the Common Rules, Chapter 1, Art. 1.
"If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their suffering, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of our sovereign judge of the living and the dead: 'Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.' To do that is to preach the gospel by words and by works. That is the most perfect way. It is also what our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth."

The basis of our renewal, that is of our Creative Fidelity to the Mission is tied into our love of God, being men of prayer; our love of the Congregation, being men who work at community life, that is participative and unifying; and men who draw close to the poor in order to listen to them, to be moved by their requests of us, being their servants with a desire to be obedient to them as our lords and masters and therefore to open our hearts to that transforming experience of God's love that takes place in our interaction with those who are poor. And we do so as a community. We do so motivated by God's love.

As we are nourished by God's word let us be nourished by God's Body and Blood and go forth bearing the Good News. Let us do so as bearers of peace with a humble confidence that it is God who works in us, He who gives us the courage to break with our fears, being made afresh and moving forward, being only concerned to do what Jesus Christ did, "going about doing good" for these the least of our brothers and sisters. So be it for the Congregation of the Mission as it embarks upon a new era, a new period of six years of following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the Poor."
His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI sends his cordial greetings to all the participants, assuring them of his fervent prayer that their efforts will contribute to a renewal of the annunciation of the Gospel to the poorest people. In this year, the 350th anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent de Paul, may all the priests and brothers of the Mission, call to mind that the missionary spirit demands that they put on the spirit of Jesus Christ. Be interior men, impregnated with the love of God. It is there you will find the courage to go and meet the poor face to face and announce to them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Now that the Year of the Priest has just finished, may the Congregation of the Mission stay faithful to its vocation of forming priests alive with a missionary dynamism who will contribute to the renewing of the Church and the world with the spirit of the Gospel. The mission to the Nations (ad gentes) should be for it a major preoccupation in this 150th anniversary of the death of Saint Justin de Jacobis, that good priest totally given to God and his mission. May you never lack the passionate spirit of your founder to “run to the spiritual aid of your neighbour as to a fire!”
Greetings from the Pope to the General Assembly

Entrusting the participants of the General Assembly to the protection of St. Vincent de Paul and Saint Justin de Jacobis, also to the maternal intercession of Our Lady, the Holy Father sends to them an affectionate Apostolic Benediction, which he extends to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission and to the people who benefit from their apostolate.

From the Vatican, 8th June 2010.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State of His Holiness

To the Most Reverend Father Gregory GAY
Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission
ROME
Very Dear Father, dear confreres,

A very cordial remembrance to all of you who take part in the 2010 General Assembly. My prayer and my brotherly affection accompany you during these weeks of reflection. Celebrated 350 years since the death of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Saint Louise de Marillac, it is an occasion to analyse the present situation of the Congregation and to plan its future in fidelity to the charism of the Founder.

Permit me to share with you my feelings coming from my experience as Prefect for the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life. In the six years of my service in this dicastery of the Holy See, I believe I have acquired a certain knowledge of consecrated life and of its actual situation which might be useful to you.

In the course of my numerous journeys over the world, I have noticed with surprise the absence of the confreres from the great current projects of the Church. Also the absence of experts and specialists of the Congregation in different domains of spiritual, theological, pastoral learning. Other Congregations smaller than ours have them in greater number.

What is the cause of this? Since the 2nd Vatican Council and the troubles which followed, we suffered like other Congregations, losing a good third of our numbers. In 1965, we were 6030 members.
In 2005 we were 4049. But the great problem is not the number. Our problem is absence from the great projects of the Church, due to a certain weakening of our works. Traditionally, the Congregation of the Mission had as works missions to the people, the foreign mission (ad gentes), spiritual direction of the Daughters of Charity, and, on the other hand, the formation of the clergy. All this is well summed up in the collect of the mass of Saint Vincent de Paul: “Ad salutem pauperum et cleri disciplinam.” For centuries, a good number of the confreres were assigned to teaching and to the formation of the clergy. These confreres were intellectually and spiritually prepared for this task. So there was on the Congregational level, a certain complementarity and a certain balance between teachers and missioners, between intellectuals and pastoral men, each exercising a benign influence on the other.

After the 2nd Vatican Council, this balance was broken. The intellectual, the man of wisdom, the teacher has, in large measure, disappeared from our ranks. And it is a loss for the whole Congregation, and probably one of the causes of its actual stagnation.

This reality is, in my opinion, the sign of an infidelity to the charism of the foundation and to the secular tradition of the Congregation of the Mission. The general Assembly has the opportunity to reflect on the problem and to remedy it.

This is all the more urgent since the formation of the clergy is one of the major problems of the Church at the dawn of the 21st century. This is so clear that there is no need to insist on it. Saint Vincent would be aware of the problem, as he was of the crisis of the clergy in his time.

Dear Confreres, a correction in the choice of our works is called for, a balance must be restored, a great tradition taken up again. It is in fidelity to its charism that the Company of the Mission will recover the vigour of its finest hours and its place in the Church.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Saint Vincent, help you in this task.

With all my brotherly friendship,

Franc Card. Rodé, C.M.
Prefect
I have been asked to offer this day of retreat that will prepare us for the election of the Superior General which will take place tomorrow. Since this office is the highest authority in the Congregation, it seemed opportune to me to offer you a reflection on authority in the Congregation. Besides, I believe that the theme concerns us all, more or less directly, since we all exercise the ministry of authority: the Visitors are an authority in their respective provinces, the local Superiors in their communities, the pastors in their parishes, the formation directors with those whom they are forming..., etc.

We all know that the word “authority” originally meant “growth.” It comes from the Latin verb “augere.” Perhaps the image of a mother who does everything she can for her child can give us the deepest meaning of what authority is. It is the mother who nurtures and gives growth to her child who has been conceived. It is she who, at the right moment, knows how to give the child the autonomy and independence that the child needs to develop as a person. Of course, this sense of authority can be found in St. Vincent. According to him, all authority is given so that people can grow and achieve the goals to which God calls them. There is another meaning of authority, complementary to this one, and which has to do with institutions: it is authority’s role to assure that the institutions serve and achieve the ends for which they were created.

I will begin my presentation making reference to the authority of Jesus in the Gospels; I will continue with the experience and convictions of St. Vincent, and I will conclude by offering some reflections on authority in the Congregation that desires to move towards “creative fidelity to the mission.”
The Authority of Jesus in the Group of the Twelve

The reference to Jesus with regard to his authority is absolutely necessary, since he is not only authority, but rather the highest authority. "Unus Dominus" (I Cor 8:6). This means that all other authority is subordinated to his supreme authority. For St. Vincent, Jesus Christ is always the model for all authority. With a great understanding of how to teach, St. Vincent invites all superiors to ask themselves this question: "Lord, if you were in my place, what would you do?" (XI, p. 429, Spanish edition). I invite you all to enter deeply into this question that St. Vincent asks us, but to do so changing the verb tense: instead of asking ourselves what would Jesus Christ do, we can ask ourselves what he did. The past can and must illuminate the present and the future. And so, let us ask ourselves, how did Jesus Christ act, and how did he live out his mission of authority in the group of the Twelve?

The community of the Twelve must not have been easy to deal with given the diversity of mentalities and temperaments, the different ages and cultural levels. In the group there was, for example, a tax collector (Matthew), that is to say, a "collaborator" of the foreign power of domination. There was also a zealot (Simon), that is to say, a "resistance fighter." Peter and John, because of their ages, belonged to two different generations, and by temperament, were quite different: Peter was primal, emotional and active; John was secondary, thoughtful and contemplative. There were among them men who were impulsive and had self-interests, like the "sons of thunder" (Mk 3:17; Lk 9:49-54), and there was even a traitor and thief (Jn 6:70). James and his brother surely belonged to a family that was well-off, since they had an open door into the house of Caiphas (Jn 18:15). And so with this group of very different personalities, Jesus wanted to form the community of the Twelve. This biblical detail can help us ask ourselves: How can we foster communion and mission, respecting legitimate diversity and the internationality of the Congregation which is inculturated in very different settings?

It is very interesting to see how Jesus goes about creating community with a very particular style of exercising his authority, different, quite different, from how the Pharisees and other contemporary leaders acted. It was never said of them what was affirmed about Jesus: that never had anyone taught with such authority (Mk 1:27).

1. To begin with, Jesus knows people and accepts them as they are. He begins with the disciples just as they are, not as they should be, in order to lead each of them, slowly, to progressively deeper
levels of growth and communication. He does not depersonalize them, creating a single model of man in community. He helps each one to grow in order to unite them in brotherhood. Peter, for example, is primal and first he acts and later on he thinks about what he has done. Phillip is slow to understand the realities of the Kingdom (Jn 14:8-10). When Thomas has his crisis of faith, Jesus does not abandon him in his unbelief. He gives in to Thomas’ demands. He goes out to meet Thomas to clear up his doubts: “Bring your finger here to the wounds in my hands...” (Jn 20:2-70). He could have said to him: “Now you have enough proof to believe....” But Jesus is more interested in saving people than in defending his authority. As for the disciples of Emmaus who doubt the Resurrection of Jesus (Lk 24:19), He does not leave them in their sadness and disappointment. He goes out to meet them as well, and with a patient, simple style of teaching, he explains the kerygma to them again, “beginning with Moses and continuing with all the prophets” (Lk 24:27), as meanwhile he warms their hearts (Lk 24:32) in order to lead them to a full conversion. What conditions should exist in our community so that it can become a space that renews the life of the Missionaries? Authority, with its mission to animate the community, has a fundamental role in all of this.

2. In the group, Jesus is not only the teacher, but he also establishes a personal relationship of friendship with each one of the Twelve. We could say that he becomes friends with them, entrusting himself to them, opening his heart to them, believing them to be worthy of his confidence. “I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). St. Vincent, when speaking of the relationship between us, used the same expression that Jesus used: “As friends who love each other well in the Lord.” By patiently weaving a web of interpersonal relationships a group is formed in which what is most important is not life in common, but rather the community of life. It is not community practices that unite a group, but rather life which is shared with the common horizon of the mission. And obviously, only from this perspective community practices have value and meaning.

3. Jesus governs the community from the inside. Even a simple reading of the Gospels shows us that there is an infinite distance between Jesus and his disciples. Nevertheless, he lives among them and lives like them. He never places himself above the community, looking to be idealized. For him, authority is a service of love. And he takes this service to the extreme (Jn 13:1). Moreover, he lives the ideal that he proposes: “Knowing that the Father had placed all in
his hands..., he began to wash the feet of his disciples” (Jn 13:3-5), John solemnly tells us, indicating that this symbolic gesture of service is a characteristic of Jesus’ authority. He does not tire his disciples with norms and more norms; rather he broadens their horizons and shows them new paths. Jesus only reprimands when something essential goes wrong, for example when they lack charity, or when they interpret the Kingdom using the criteria of the world (Mt 16:23). Jesus’ leadership is spiritual, rather than imposed.

4. Jesus orients the group of the Disciples toward the mission. Faced with the continual temptation of his disciples to “build three huts” (Mt 17:4) to continue enjoying the physical presence of Jesus on Mount Tabor, the Lord prepares them for his absence: “It is better for you that I go” (Jn 10:7). The Spirit, who will descend upon them on the morning of Pentecost, will send them forth into the world (Acts 2) to act with the same freedom and faithfulness as Jesus Christ. The community of life is a path of growth in fraternity, but it is not an end in itself: it is for the mission. The Constitutions 19 reminds us of this: “The Vincentian community is, therefore, organized to prepare its apostolic activity and to encourage and help it continually.”

Beginning with the mission (his and that of his disciples), the Lord leads them to understand that his service as messiah is not about prestige, power or glory as the Tempter would want him to believe (Mc 1:12-13), rather it is about love carried to the extreme. Always from the experience of the mission that the Father has entrusted to him, Jesus tells them clearly that “he must go to Jerusalem” and suffer the passion (Mt 16:21). He tells them that they will face a similar fate (Jn 15:18-25). Jesus reveals the cross to them, but the cross accepted and lived in hope. And so he prepares them to face conflict, suffering and the cross; essential dimensions in every Christian life.

Experiences and Convictions of St. Vincent About Authority

The authority of Jesus Christ will always be an absolutely necessary reference for all of us who are part of the Church. But for us Vincentians, we also take into account the reference of our Founder, with his own way of understanding and living out authority. We know that St. Vincent exercised his authority of a father and a counsellor for very different groups: missionaries, priests of the Tuesday conferences, Daughters of Charity, Visitation nuns, and Conferences of Charity. He was a local superior and superior general. All of this gave him a very rich experience in the
governance of persons, communities and institutions. Fr. Flores sums up St. Vincent's experience of authority in this way: "I believe that Saint Vincent died happy because throughout his life he had been a good superior" (M. Pérez Flores, "Autoridad," in Diccionario de espiritualidad vicenciano, CEME, Salamanca 1995, 43).

No one doubts that St. Vincent was a guide with vision and charisma. Fr. O'Donnell says that, whether St. Vincent was or was not held captive in the north of Africa, it seems to him that the paradigm of alchemist fit Vincent well. St. Vincent possessed the art of confronting common situations and being able to transform them into something long lasting and of great value. For example, he was not the first to preach popular missions. They existed in his time. Nonetheless, with him they evolved and became a valid response to help people to begin a new life — by means of a general confession —, to promote reconciliation among families and towns, and to establish an efficient way to help the needy with the Conferences of Charity. This is to say that with his charismatic authority, he was able to transform ministries so that they could respond to the needs of the most abandoned.

Evidently he did not do this alone. We can say that St. Vincent was a guide with others, or in other words, that he did not exercise his authority alone, but rather always in collaboration for example, with St. Louise, with Fr. Portail, with Madame de Gondi.... He appreciated and sought out the collaboration of all kinds of people: men and women, rich and poor, from the city and the country. He trusted in others, valued their contributions, and expected from them more than they themselves believed they were capable of offering. This is the way a true leader is: capable of inspiring, of encouraging other people to bring out the best in themselves in benefit of others, in this case the most poor.

With respect to his doctrine, St. Vincent is not especially original when he speaks about authority. He limits himself to following what the traditional theology of his time proposed: that authority comes from God; that it is the prolongation of the authority of Jesus Christ; that it is a service; that authority is a mediation and an indispensable dynamism for the life, the mission and the good order of the community; that its principal mission consists in guiding souls to perfection, etc. These ideas were well known then and they are now as well. But what, in St. Vincent's thinking about authority, is most in tune with our times and our sensibilities?

In the first place, we highlight a general orientation that is valid for all and enlightens all who are entrusted with a responsibility in the governance of the Congregation: superiors have to be firm in their purpose and flexible in their means. "Be firm as to the end and
humble and gentle with regard to the means, steadfast in the
observance of the Rules and holy customs of the Company but gentle
in the means of seeing that they are observed,” St. Vincent advised
Fr. Jean Guerin (Vol. II, Letter 619). On another occasion he explains
this conviction: because to be invariable in the end and moderate
in the means is like having “the soul of good leadership” (Vol. II,
Letter 642a). And both the end and the means must be enlightened
by the Gospel, by the “evangelical maxims” in the expression used by
Vincent himself. In the Common Rules there is a whole chapter that
calls for the following of the evangelical maxims and for fleeing from
those of the world (CR, chap. II). That which is a norm of conduct
for the missionary, should also be an orientation for governance for
the superiors. Or said in other words: St. Vincent always invoked the
words of Jesus Christ and his way of acting as a motive and source of
inspiration for making good choices in governance.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and delicate services of
authority is the direct contact with persons. St. Vincent was not a
superior who ordered people around, although he was always very
firm. He was concerned with motivating and explaining what was
ordered. In short he was concerned with facilitating obedience as is
recommended now in the Instruction on The Service of Authority and
Obedience in number 21. We could cite, to give an example, the letter
he wrote to Fr. Du Coudray. This missionary refused to leave
Rome where he had worked on the Syriac version of Holy Scripture.
St. Vincent used all possible reasons to make his new assignment
easier for him. He even told him that he imagined how the poor were
calling to Fr. Du Coudray to come and evangelize them. He also gives
other reasons, among them that his presence was necessary to
give authority and consistency to a local community. At the end,
St. Vincent does not order him with authority; rather Vincent prefers
to motivate him so that he will decide for himself: “Come, Father,
please,” he says to him (I, Letter 177).

In this direct contact with people, St. Vincent was always
respectful with all, especially with the Sisters and the Missionaries,
despite the irony that was sometimes hidden in his words and in his
letters. He could not tolerate disrespect by superiors to their
brothers. On one occasion a superior had the bad taste to write
St. Vincent saying that he preferred to guide animals rather than
men. He answered him with irony: “You have only used these terms
to express your difficulty better and to persuade me to relieve you of
your office. We shall try, therefore, to send someone to replace you”
(IV, Letter 1344). A short time later, St. Vincent wrote him another
letter announcing that he had named a new superior who would
replace him in his function of directing the community. St. Vincent
finished his letter reminding the superior who had been replaced of his obligation of being “the example of submission and trust each man owes to his Superior” (IV, Letter 1366).

Vincent always placed great importance on information and communication, despite living in times very different from our own. Everything that he received he passed on to others. In his letters we see how he informed the communities of the events that affected them directly or indirectly. He was convinced that communication created a sense of belonging. He wrote circular letters announcing not only the deaths of members of the community, but also notifying the Congregation of the successes and the failures he had experienced with his projects. He saw both communities (the CM and the DCs) as two large families and each local community as a small family. He tried to get all of the members to be interested in everything. He favored communication within the community: “As far as concerns me — these words are from St. Vincent himself —, I have the experience that where the Mission has some poor men, if there is a superior who is open and communicates with the others, all goes well” (X, p. 773, Spanish edition). In this same sense, St. Vincent complained bitterly about a superior who lived in isolation, without communicating with the rest of the community, and even worse, did not treat his brothers with the affection they deserved. St. Vincent reprimanded him and suggested that he renew his charity and grow in humility. It was not at all unusual for St. Vincent to remind the superiors to be humble, taking into account that humility is one of the specific virtues of the Congregation (M. Pérez Flores, op. cit., pp. 35-43).

As we have seen, St. Vincent’s experience and convictions around authority continue to be enlightening for our times, despite the fact that he lived in a time when both ecclesial and civil authority were considered holy and unquestionable. Today authority has to confront problems and situations that were hardly experienced in the times of our Founder. For example, individualism, understood as the total autonomy of the person, or as a partial belonging to the Congregation, to the Province or to the Community. Individualism prevents one from finding a harmonious balance between the personal and community dimensions, because personal plans always come before community and provincial plans. Something of this is indicated in The Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 3. In this same number it is affirmed that cultural influence is a factor that has promoted this mentality. The search for personal fulfillment and well-being no matter what the cost, are other manifestations of the same reality. Moreover, today individualism may go by other names such as particular charisms, cultural differences or personal
processes. And all this can lead to more confusion. It is authority's role to discern where the limits are between legitimate diversity and individualism that destroys community life and weakens the sense of belonging. And of course, authority should insist on and remind us of the sense of a common mission, as St. Vincent would undoubtedly do if he lived in our times.

**Authority and Creative Fidelity for the Mission**

This 41st General Assembly has committed itself to reflect on the future of our mission, following the orientations of C. 2. According to this, it is to be expected that after the Assembly we make efforts oriented toward revising, renewing, adapting and creating our ministries, without forgetting, that fidelity also unites us directly to St. Vincent, his charism, his legacy and his spirit. It is necessary that we ask ourselves, here and now, this fundamental question: “How should authority in the Congregation be, in order to promote creative fidelity in the mission?”

We could begin by saying that creative mission requires an authority which is more charismatic than institutional. Evidently, there is no opposition between the two... only differences in tone or emphasis. Institutional or functional authority is more attentive to promoting the purpose of the Congregation, according to the spirit of St. Vincent, in a true communion of life and apostolate, according to C. 97. The Superior General, the Visitor and the Local Superior, each one at his own level, has his space within which he acts; each one complementing the others. Charismatic authority or leadership more easily looks toward the future, and moreover, looks toward it with confidence, seeking to be creative in ministry, or at least, to favor creativity in the ministry of others, as St. Vincent did in his time, as we saw earlier. Charismatic authority is convinced of the urgent need for evangelization and loves the mission passionately... the mission among the poor as St. Vincent wanted. For a superior, this is much more decisive than being a specialist in one ministry or another. These (the specialists) will never be lacking, thank God, but these are not usually the best at pointing out new paths or at animating others.

To situate oneself clearly and passionately in this source of energy that is the mission, which is at the heart of our Constitutions, without doubt leads one to creativity in ministry and to open up new paths. This was exactly the case of St. Vincent: the passion and urgency he experienced for mission and charity led him to make thousands of initiatives. But passion was the driving force. Here we could cite the old principle filled with wisdom: “That which the heart desires, the mind ends up manifesting.” Curiously, St. Vincent said
something quite similar to a group of Sisters when he assured them that to desire something strongly is to be halfway to obtaining it. Perhaps zeal, one of our specific virtues, of which St. Vincent often spoke to the first missionaries, is something that we should insist on, especially to the superiors of the Congregation.

Creative fidelity requires superiors who are somewhat charismatic, that is to say, persons or leaders who are capable of inspiring others to bring forth the best in themselves, always in service of the mission. Because what truly influences others is not the power a superior has, but rather his moral authority. Power is linked to the office, the responsibility; authority is linked to the credibility of the person. We could say that credibility is the base of the moral authority of a superior. This does not come with the letter of appointment, but rather with his credibility and his authenticity, guaranteed by a coherency between what he says and what he does. Above all, a leader has to be a witness that convinces with his words, but most of all, with his life.

Creative fidelity for the mission requires leaders or determined guides who point the way forward and who have a certain capacity to risk. If not, creative fidelity could be only beautiful words. Or said another way: all the orientations that come out of this Assembly will not become reality if the superiors do not commit themselves to them, starting with General, including the Visitors, and ending up with the Local Superiors.

Let us speak now about some of the bases or essential qualities needed today to exercise this service of authority that looks forward and desires to be creative. For example, the superior should be a person who is deeply spiritual. "In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority," says the Instruction on The Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 13a. The evangelical project outlined by the Constitutions has to be directed and animated by spiritual persons. St. Vincent says this quite clearly in the different norms for the local superior. If superiors are experts in one or various ministries, if they have an extraordinary knowledge in one field or another, if they have good communication skills, all the better. But none of these qualities can substitute the most fundamental of all, the spiritual dimension. Otherwise the communities, the Provinces and the Congregation can easily become a work team, or a group with self-interests or a lobby group. Evidently, a spiritual man, capable of leading spiritual men, should cultivate prayer and maintain direct and frequent contact with the Lord. Frequently Jesus went away to pray, alone or with his disciples, the Gospels tell us. He also prayed for those who had been entrusted to him: "I pray to you, Father, for those whom you have given me..." (Jn 17:9-10).
In the advice that Vincent gives to Fr. Antoine Durand we find this: "You should turn to prayer to preserve your soul in His fear and love; I have the obligation to tell you, and you must already know, that many times we lose ourselves while contributing to the salvation of others" (XI, p. 237, Spanish edition).

Another quality which is needed today by charismatic authority is the capacity for discernment. The Constitutions and creative fidelity drive us to be creative in the mission, in community life, in personal relationships, and also in prayer. But we cannot move forward any which way, because creativity should always be expressed beginning with our own identity and Vincentian charism. Otherwise, we could come up with initiatives which are quite up-to-date, but which are foreign to our own spirit. From this supposition we easily see that superiors (and indeed all the missionaries) need to have the capacity to discern, and so must be filled with our own Vincentian spirit. Today more than ever, this capacity to reflect is needed, because the situations that affect the communities, the Provinces and the Congregation are not obvious, but rather very complex.

Obviously, to enter seriously into the process of discernment, one must listen to the Missionaries and know how to dialogue with the laypeople who work with them. This sharing can be for a superior a true mediation that helps to discover what God is asking of a community. The Vatican Council II invites superiors to "listen well to the brothers" (PC 14), and not to "stifle the Spirit, but rather examine everything and remain with what is good" (LG 12). Without this sharing, there is no real guarantee of correctly interpreting the will of God. Moreover, one can confuse God's will with one's own will. "Whoever decides something without consulting the person who will be affected, is mistaken, even if he is correct in his decision," Seneca, the famous philosopher, liked to repeat. We find this same argument in a letter which St. Vincent wrote to P. Jean Guerin: "Receive the opinions of the two who have been named councillors...." The Constitutions tell us that the opinion of each missionary is important and should be respected. Listening to them, the superiors can be in touch with the grass-roots movements in the Congregation and the Provinces, and interpret them as signs along the way.

Another important aspect of charismatic authority is its closeness to people, which could be called having the heart of the "Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:1-21). We could say that the most important mission that the Lord entrusts to a superior in the Congregation is the Missionaries. This is what we have found in Jesus Christ and in St. Vincent. Of course, this function of authority is more important than the concerns about houses, documents, rules, projects.... A superior who does not manifest the sentiments of a father, a moth-
er, and attitudes of a good shepherd can leave their brothers with wounds. The same situation occurs if the confreres feel that they are valued and appreciated only because of the tasks that they carry out or because of their effectiveness. The words of the Pope, addressed to men and women superiors general in the audience of May 22, 2006, are very significant: "Of you, major superiors, I ask that you offer a word of special concern to those who are going through difficulties, to the elderly and the infirm, to those who are going through experiences of crisis and loneliness, to those who suffer and feel confused...." To the list mentioned by the Pope, we should perhaps add those who have spent some years working in different ministries. They are persons who have given themselves totally and now may suffer the erosion of fatigue, and a certain disappointment because of the results. The good shepherd knows his sheep, and does all that he can for his flock. He leads it to good pastures, and cares for its growth (Jn 10:2). This biblical image, so appropriate for defining the figure of the Superior, and which appears in C. 97, has to become visible and real in ordinary life, by the close presence of the superior, the esteem, the interest and the prayer for each one of the Missionaries, as well as trust in their possibilities. These are all signs that speak for themselves of the superior's heart, the heart of a good shepherd.

Conclusion

The exhortation Vita Consecrata says: "In the consecrated life the role of Superiors, including local Superiors, has always been of great importance for the spiritual life and for mission" (VC 43). We do not need many explanations to conclude that every human group needs authority, although the form may vary greatly from one society to another. We could say that it is an anthropological fact written into our nature and developed in all cultures. Christian revelation does not ignore this fact, rather it confirms it. St. Vincent tells us the same thing by using an image which is quite suggestive: "Superiors — he tells us — are like pilots who take a ship into port" (IX, p. 859, Spanish edition). It is possible that authority, in some ways, is more important than ever, and faces more difficulties than in the past, when structures were stronger and more sustaining. They helped authority to carry out its mission. Today things have changed. Structures have lost their credibility and have been considerably weakened, so much so that now they are in need of solid people who are capable of sustaining and animating the structures. Said another way, in earlier times superiors were accepted and respected by all, at least externally. Today this is not so clear. Moreover, institutional
authority relies on moral authority, perhaps more than ever. And this does not come with the office alone; it must be gained by dedication to the mission, by wholehearted, free service and by a life which is coherent.

Surely one of the most important functions that, in these days, has been entrusted to authority is that of animating communities, ministries and spiritual life. The C. 101, 102, 123 and 129 indicate this clearly for each one of the three levels of government. But this animation cannot be improvised, nor can it be done by force, confusing the essential with what is secondary, or expending energy without clear goals. Governance and animation need a map, a global plan, goals to be met as well as concrete strategies. Evidently this proposal of animation has to be in line, not only with our Vincentian charism, but also with the orientation that this General Assembly will give to the whole Congregation for the next six years. And this orientation will be about creative fidelity. This will require superiors who point the way ahead, who have a vision of the future, who dream the dreams of God and of St. Vincent, and who will take the risk of preparing and promoting what could be a new birth. I hope that the superiors of the Congregation will not allow themselves to be bogged down by an excessive institutional prudence that will make them ambiguous in practical decisions and fearful of making evangelically bold offers to the Missionaries! Thankfully, we count on the example of Jesus Christ and the experience of St. Vincent.

Translation: GILBERT R. WALKER, C.M.
REPORT OF THE SUPERIORESS GENERAL OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

SR. EVELYNE FRANC

Dear Father Gregory, dear Fathers and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission.

It is a joy for me to welcome you to the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity today, on this solemnity of the apostles Peter & Paul, a date which is certainly special for some of you.

We, the Daughters of Charity of the six international Communities who make up this great house, we are happy to welcome you for the celebration of your 41st General Assembly just begun, and whose theme 'Creative fidelity to the Mission' promises pertinent debate and important decisions.

Permit me to pause for some moments to consider the context and the place of your gathering, marked by Providence. You are celebrating your Assembly in the midst of a jubilee year in Paris, the city where Saint Vincent and Saint Louise worked and laboured so much. Everything here speaks of them, everything reminds us of their heroic achievement, that of an immensely creative charity, in a missionary spirit without frontiers. In a word, the context of your Assembly is itself a challenge, a call to revive charity and mission, to reproduce the daring, the creativity and the holiness Vincent and Louise lived (cf. VC n. 37).

As for the place which you have chosen for your work, the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity, — it is the Blessed Virgin’s house, a sanctuary of grace and of mercy for a world parched and thirsting for love. I am convinced that you have been impressed to see how many hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims are daily received there by a team of lazarist Fathers, of laity and of Daughters of Charity. These pilgrims crowd around Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. She invites them to come to the foot of the altar, to listen to the voice of the Lord, to gather up all the graces which her Mother’s hands discretely distributes to them, like so many beams of love.

We ask Mary’s intercession for the Congregation of the Mission. We ask her to accompany the unfolding of your Assembly, your debates and decisions: that she encourage your initiatives and projects, that she help you remain listening to the Holy Spirit, and respond to
the prompting to transmit to the poor messages of love and hope, as the living expression of your fidelity which strengthens and renews itself in depth, making itself creative for the mission.

I would also like to invoke the year of the priest which has just ended with such solemnity in Rome, which you have lived with joy, united to the Holy Father and to all the Church. Our prayer has closely accompanied you and we have thanked the Lord for the inestimable gift of the priesthood and asked for all of you abundant blessings in the exercise of your ministry.

Permit me now to rapidly develop two points: an act of thanksgiving, and a prayer

**Great and wonderful are your works, O Lord (Rev 15:3)**

I borrow from the book of the Apocalypse this verse to express our gratitude, our admiration and thanksgiving for all that the Company has received and continues to receive from the successor of Saint Vincent and from the priests of the Congregation of the Mission.

**Yes, Great and wonderful are your works, O Lord!**

Today, as it is six years since your General Assembly in Rome, I am given the opportunity to thank the Lord who lovingly watches over our Company. It is appropriate to quote the recommendations which Saint Vincent gave, on 7 February 1660, a few weeks before the death of Saint Louise, to Father Jacques de la Fosse, to encourage him to take care of, and today we would say **“accompany,”** the Daughters of Charity: “The action of God to bring to birth the little Company made use of our activity: and you know that the same things which God makes use of to bring things into being, he also uses to preserve them.”

All through her life, it is important to recall, Saint Louise showed with a holy insistence her desire that the Company of the Daughters of Charity would remain under the authority of Saint Vincent. She also ardently desired that the Daughters of Charity would receive the spiritual help of the Fathers of the Congregation of the Mission.

And so, since the beginning of the Company, we have been enriched and supported by the help of the successors of Saint Vincent, the Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission, and of our brothers in Saint Vincent. How could we not show our gratitude?

Allow me to speak first of all to Father Gregory, to thank him for his close and cordial accompaniment, for his frequent visits to the
sisters, linked to the visits made to his confreres, and even to the most distant corners of the Company (for example the Cook islands) to support and encourage them to live with joy and fidelity their vocation as Daughters of Charity.

I would also underline the great availability of the Director General, the Superior General's permanent representative to the Company, his untiring devotion to the mission of favouring fidelity to the charism.

In the same way I speak on behalf of the Sisters to thank the provincial Directors, the faithful fellow workers with the Visitatrices and the councillors in their respective Provinces. All of them are grateful to them for the Vincentian dynamism which they bring to the Provinces and for their delicate attention to the spiritual journeying.

It is also a joy for me to thank all the Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission who work together in many ways for the formation of the Sisters, whether through the preaching of the annual retreat, monthly or quarterly days of reflection, the sessions and other activities which help us live the gift of the vincentian charism.

Yes, great are your works, O Lord!

After thanksgiving, here is prayer, that of the psalmist:

Lord, strengthen the work of your hands! (Ps 137:8)

The experience of graces received pushes us to desire and ask of the Lord with great confidence that he bring to completion the work he has begun in the Company. The living witness, burning with an often discreet love, given by so many many saintly Sisters, who through the whole length of our history, have spread the perfume of charity through a simple and humble service of the poor, realized with joy and gentleness, respect, compassion and devotion, fills us with admiration.

The Company is called to serve in a state of charity, and in a state of mission. Charity and mission are inseparably united. Charity without mission is inconceivable, and mission without love makes no sense. Charity is fully completed in mission. Mission is nourished by charity. Right through this jubilee year we have been exploring together, you and we, with the rest of the Vincentian family, this duality and have deepened it.

In order to respond with an ever new fidelity, today as yesterday, to this call to live, in a state of charity and mission, we count on your
support. We know that Saint Vincent, speaking to his Confreres and to the Daughters of Charity, liked to underline to the one and to the other, that direct acts of service and evangelization could not be separated. He wished that, you and we, be open to these two dimensions of our vocation, presenting them to us as complimentary.

We count on your service of animation, and of spiritual accompaniment, of collaboration in formation, of energy and of missionary dynamism, to revitalize our charism in order to respond to the challenges of the present which prepare the Company of the future. For the Lord speaks to our hearts of the suffering and the abandonment of so many persons wounded by life, silent and left unnoticed in the great whirlwind of our noisy civilization, which is media exposed to the extreme, which never dwells long on the true causes of poverty.

We hope to work even more closely with you in the ministry of vocations, a ministry in which we wish to be creative and dynamic, inserted into the pastoral care of the diocesan Church, a ministry capable of attracting young people to Christ, and of showing them the beauty of the Christian life, of Vincentian service, the joy of giving one’s life in love, as Vincent and Louise did.

We are well aware that “The mission of consecrated life and the vitality of Institutes depends, certainly, on the active fidelity with which the consecrated religious respond to their vocation, but that their future is linked to the fact that other men and other women generously accept the Lord’s call” (VC n. 64).

We are ready for collaborative work, tighter, more intense, as brothers and sisters, inheritors of a charism entrusted to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise for the good of the Church and of humanity, a charism which is our responsibility.

As with Our Lord, there cannot be any poverty which is foreign to us, to you or to us (cf. C. 11a) and, from him, we can learn to welcome with love the poor, the little ones, to look with mercy and to serve the weak, the despairing, and to lift up again those who are fallen.

Co-inheritors, we follow Jesus Christ in the way Saint Vincent and Saint Louise followed him; we are called to be experts in charity and in mission. Could we try to promote a network of charity which would regroup, gather and multiply our strengths in favour of our most disinherited brothers and sisters, in the framework of the wider Vincentian family of course, but in a particular way between ourselves?

This would constitute a gift for the Church and the world of today, three hundred and fifty years after Saint Vincent and Saint Louise
returned to God, having left an evangelical harvest of love for the
disinherited, of attention to the little ones and of works of charity
and of mission of an incredible breadth.

Our world needs new apostles of charity and of mission who
speak to the poor of the God of Love, who make visible his face as
merciful Father, as liberator and as defender of the oppressed.

Do you think that we could imagine new forms of collaboration,
new ways of presenting the Vincentian charism to the Church and to
the world, being more daring in the service of the poor?

How good it would be to act together, in a more intense way,
for the promotion and the dignity of the poor, respect for human
rights, the defense and care of life, the ministry of the family,
work for justice and peace, solidarity with the whole human family,
supported by the social teaching of the Church!

Could we imagine together what Saint Vincent and Saint Louise
would do today to run to put out so many fires, those of suffering
and of pain, which disfigure the human landscape of the world and
transform it into a planet where misery is visible here and
everywhere, for sadly poverty has no geographical frontiers?

Finally, dear Fathers and Brothers, I wish to tell you that the
Daughters of Charity are waiting and expecting from you that you
help us let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit, as our last General
Assembly asks of us.

It is a little more than a year since we celebrated it in this very
place. I am certain that the walls which surround us are the silent
witnesses of the joyful experience so strong in the action of the Holy
Spirit which all the Visitatrices and delegates lived.

Count on the prayer of the Company which is asking the Holy
Spirit to be in the midst of you, as for a new Pentecost. We are happy
with your presence among us.

May the Lord bless you, may Mary accompany you!

Translation: ADRIAN EASTWOOD, C.M.
SUPERIOR GENERAL REPORT
TO THE ASSEMBLY

G. GREGORY GAY, C.M.

Introduction

As I wrote in my letter to you on 30 March, Saint Vincent loved to be with the confreres and to hear their stories and their striving to make the gospel better known to the poor both in word and action. He loved to offer his encouragement.

My brothers, delegates of this 41st General Assembly, this is what I hope to do in this report and it is also my hope that we offer encouragement to one another as we gather in this Assembly.

As we are all aware, our focus for this Assembly is the mission itself. The motto that we selected “350 Years and Beyond, the Mission Continues,” has reminded us of our journey. The particular theme that we have selected is Constitution 2: “...faithful to the gospel, attentive to the signs of the times, open up new ways and use new means, remain in a continual state of renewal.” This helps us to be attentive to the direction we want to take with the help of the Holy Spirit. Our goal: creative fidelity to the mission.

In my report I would like to indicate a number of actions undertaken by myself, members of the curia, my general council, and confreres throughout the world, as well as other members of the Vincentian Family, as examples of where “creative fidelity to the mission” happens. I hope that by way of this report an open and respectful dialog will occur aimed at moving our hearts and our hands into action filled with a passion for Christ and passion for the poor.

Visits and Special Events

One of the ways I have experienced the charism alive and well has been in my visits to the provinces and at the same time visits to the Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. I first want to present statistics of the number of countries I have visited by continent and the number of times visited.
Those of us who participated in the General Assembly of 2004 heard my predecessor, Father Bob Maloney say that he did not consider that the visits to the provinces were of utmost importance for the Superior General in these times. He had chosen to be the spiritual animator of the Congregation through the written word, which he did quite well because we continue to hear from time to time and in different places throughout the world quotes from many of the inspiring messages that Father Maloney had written either to the Congregation or to the Vincentian Family in general. However, I do not consider myself to be a writer, and I said that from the very beginning. I chose to carry out my role as spiritual animator of the Vincentian Family, particularly the Congregation of the Mission, through my visits to the different countries. We as a congregation are in 84 countries. I have visited 73 of these countries which included all of the provinces and vice-provinces. I was unable to visit 11 countries. I also visited 7 countries where we are not present but the Daughters of Charity are, many of those being isolated places.

My reason for choosing to animate spiritually through the visits is that it coincides with who I am as a missionary. I am used to living out of a suitcase and to moving from here to there. At the same time, after having been recently elected I asked the different visitors what they would want of me as their new Superior General. A good number of them if not the majority asked that I might visit. For many of the places it was the first time in 18, 19, 20, 21 years that a Superior General had visited. My reflection on these visits, as I have alluded to here already, has given me the opportunity to see the charism alive and well. Experiencing that first-hand encourages me to share with others in order that they too might be animated to serve in a deeper way the call we have received from our Founder Saint Vincent de Paul.

During a Council evaluation one of the Assistants pointed out that he felt that my visits tired me out and made me sometimes a bit on edge at our Council meetings. My response to him was the contrary. I returned from the visits to the different countries full of energy. Often what drained my energy were the long hours of work in the curia itself and the tense situations of discussion that were carried out around the council table. One might claim that the image I get of the Congregation or of the Vincentian Family in these visits is always the best picture because everyone would put on their “Sunday Best” for the visit of the Superior General. Most likely that is the case. And yet it says what we are capable of being and doing.

I participated in a number of significant celebrations which you will see highlighted in the pictures that will follow. It gave me the opportunity not only to experience the mission as it is, but also to
hear its history, the richness of the service in the evangelization provided. It also made me see the challenge; it is to inculturate ourselves where we are called to be good news to the poor. Perhaps that is something we have failed to do from time to time, transporting just our own ways of living, setting up mini-colonies and missing the opportunity to relate in a deeper way, sharing the gospel with those whom we serve. We can be inspired by many of our great saint missionaries who were able to inculturate themselves in order to be that good news. As one model I hold up Justin de Jacobis, whose 150th anniversary of death we are celebrating this year.

These special events also gave me the opportunity to see the good collaboration that takes place among the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and other branches of the Vincentian Family. At the same time I see this continues to be a challenge.

Since it is the Assistants who normally did the canonical visits to the different provinces, I carried out only three canonical visits: the Provinces of Hungary, Madrid and Austria. My interest in these canonical visits, as well as hopefully all the canonical visits that were carried out by the Assistants, was to be a faithful listener to the spirit of the Lord expressed in the lives of each of the members of each province or vice-province visited. Of utmost importance for me is something that Father Hugh O'Donnell said in the Visitors Meeting in Mexico when speaking about ongoing formation; he said: "Our greatest resource is ourselves." Therefore we need to put attention and energy in one another in order that we might be faithfully creative in carrying out our mission.

I was honored to be present for the raising of the Vice Province of Eritrea, Saint Justin de Jacobis, to a Province showing the maturity that the confreres had attained in becoming independent as a province and yet interdependent in terms of collaboration in carrying out the mission with the worldwide Congregation and the Vincentian Family. In October the Vice-Province of Nigeria will be raised to a Province as well.

I was present for the reconfiguration of the new Western Province of the United States that occurred January 25 this year. One of the reflections made by its new visitor, Father Perry Henry, was that each of the three provinces that now comprise the new Western Province had developed over the years its own culture and its own style and methods of carrying out evangelization. Rather than see that as an obstacle in coming together, he considered it to be a richness, a way of enriching ourselves with the differences and gifts and cultures that have been developed. Would that we all would be able to see the
question of reconfiguration precisely in that light, an opportunity to enrich ourselves in order that we might in turn enrich those whom we are called to serve.

At the beginning of my mandate I made an attempt to visit and be present at all the meetings of the different Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces, recognizing the importance of this dimension that although not yet a legal entity has charismatically sprung up as a way of carrying out more effectively our mission to evangelize the poor. I visited also a number of the interprovincial internal seminaries and the like, again recognizing the importance of collaboration at the interprovincial level in formation and other areas.

As mentioned at the beginning I also visited a number of countries where the Daughters of Charity are, but not the Congregation of the Mission. In many of those experiences I received a petition from both the Daughters and the Bishops to accompany our Sisters as well as the rest of the Vincentian Family and the poor whom they serve. I found that where there is collaboration among the Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Family, a much more dynamic, much more alive experience of the charism occurs.

Take a minute or two now to reflect on what I have said, listen to some music and see some pictures of the different special events that I have mentioned and jot down any questions or comments you may have.

Initiatives

In this second part I would like to focus on some new initiatives that have taken place and some building on previous initiatives.

At the level of the General Council, we created a plan of action over a period of five years which was reviewed regularly. At the same time I initiated an annual evaluation of the performance of the roles of each of the General Assistants as well as of the Superior General, something that was painful at times. I think that it is important, especially if we are called to reflect on and evaluate the Congregation, we ourselves should be capable of evaluating our own performance and service.

With the guidance of the Assistant for Missions, an office was set up and Statutes for the International Missions were developed. This was a new development coming from the fact that, in my opinion as Superior General, the role of the Assistant for Mission has changed. As the Constitutions themselves state: "One of the Assistants General has a special responsibility for the foreign mission." As one reflects on the nature of the Congregation today, it is hard to say
where those foreign missions are. Taking into account some of the most recent documentation of Pope Benedict, when he speaks about *mission ad gentes* he is speaking not about far away places that have never heard the Word of God, but those places, even close by, that need to hear once again the good news proclaimed. In one sense, it seems to me very difficult to define which of our provinces are foreign missions. In the previous administration, Father Victor Bieler, who continues to be an active missionary in our international mission in the Solomon Islands at 80 years of age, was energetic in visiting many of the provinces, far more than any of the other Assistants who accompanied the Superior General.

My intention was to change that dynamic and give to each of the Assistants a sense of the whole of the Congregation of the Mission. Thus there was the need to change the dynamic of the Assistant for Missions. I congratulate Father Ubillus for a job well done in making a special effort to be in contact with different missionaries, offering workshops and seminars, opportunities to participate in sessions developed by different entities of the Church, sending out articles particularly during the times of Advent and Lent of a particular missionary nature.

There was also the creation of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and the continental workshops that followed: in Mexico and Brazil for Latin America, Cameroon for Africa and Bangkok for Asia. There is one to be celebrated yet in Illinois for the United States. I consider this Commission to be one of the most significant new initiatives of this administration. The idea was taken from my predecessor which I made an effort to put into practice, expanding it to include not only members of the Congregation of the Mission, but other members of the Vincentian Family with the desire to do “mission” and do so in a collaborative way.

The word “Systemic Change” in itself has been difficult for some people to understand and some say it does not exist in their language. That is not the case; it exists in all languages; we just may not know that it does. Hopefully many of you have had or will have the opportunity to participate in one of these workshops on the promotion of systemic change. In my opinion it is a most concrete way to live as missionaries today, motivated by that which identifies who we are: charity; but charity that is not a hand out, but rather a hand up, as so well yet so simply stated by a confrere. Charity includes personal contact which has to be ever present in our realization of our mission as well as the promotion of human dignity and an involvement in what we call political charity. This was well spelled out in one of the issues of Vincentiana.
Out of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change came the awards for systemic change projects as well as mission projects for the Congregation of the Mission. There are also special awards for systemic change projects of the Vincentian Family. It has been our experience that over the years since the Systemic Change Award and the Mission Award were presented, the understanding, the implementation and the realization of these projects has improved promoting creativity in evangelization and in the service of the poor.

Another initiative was meetings with the presidents of the Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces which we had twice. Hopefully the new administration will continue this experience, because it is a way in which we have a greater sense of who we are and what our common mission is.

Another initiative was the workshop for Confreres in Difficulty. Although many had difficulty with the title itself, it was the best name that we could come up with. I would like to say something in light of this workshop. I repeat, our main resource is ourselves. In the workshop our intention was to help the visitors and others respond to the situation of confreres and at the same time to help clarify the relationship that they have with the Congregation of the Mission, not only spiritually but legally as well. To say that the question regarding sexual abuse is restricted to one particular country as some of us may have thought, is obviously not true; it is a reality that affects all of us throughout the Congregation of the Mission and in every country where we are present. Therefore we have an urgent need to respond as best we can not only to the confrere who goes through this experience or who suffers from pedophilia, but also a concern that has to be real regarding the victims. The question of abuse is very costly economically speaking as well. It hurts to have to spend many thousands and thousands of dollars when we know that the money that we have as a Congregation of the Mission is not ours but the patrimony of the poor. We hope to dialog about this issue here in the Assembly in different moments. I recommend the next administration deal with this issue at different levels, whether at the Visitors meetings, the Conference of Visitors and/or Provinces meetings, the new Visitors Meeting as well as in the General Council itself to update the Guidelines.

With regard to SIEV, which is one of the offices of the Congregation, a new initiative that we have taken was naming an Executive Secretary to assist the coordinator. It was Father Suescun, and I congratulate him on the support that he has given to Father Alexander Jernej, the coordinator. One of the most significant events that they were able to put forward in this period was the session for
new Vincentian scholars. Hopefully we will be able to maintain and develop this dimension of the SIEV. In my opinion it is one of the ways to deepen our Vincentian culture.

Other new initiatives: a desire for better communications between the center and the rest of the provinces, which, to be honest with you, has not always been easy. I think we have been faithful to getting the information out to the confreres, but because of different circumstances, and I certainly understand this, the communication back and forth has not always been fluid. One of the attempts of bettering communication was the creation of the new web page specifically for the Congregation of the Mission, cmglobal.org, as well as the uniform e-mail addresses for easier communication with all the provinces, the visitors, their secretaries, and their economes.

Let me take a moment to express something that, in my opinion, reflects the need for deepening communication between the provinces and the Superior General. There have been a number of different incidents that have occurred over these last six years where I have been informed by others outside of the Congregation of the Mission of significant matters that involved confreres in the Congregation of the Mission, which as you can imagine was very embarrassing. I will give you a concrete example, not mentioning names, but it happened on any number of occasions. Sister Evelyne would say to me, Father, is it not it a shame that such and such situation has occurred with Father so and so. And I would have to say, Sister, I am not quite sure what you are talking about. Then I would receive details of the situation of which I had not been informed by the visitor himself. And I am talking about significant matters. There is a need to deepen our sense of being one through greater communication that needs to flow not only from the center to the provinces, but from the provinces to the center especially concerning major issues.

It is not that I desire a centralization as strong as may exist in the Daughters of Charity. But certainly more than what presently exists. I hope this occurs in the next administration. Certainly this is our encouragement, that we work toward a greater unity rather than being loosely linked to the center. It is in this light that I have spoken often of the importance of the internationality of the Congregation of the Mission. Those who participate in the CIF program, of which I will be speaking shortly, have the opportunity to experience the internationality and its richness. When we are able to share ideas and visions that go beyond our own limited areas and cultures, it is always a growth producing experience. It is not easy, but certainly important.
Another initiative was the creation of new patrimonial funds which the Econome General as well as the Director of the Solidarity Office will be speaking more in depth. It certainly is where we recognize the generosity of the provinces, especially towards those who do not have the resources necessary to carry out their mission in a creative way. Those "who have," have been generous in giving to those "who have not." Here, even in this matter, I would hope that we could achieve an even greater degree of equality. Sometimes you get the impression that those "who have" resources also have power in decision-making processes and often you sense inferiority from those who "do not have," in terms of participation in these processes. Obviously this is a challenge where we need to move forward.

Take a minute now to reflect on some of the things that I have said as again you listen to some music and see some pictures and jot down your thoughts.

**Ongoing Formation**

We have continued with the previous administration's practice of ongoing formation for new Visitors, having had a session in 2006, 2008 and 2010 which I find the need to make more practical and less theoretical. I am appreciative of the wonderful work that Father Corpus Delgado has done, having helped create the program and moderating it since its beginning. Corpus would take seriously the evaluation of each of the sessions and develop the new workshop based on the recommendations made.

Another new initiative is a Money Management workshop for provincial economes that Father John Gouldrick, our Econome General, has put together. The first one was realized in the Philippines for the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference.

Another new initiative is a workshop for new Directors of the Daughters of Charity. This came as a way of concretizing a Directory for the Directors of the Daughters of Charity that was initiated in the previous administration and enacted in the present. There have been three workshops for new Directors. For me it has been important that I be present throughout the whole of those meetings. Sister Evelyne and a good number of her Council members participated in all the workshops from beginning to end in order to assist the new Directors. I am grateful to Father Javier Alvarez for organizing and executing, together with different team members, these workshops that have been fruitful.

With regard to our own CIF program, besides the programs already developed that we have maintained, that is, the three-month
program as well as the heritage program of one month, the Directors set up a program for leadership that was presented first to the superiors and superiors to be, then a second time for visitors and members of their councils. I am appreciative of the good work that was done on that workshop with the help of Father Hugh O'Donnell, the former Director of the CIF program, and now the new team, Father Marcelo Manimtim and José Carlos Fonsatti. A new program which was just completed not too long ago is for the ongoing formation of Brothers in the Congregation of the Mission. Rather than say more about how successful this program was, I will ask Brother Paco, who is a delegate here at the Assembly, to come forward and share with us briefly his impressions and the actions that occurred in that CIF session for Brothers.

After having heard that reflection from Brother Paco, let us take a few moments to reflect on what we have heard in this section on ongoing formation reflecting and jotting down your thoughts.

**International Missions**

With regard to our international missions, of which we now have four, I would like to say the following and at the same time make some comments about some of the missions throughout the Congregation.

As a new initiative regarding the mission of the Solomon Islands, we have worked out an agreement with the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference. They have been collaborating significantly in the development of that mission. We continue to make requests for confreres beyond Asia Pacific to supply missionaries to continue this good work of seminary formation and evangelization. Since the establishment of the international mission in the Solomon Islands as well as Papua New Guinea, we have begun to receive vocations. The Province of Australia has generously assumed the responsibility of the formation of these candidates in the name of the Asia Pacific Conference. Presently we have five missionaries in Solomon Islands. Father Raul Castro from the Province of Argentina is in process and preparation for the mission and is awaiting his visa. We have a number of confreres who give of their time on a part-time basis teaching courses for a semester or a number of months as has Father Drago from the Province of Slovenia, who has also contributed to raising money for the continuation of this mission. A thank you to Father Drago. We do need the help of Scripture Scholars in the Solomon Islands as well as other missionaries. The recommendations we are making to the new administration is to continue these requests in the October appeal.
In Papua New Guinea we have three missionaries; the fourth, who was one of the original members has been named the Visitor of the Province of the Philippines, Father Rolly Santos, who is here present with us. We are waiting for visas for two confreres, Father Georges Maylaa from the Province of the Orient and Father Emmanuel Lapaz from the Province of the Philippines. I have heard there that we have had promises of other missionaries from other countries. We also have a lay missionary from the Philippines who is awaiting his visa.

With regard to the international mission of El Alto, Bolivia, as we know it is a very difficult mission and it has gone through a lot of growth pains and a reconfiguration. At this present time we have in El Alto four missionaries, two in a rural missionary parish and two in another. We have opened a new mission in Cochabamba, Bolivia, with two confreres, Father David Paniagua, the former Director of the Daughters of Charity of Bolivia from the Province of Chile, and Father Joel Vasquez, who is currently the Director of the Daughters of charity in Bolivia, from the Province of Colombia. The hope is to expand the mission with more personnel once it gets underway.

I have also received requests over the years from many bishops for missionaries in different places, particularly in Brazil and in Africa. One of the most recent is from a bishop in Angola whose diocese is centrally located with regard to the three missions of the Daughters of Charity there. It also happens to be the diocese that has the least amount of priests. I am recommending to the next administration that they consider this as a priority when we are able to open up our next mission.

The Visitors Conference of Africa, COVIAM, has been working for the last couple of years on beginning a new mission in Chad, hopefully in conjunction with the Daughters of Charity. I have encouraged COVIAM to assume this responsibility and to do so in the simplest of ways. They have the General Council's 100% support as they move forward being creatively faithful to the mission.

Other provinces as well have undertaken new missions in these years. Among those are Kazakhstan of the Province of Poland as well as the desire on the part of the Province of Saint Justin de Jacobis to open a new mission in Sudan as part of their commitment to the 350th. With regard to missions, I would like to close my reflections on this section with the situation in mainland China. As we all know, this is part of Province of China and has its base of operation in both Taiwan and the mainland. Yet on a number of occasions the former visitor as well as the current visitor of China have asked for assistance for further developing the missionary efforts in mainland China. It would be my hope that it can be further developed
concretely by the Province of China working with the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference and other recommendations that might come out of this General Assembly since the Province of China and their provincial council have requested that somehow the issue be discussed here. Hopefully it will be, perhaps in the continental sessions and in other moments where it is appropriate. It is of great importance for me as for the previous administration to have a continual effort of preparing ourselves to evangelize in mainland China.

Let us take a few minutes to reflect on what I have said regarding international missions and missions of other provinces with music and pictures to accompany. Please jot down your thoughts.

**Vincentian Family**

A new initiative arising from our efforts to work together as a Vincentian Family has been the creation of the Executive Committee for the 350th anniversary of the death of our Founders with its five commissions. Specifically the intention of this Committee, which is drawing to an end with the closing of our Jubilee celebration September 25 in the Basilica of Saint Peter's in Rome, has been to deepen our own Vincentian spirituality and our sense of being Family through greater efforts of collaboration.

One of the concrete outcomes of the 350th was the decision by the international heads of the Vincentian Family to set up a micro credit pilot project in Haiti that we will hear more about from Father Bob Maloney later on this week when he speaks to us. The project in itself is a concrete expression of systemic change and hopefully it will help us to understand it more clearly. The earthquake in Haiti has certainly made providential our wanting to respond as a Vincentian Family to the situation of poverty there.

In order to show how important collaboration is for me, I use the image of us sitting at the table, equally sharing in the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, having Christ at the center and evangelization and service of the poor as our common goal.

I have participated in General Assemblies of all the branches. I was at the General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity in May 2009. I may be in two General Assemblies of Vincentian Marian Youth: one was in Paris in 2005 and the other will be Lisbon, Portugal following this General Assembly. It all depends on who the Superior General is which determines who the Director General will be. I have participated in two Assemblies of MISEVI, one in Berceau and the most recent one in February of this year in Colombia. I have also participated in two international meetings of the Association of
the Miraculous Medal, one in Rome and the most recent this past November in Paris.

A few comments on each of these branches that are closely connected with the Congregation of the Mission. Need I say with regard to the Daughters of Charity that we should have a very close relationship. Minimally, our Constitutions establish that. But I have to admit that as Father Maloney once said, and it continues to be our experience, it is more difficult to name a Director of the Daughters of Charity than it is a Visitor. One of the reasons is that we do not know well enough the charism of the Daughters of Charity and confreres do not feel prepared to accompany them. That is a fault on our part that we need correct. I recommend that for the future in our programs of formation, young men have an opportunity to know better the charism of the Daughters of Charity and to work closely with them. This is our role in the unfolding of the charism, called to be like that of Vincent with Louise, complementary in the evangelization and service of the poor. As I mentioned earlier, where there is good collaboration there is energy and enthusiasm. And where there is not, the poor suffer.

With regard to the Vincentian Marian Youth, the international president will speak to us later on in this Assembly. VMY as well as MISEVI and the Association of the Miraculous Medal are not independent associations, but are apostolates of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and we are called to respond accordingly in their development.

With regard to MISEVI, it has been struggling in its growth over the years, but not because there is a lack of lay Vincentian missionaries. As I go throughout the world, I see a great number of lay Vincentian missionaries. But they are not connected to MISEVI for a number of different reasons, which we addressed in our most recent Assembly in Colombia. My hope is for those who are lay Vincentian missionaries to come under the umbrella of MISEVI. Some have restricted it to mean only lay missionaries in mission ad gentes. But as I mentioned earlier, Pope Benedict has helped us to understand mission ad gentes as something much wider. We mean to say that MISEVI is for all lay Vincentian missionaries.

With regard to the Association of the Miraculous Medal, it is growing. In its most recent Assembly we reworked the Statutes to make them more inclusive of all the different efforts that are taking place for promotion of the Miraculous Medal throughout the world. The uniqueness about the Association of the Miraculous Medal is that it is an Association of which all can be active members. It is not just a lay Association, but an Association that involves confreres,
Daughters of Charity, other religious men and women, all with the concern of promoting devotion to our Blessed Lady.

I recently participated in the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in which the first non-European president in its history, Mr. Michael Thio from Singapore, was elected. Over these years I have seen tremendous growth in the Society and it has a quality of leadership that, in my opinion, is to be honored and respected. We will witness an example of that because one of the vice-presidents of the Association will be speaking to us in this Assembly.

With regard to AIC, I participated in two international Assemblies, one in Santo Domingo and the other in Rome. It continually impresses me in my different visits throughout the world, their commitment as women to work with women who are poor.

Another initiative with regard to the Vincentian Family: Every year, traditionally, since the previous administration, there have been meetings of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family. In this administration we have added a new element, that is inviting a different branch or branches of the Vincentian Family to participate and to share with us how they live the charism today. As a result, the international meetings have grown in size making it a bit difficulty to exercise any kind of decision-making. As a result I made the recommendation that was accepted by the leaders of the Vincentian Family, to form an Executive Committee made up of the Daughters of Charity, the AIC, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Congregation of the Mission. They would meet on a yearly basis to take any suggestions of the Vincentian Family leaders and/or to make recommendations or decisions. Particularly important is the decision-making process for this Committee regarding the Vincentian Family Executive Board that operates in the micro credit project in Haiti. One of the principal reasons that I together with the Delegate for the Vincentian Family, Father Ginete, have decided to invite new members of the Vincentian Family is to see the charism alive and well beyond our traditional branches. It is good for us to see this dynamism which can enrich us and encourage us to be evermore creative in the mission.

It is delightful to see how these different branches, some 260 associations or congregations, lay or religious that are connected with the charism of Saint Vincent, are desiring more and more to have Vincentian formation, to drink from the Vincentian spirit and charism, and to do so as a Family. I want to encourage us to be at the forefront together with the Daughters of Charity and the other traditional branches to promote this. When we are possessive of our
charism we only cause harm, and mostly to those who are the beneficiaries of who we are, those who live in poverty.

Now, let's take some time to reflect on some of the things that I have said to you, with photos as we listen to the music that accompanies it.

**Further Concrete Recommendations for the Future**

Let us begin *ad intra*, that is with regard to the curia and general council itself. One of the things I discovered at the beginning of my service is that the curia is overly centralized. As a result I have attempted to restructure that since everything is centralized in the Superior General, everything passes by his desk. What I have attempted to do is a greater distribution of the responsibilities, particularly among the Assistants, but also with other members of the curia. For example, if information arrives from a particular province, I assure that a copy of that goes to the Assistant and one to myself. I would hope that the Assistant would give recommendations as to how we might treat the issue. It has worked to some extent with some of the Assistants but not in every case.

I recommend to the new administration that there be an increase of one Assistant. That means that the Vicar General and rather than three Assistants, four Assistants. With this there is no need to change our Constitutions, because it is clearly stated in 116 § 2: *"The Assistants General, at least four in number...."* My recommendation is that we have an additional Assistant, and that each Assistant be assigned different responsibilities besides the canonical visits.

I recommend that the Vicar General be responsible with the Procurator General of the Congregation for confreres in difficulty. This should be a priority for the next administration. As I have said, our main resources are the confreres and we need to care for them as best as we can.

We have an Assistant for Missions as Statute 57 states: *"One of the Assistants General has a special responsibility for foreign missions."* I recommend that office continue as it has been developed by Father Ubillus, but with a particular focus on the international missions of the Congregation and the areas of mission of the different provinces that ask for assistance.

Another Assistant would be the delegate for the Vincentian Family. Therefore we would eliminate a role within the curia itself. I have discussed this with Father Manny Ginete, who in my opinion, has done an excellent job and received a very positive evaluation from the council in this matter. I think that the mandate from the
General Assembly of 1998 has been fulfilled, at least a basis is established, the sense of being a Vincentian Family is clear. It is more highly developed in some places over others, but that is only because of the history and the experience has been greater. But if one of the Assistants General becomes a delegate for the Vincentian Family he would continue to develop or promote that sense of Vincentian Family in the Congregation of the Mission.

Taken from our Visitors meeting that focused mostly on ongoing formation and as well initial formation, another Assistant would be responsible for this area. It is interesting that the majority of congregations have different assistants, particularly to deal with initial and ongoing formation. I think that it is important, especially when we want to focus on our main resource which is the conferees. It has been heard any number of times from the different reports we receive from provinces that one of our greatest weaknesses that we need to address is precisely the formation of our own, both at the initial and ongoing stages.

A fifth Assistant will be responsible for the relations with the Union of Superiors General and issues such as Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation. Father Alfredo Becerra, who is our archivist and librarian at the curia, has done an excellent job in assisting me in this area. I hope that he would be able to assist one of our Assistants as well. It seems to me that we need to have a focus that takes us beyond the internal structure of the Congregation of the Mission. We need to know those whom we serve and the issues that touch their lives. In the other two Assemblies that I have participated in, we have tried having more consciously present to us the reality of the poor. To say that the General Assembly, for example, is not a place to talk about our commitment with the poor or the reality in which the poor are living would stifle any lines of action that we might want to put forth. That Assistant would help keep us in touch with the world as it is, and especially the plight and reality of the poor.

I have found particularly helpful in my six years the reports from our representative at the United Nations, because the working groups that he is involved in always are about major issues and how they affect the poor. As I said in the most recent tempo forte circular, any Vincentian who is not conscious of what the major issues are today and how they affect the poor is lacking in his witness as a Vincentian.

The number and geographic representation of the Assistants, Constitution 116 § 2 not only says "at least four in number" but "from different provinces are elected for a six-year term." I would hope that there would be a confere from Africa on the council as well as from Asia-Pacific, one from Latin America, two from Europe, that is
representing Eastern Europe as well as Western Europe, and one from the United States. That is six people: Superior General, Vicar General, four Assistants. I think that it is possible and it is time we move in that direction. It does not mean in any way that the Assistants will be representing only the interests of their particular geographical area, but we will have representation from the world-wide Congregation who can help speak to and address the issues that confront us.

The final recommendation *ad intra* has to do with fund-raising. It is recommended to the new administration that the Superior General be more directly involved in the question of fund-raising especially for the patrimonial funds of the provinces in development. When people want to give donations in a large amount of money, often they want to see the head of the organization. That is the reason behind this which I fully support.

With regard to *ad extra*, further recommendations to add to what I have already said, regarding the provinces. A major issue for the future continues to be the need to take into consideration the question of reconfiguration, owing to the fact that we have to be as efficient as possible in our evangelization and service of the poor. We do so by cutting down on personnel in administration, increasing the manpower available to serve the poor, making greater efforts at interprovincial collaboration and being able to move beyond where at times, perhaps, we have grown comfortable, to serving those on the margins. The dialog regarding reconfiguration has been left in the hands of the provinces themselves, but with encouragement of this administration and will continue to be a recommendation for the next administration. This is not a matter that deals only with the Congregation of the Mission, it is a major issue of all the congregations, especially the larger congregations, as many are trying to address the question of their mission and being creatively faithful to it. Many times it involves a greater collaboration and a willingness to change the structures that sometimes impede that goal from being accomplished. The issue has been addressed in a number of provincial assemblies and other places as well and it will be a part of this General Assembly’s discussions at different moments.

Regarding the economic situation of the Congregation, Constitution 148 § 2 dealing with goods says: *"The Congregation of the Mission embraces a communitarian form of evangelical poverty in that all goods of the Congregation are held in common, and the Congregation uses them to pursue and attain its own purpose more successfully."* I simply raise this question here for the next administration: how true is this constitutional article as we look at the reality of the Congregation of the Mission? As we will hear in the Econome
General’s report, many of our provinces are very generous in their giving to provinces in development. But I would recommend to the next administration to help the provinces move beyond a question of generosity and see this solidarity with the provinces in development as a question of justice, sharing as best as possible so that we truly hold in common all the goods. I believe that this will make us more effective as well as faithful in our service of the mission.

We will take a few minutes for reflection and quiet listening to music while viewing some pictures.

I would like to list some conclusions, matters that I consider of utmost importance that do not need much explanation because they are clear. We need to challenge ourselves as we move into the next six years with a serious examination of what I am about to say.

First: Know and live the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission. With this alone things will be better than they are now and above all for the poor. Specifically:

- There is the need to be more consistent and faithful to one hour daily of meditation (see C 47 § 1).
- The need to be serious in our development of living community plans. We are a community for mission. If community is not taken seriously then we can hardly be faithfully creative to the mission (C 27 / S 16).
- All goods are held in common (C 148 § 2). The importance of solidarity from a justice perspective.
- Creativity in our forms of evangelization would involve greater collaboration at the interprovincial and international levels of the Congregation and with the Vincentian Family as well as with other ecclesial and non-ecclesial organizations that have ends similar to ours.

Before we move on to discussion, then the break, and then question and answers, a few words to you as delegates to the General Assembly, particularly to those who are here for the first time. Do not let the rules and regulations that you find in the Directory stifle you from participating fully in the dialog that occurs in this aula as well as in discussion groups throughout the three weeks of the General Assembly. I feel that this Assembly will only be successful if we truly work from a communion and participation perspective.

Let us pray that we be open to the Spirit as we chose those who are to be our leaders for these next six years, taking seriously the need to have a Superior General who is willing to be the spiritual animator of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family, following the direction that we have already been given in these modern times of the Congregation. In addition, it is of the
utmost importance that the Superior General have a General Council that supports him and helps him to follow through on what he hears as the issues of utmost importance manifested in this Assembly as well as manifested in the reality of the Congregation today as I have tried to present in this report.

"May this be a time of listening and dialog, of communion and joy, so that we can give prophetic witness of God's love in the whole world. Living in the state of ongoing renewal, we can then be signs of creative fidelity to the mission."

Thank you.
Dear confreres, good morning,

Allow me to begin my presentation, asking your indulgence. This morning and the next two mornings, with the presentations of the Econome General and of the Directors of the VSO you will be inundated by a series of numbers, diagrams, charts and such like. This high concentration of numbers will, perhaps, be boring and tiring. Father John and Father Miles will certainly make their numbers attractive. I, for my part, will just call your attention to the peculiar characteristics of "my" numbers. They do not refer to an amount of money but to real people, our confreres. It is often said (and Father General in his talk also reminded us) that the greatest resources of the Congregation are the confreres themselves.
Well, the numbers that we see will help our common reflection on our "richness" or "poverty" in this sense. We will see where our "losses" have been more relevant in these last six years, and where we should "invest" our resources, not only to maintain, but above all to make "fruitful" the most precious talents entrusted by the Lord to our community, that is, its members.

Let me now present schematically the structure of my presentation:

1. I will begin by presenting the numerical evolution of the C.M. in these last six years 2004-2009.
2. I will then show the ministries of the C.M. in numbers and percentages.
3. The third part is the center of my presentation and will focus on the trends of the confreres in the provinces in the last six years: new incorporated, deceased, expulsions, excardinations, dispensations from priestly ministry.
4. I will then present the situation updated June 2010 of the absences in the individual provinces according to the different types of absences.
5. I will conclude my presentation showing the graphic of the evolution of "admitted" students in the C.M. in the last six years.

The Numerical Evolution of the C.M. in the Last Six Years

The numbers in table n. 1 refer to all the incorporated members. They do not, therefore, include students who have not yet taken their vows. The source of this data is the annual statistics that the General Curia receives from the provinces and sends to the Holy See. As we can see, the numerical decline of the members of our Congregation has not stopped in the last six years. From 3,435 members in 2004 we dropped to 3,299 confreres as of December 31, 2009. The negative total amounts to —136 members, meaning an average yearly loss of 27 confreres.

Actually when we see the data of the movement of the confreres (entrances and departures) taken from our database at the curia, we will notice that the loss of confreres in these six years is greater, 162 members. The discrepancy between these numbers may be due to the fact that the provinces, when filling out the statistical forms for the curia, do not always list as their members confreres who have been absent from the community for many years. On the contrary, according to our data base, a confrere remains a member of the C.M. until he has been officially dismissed or dispensed.
In table n. 2, we can now see the distribution of the confreres by their status: bishops, priests, deacons, (that includes both the few permanent deacons as well as the transitional deacons who are waiting to be ordained), brothers, and incorporated students.

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<td>2999</td>
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<td>164</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>157</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>3346</td>
<td>3325</td>
<td>3299</td>
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</table>
Finally, tables n. 3 and 4 show the percentages in which Conferences contribute to the total of the members of the C.M. In comparison with 2004 CEVIM diminished by 2% and NCV 1%. On the other hand APVC increased by 2% and COVIAM by 1%. CLAPVI percentages remained stable. The progressive shift of the center of the C.M. from Europe and the US to the other continents is continuing.

The Ministries in the C.M. Numbers and Percentages

Let's now have a look at the ministries covered by our confreres. Table n. 5 compares the data of 2009 with that of 2003, according to the information provided by the Provinces in their statistics. The biggest changes regard the decrease of the number of confreres
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<td>Missions Ad Gentes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminaries and clerical formation</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special studies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chaplains: military, immigrants, hospital, associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chaplains: Vincentian Lay Groups</td>
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<td>Pilgrimage sanctuaries</td>
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<td>Social Communications (publications, radio, television)</td>
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<table>
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<th>MINISTRY</th>
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<td>Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missions Ad Gentes</td>
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<td>Administration</td>
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<td>Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminaries and clerical formation</td>
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<td>Special studies</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Communications (publications, radio, television)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table n. 5
dedicated exclusively to the formation of our own, of those at the service of the missions *ad gentes* and of those serving the Daughters of Charity. The most noticeable increases concern the retired and ill confreres, those serving missionary parishes and the several different chaplaincies. We can also notice the always low number of confreres dedicated to popular missions.

Tables n. 6 and 7 show the distribution of ministries by percentages. As we can see, they have not changed much in the
last few years. That can indicate continuity but also little flexibility and availability on the part of the confreres to cover ministries different from those they have been involved in for the last six years.

The Movements of the Confreres in the Provinces

We noted at the beginning the progressive decrease in the number of confreres in the C.M. in the last six years. Let’s now try to discover the reasons for this decrease. I would imagine that all of us believe that the main reason for this negative balance is the high number of deaths in the provinces of Europe and US which is not balanced by the new incorporations, coming above all from the provinces of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Things in reality are not exactly like this.

Table n. 8 will help us better understand the real reasons. It gives us valuable data both at the level of the Conferences and at the overall level. I will begin with some considerations on the Con-

![Movements 2004-2009](image_url)
ferences limited to the comparison of new members and deceased. But before doing that, I must explain that I put the data of Cameroon and Vietnam, both regions of Paris, respectively under the COVIAM and APVC and not under CEVIM to get a more realistic picture of the actuality. Similarly the data for Belgium, which is a region of Congo, have been put under CEVIM and not under COVIAM.

- COVIAM has a very positive balance: 97 new members as opposed to 10 deceased.
- CLAPVI, too, has a positive balance, although in a lesser degree: 120 new members as opposed to 91 deceased.
- In NCV the balance is the other way: only 5 new members in the last six years as opposed to 15 deceased.
- APVC has a positive balance: 114 new members and 40 deceased.
- Finally, CEVIM: here the disproportion between new members and deceased is very large: 71 new incorporated and 219 deceased.

If we have a look now at the columns regarding the overall level we notice however that the gap between the first columns, that is the new incorporated, and the second, that is, the deceased, is minimal: just 14 confreres less, 428 deceased, as opposed to 414 new incorporated. This means that if we compare only the number of the new incorporated with that of the deceased in the last six years, the Congregation overall would be stable in the total of its numbers. What is, then, the main reason for the deficit (-162 confreres)? We must look at the other four columns: the expulsions, the incardinated in dioceses, the dispensation from vows, and the dispensation from priestly ministry. These are the main factors, and not the deaths, that contribute in a major way to the drop in the members of the C.M. On these factors I would like now to focus our attention, with the help of the next graphic.

Table n. 9 shows in a detailed way the various kinds of "departures" of the confreres. In the last six years 72 confreres have been dismissed (ipso facto or through a process), 37 have been excardinated and incardinated in a diocese, 13 brothers and students have received a dispensation from their vows from the Superior General and 27 confreres obtained the dispensation from the priestly ministry from the Holy See. The total number of departures is 148. The distribution of these departures in the Conferences is not uniform. COVIAM has the lowest number (2 incardinations and 5 expulsions), whereas CLAPVI has the highest (23 expulsions, 17 incardinations, 8 dispensations from vows, 6 dispensations from
Out
2004-2009

Table n. 9

priestly ministry). NCV, APVC and CEVIM have moderate numbers. It is a bit surprising that CLAPVI suffered the greatest number of departures from the Congregation even greater than CEVIM which yet accounts for many more confreres.

We can also see that while the phenomenon of incardinations in dioceses is almost non-existent in Africa, USA and Asia Pacific, it is very prevalent in Latin America and to a lesser degree in Europe.

Let us now look at tables n. 10 and 11 to get an idea, in percentage, of how much the Conferences contributed to the departures from the Congregation between 2004 and 2009. By way of an example I also included the graphic giving the total number and percentage of confreres by Conference as of 2009. We see that:
CEVIM has 42% of the total members of the C.M., but in the last six years only 30% of the departures came from this Conference.

COVIAM has 9% of the total members and had only 5% of the departures during the last six years.

APVC includes 15% of the confreres. It contributed 14% of the total departures in the six-year period.

NCV has 10% of the confreres and 14% of the departures.

Finally CLAPVI has 24% of the confreres but 37% of the departures.
Let us now stack our columns (table n. 12); this is the picture that we get if we add the departures to the deceased for the years 2004-2009. The graphic shows effectively the real causes for the deficit at the end of these six years. Interestingly it also reveals that CLAPVI, which had a positive balance in the comparison deceased-new incorporated, altogether has had more losses than new entrants.

**Picture of the Absent Confreres**

In tables n. 13 and 14, updated to June 2010, we can see the situation of the absent confreres which unfortunately very often has as its outcome a departure from the Congregation. This is the reservoir that often results in departures. The absences are divided according to their different types: absent with the permission of the visitor; absent with the permission of the Superior General; absent with the permission *ad experimentum*, that is in view of incardination
### ABOSENCES by PROVINCE - As of June 2010

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<th>PROVINCE</th>
<th>Total Province Members</th>
<th>Permission Visitor</th>
<th>Permission Sup. Gen.</th>
<th>Permission Ad Exper.</th>
<th>Illegitimate Absence</th>
<th>Out (not Official)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Prov. Abbr.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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Table n. 14
in a diocese; illegitimately absent; and unofficially departed confreres. These are absent confreres no longer listed in the catalog but that have never been officially dismissed, and therefore are still juridically members of the C.M. It is important that we bear this in mind since the congregation is still responsible for these men and for their possible penally relevant behaviors.

For your convenience the charts also show the total number of members of each Province as well as the percentage of the absent confreres for each province.

Some general remarks:

1. All these absences should be temporary and concluded in one way or another.

   - The first two types of absences (permission from the visitor and permission from the Superior General) should be provisional in view of a readmission of the confrere into the community at the expiration of the permission. Unfortunately experience shows that this is very often a first step toward the fourth type of absence, illegitimate.
   
   - The third type of absence (with the permission *ad experimentum*) should theoretically last five years at the longest and should usually conclude with an incardination. However, this does not always happen: there were cases of confreres who after nine years *ad experimentum* in a diocese had still not been incardinated by the bishop.

   - The fourth and fifth types of absences (illegitimate) ought to be resolved through a process of readmission or dismissal. However, most of these confreres remain in the limbo of the illegitimate absences.

2. We often see a sliding of the confreres from one type of absence to another. One starts with the one year permission from the visitor, then continues being absent with the permission of the Superior General and ends up with a permission *ad experimentum* or with an illegitimate absence. I wonder if this sliding is inevitable or if there is something we could possibly do to change the dynamic and reintegrate the confrere into the community.

There is a certain amount of confusion, sometimes, on the part of the visitor about the different types of permissions. It may be helpful to remember that permissions given by the visitors can never be *ad experimentum* in view of an incardination of the confrere in a diocese. Only the Superior General can grant this type of permission. It also occurs, unfortunately, that visitors give permissions of leave only verbally.
As for table n. 13, the most striking feature is the difference in the percentage of absences in the three Conferences. CLAPVI has a percentage more than three times higher than COVIAM and almost three times higher than NCV. Specifically Central America, Colombia and Ecuador have percentages above 20%.

Let us now look at table n. 14 with the remaining provinces.

- The percentage of absences here are lower, specifically CEVIM has the lowest percentage of all the five Conferences even though it is the most numerous Conference.
- Let me give you a final remark on the total of the absent confreres. There are 209. This would be the second most numerous “province” of the C.M. after Poland.

**Admitted Students in the Last Six Years**

In table n. 15 we can see the trend line of the admitted students in the last six years. The data come from the yearly provincial statistics. Their reliability is however, relative as some provinces sometimes
count among their admitted students even those who have not yet made the internal seminary. It is certain however, that there has been a decline in the number of admitted in the last six years.

Some Final Observations

At the end of this overview on the statistical trend of the C.M. in the last six years, let me dare to draw some conclusions:

- The total number of confreres continues to diminish. The new entrants cannot balance the losses. The gap however is not caused, except in a minimal way, by deaths, which approximately equal the new incorporations, but rather by the departures from the C.M. It is this continuous — allow me the term “hemorrhage” — that weakens the body of the Congregation. Though we cannot do much about the deaths of the confreres, we certainly can commit ourselves to stop this hemorrhage of departures.

- Dismissals and dispensations are simply measures aimed at solving and regularizing situations already compromised for a long time and for which there is no other possible remedy. They are the conclusive act of long and often painful processes. It is necessary, therefore, to act at an earlier stage, at the origin, to prevent future “runaways” from the C.M. Specifically, in my opinion, we should work to strengthen both in the initial and ongoing formation the sense of belonging to the community, valuing and deepening the meaning of our vow of stability. The need for this is also shown by the “migration” of a considerable number of confreres toward dioceses.

- Special attention should be paid to the issue of the absent confreres. The cases of reintegration into the community are very rare. In fact, the most frequent outcome, unfortunately, is leaving the community. Let me encourage you not to judge too readily that a confrere with a permission to be absent is destined to leave. My feeling is that an adequate accompaniment could be helpful in an eventual return of the confrere to the community perhaps with a even stronger attachment to his Vincentian vocation. Relatively high numbers of vocations do not give us reason for failing to pay attention to the confreres already in our provinces.

- I am happy that among the recommendations of the Superior General to the next administration is to have Assistants General appointed to follow the confreres in difficulty and for initial and ongoing formation. I believe that the extent of the phenomenon of the absent and those who have left without
permission can no longer be dismissed as "personal cases!" This demands care and attention at all levels, local and general.

- St. Vincent wrote to our confrere Giovanni Martin from 27 September 1646:

  "Our Lord's work is accomplished not so much by the multitude of workers, as by the fidelity of the small number whom He calls."

So, when we speak of a crisis in the Congregation today, we must think not so much of a scarcity of vocations, but rather to a lack of perseverance in the vincentian vocation. It is the fidelity to the charism in the Congregation of the Mission that suffers a crisis, at times dramatic. Various are the reasons for this loss of appreciation of the value of fidelity. I think, judging from the letters that arrive at the Curia, that in many cases the confreres prefer to be "free lancers" because they feel, rightly or wrongly, that their creativity is demeaned in community. For this reason I find it providential that the theme of this General Assembly is: "Creative fidelity." It is significant that these two terms are combined: creativity is not opposed to fidelity. It is necessary to confirm and make manifest that it is possible to be creative within the community, that it is not necessary for a confrere to detach himself, to absent himself or to leave the Congregation to be able to express the talents that God has given him.

As we have heard in the song yesterday: "That all those that will come after us will find us faithful." Yes, this is my hope and my prayer: that we can always be faithful to God who has called us, faithful to the community in which God has called us and faithful certainly to the mission which He has entrusted to us.

Thank you for your attention.

Translation: MARY HALE, D.C.
PRESENTATION
OF THE DOCUMENT OF CONSULTATION*

THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION

The members of the Preparatory Commission of this Assembly have met three times in Rome, 9-13 June, 2008; 15-19 June 2009; 7-11 December 2009 respectively.

At the end of the second meeting we sent to all the provinces a questionnaire to stimulate reflection and dialog in four areas:

- An evaluation of the progress made since the AG 2004
- The topic of on-going formation
- The concept of faithful creativity to the mission (which is the title of this Assembly 2010)
- Dialog with the Vincentian Family and the poor

We asked first the Domestic Assemblies and then the Provincial Assemblies to work on these topics. A “synthesis” of the ideas and most significant experiences were to be sent to the Preparatory Commission by October 31, 2009. This has been done.

At the third meeting, the Preparatory Commission reviewed the material sent from the Provinces and, at the suggestion of the Superior General and his Council, have not prepared a documentum laboris, but a Document of Consultation, to bring together and put in order this material to send it to the participants of the Assembly, so that they will be able to prepare adequately to be ready to dialog, which will be the focus of this General Assembly.

A Document of Consultation seems to be a more adequate instrument for an Assembly that is characterized by dialog rather than a final document. For this reason, you will not be asked to vote on it at the Assembly (cf. Directory 26, #2). The Assembly, in fact, is free to use it as they wish.

This document that is sent to all the participants at this Assembly two months before its beginning (cf. S 88, § 2, 4) consists of three parts linked logically together. The first is entitled “a look to the past”

* The entire Document of Consultation was published in Vincentiana, 54th Year, N. 2, April-June 2010, pp. 163-180.
and is intended to make an evaluation of the progress made in the last six years.

The second part is entitled "a look at the present" and is intended to focus the attention of the members of the Assembly on the signs of the times to interpret and from this, to seek new ways and new means for the apostolate.

The third part is entitled "a look to the future" and contains the themes central to the Assembly, which the members of the Assembly are called to reflect on and dialog about among themselves. These themes are: creative ministry, systemic change, on-going formation, reconfiguration, the Vincentian Family and the poor.

As the Commission that has prepared this Document of Consultation, we wish fervently that it will serve to stimulate reflection and dialog. With this intention we have prepared it, with this hope we consign it to you.

Elie Delplace, Bienvenido Disu Macaso,
Patrick J. Griffin, Luis Fernando Macías Fernández,
Giuseppe Turati, Yosief Woldemichael Zeracristos
WHAT IS THE VSO?

AN IDEA

Solidarity — that the Congregation of the Mission will be a community of goods such that, according to the location, there is equality in the capacity to evangelize the poor.

43 Provinces, vice-provinces, missions, international missions and (NEW!) 2 Vicariates Apostolic under the care of the CM are eligible to send applications to the VSO.

A CHALLENGE

An anonymous donor challenged some provinces to match a yearly donation. These monies form part of the Vincentian Solidarity Fund and allow the CM to make an offer to supply half of the cost of a project if a funding agency will supply the other half of the cost.

AN OFFICE THAT REPORTS TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

The Superior General officially opened the office on June 15, 2002 (8th anniversary!). The VSO reports to the Curia quarterly, with the director traveling to Rome twice per year.

A "FACE" FOR THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

The VSO offers an optional service to the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and International Missions of the CM. However, the VSO is also creating relationships and a history with funding agencies that, over time, will enhance the trust that these agencies have in the CM. The office is gaining valuable experience in project design, grant-writing and solicitation of funds that serves the CM in effectively engaging in its mission.
WHO IS THE VSO?

FOUNDING DIRECTOR BRO. PETER CAMPBELL, C.M.

Although he is no longer on staff with the VSO, his hard work and organizational skills allowed the VSO to progress rapidly in its mission. Thank you, Bro. Peter!

FR. MILES HEINEN, C.M.

Executive Director since January 1, 2009. I am a member of the newly established Western Province of the USA, with 28 years of ordination, speak English and Spanish, was in Petén, Guatemala '85-'92, was Econome in the former provinces of the South and West USA and served '05-'08 as associate director of Pastoral Formation in St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, California.

MR. SCOTT FINA

Associate Director since July 12, 2004. He holds a doctorate in political science. His previous Vincentian service includes serving as administrator of the Ghebre Michael Inn (for homeless men) in Philadelphia and administrator of the Vincentian Renewal Center in Princeton, New Jersey for the Eastern USA Province. Scott and his wife Barbara have three (triplet) sons: Sean, Matthew and Luke.

MS. TERESA NIEDDA

Associate Director since November 1, 2009. While new to the office, Teresa is no stranger to the Vincentian family. Teresa is a 1984 graduate of Niagara University (Eastern Province USA) and is an active alumna. She previously worked as Director of a non-profit organization that works with migrant farm workers in the USA. She brings to the VSO her experience in grant writing, international relations, and a love for the Vincentian charism.

GOAL OF VSO

TO ASSIST THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION WITH OBTAINING FUNDS FOR ITS EVANGELIZATION AND SERVICE OF THE POOR

WRITING GRANTS AND SOLICITATION OF FUNDS

The work is:

- writing grant requests to solicit funds for projects
- distributing micro-project grants from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund
• solicit funds to fulfill the obligations of the Patrimony Fund Project (NEW!)
• to obtain money for other needs of the CM as directed by the Superior General and his Council (NEW!)

RESULTS OF VSO

PROJECT NUMBERS (MARCH 30, 2010)

VSO PROJECTS – 142 projects funded in 8 years of service (total $5,031,355 USD). These projects require a more robust application process because VSO seeks a partner to fund at least half of the project and must gain the trust of this partner so that they will invest in the proposed project.

VSO MICRO-PROJECTS – 72 micro-projects funded in 5 years ($353,455 USD). These projects require a less detailed application, can be obtained only once per year per eligible entity, have a maximum value of $5,000 USD and are funded by donations received from individual CM’s.

TOTAL: 214 projects totaling $5,384,810 USD.

PROJECT ANALYSIS BY TYPE – the who (see chart at end of report)

ADMINISTRATION = serves the Confreres
Remodel the provincial offices; buy office equipment for province, buy furniture for CM house, etc.
4.61% of total

CANDIDATES = serves formation of CM
Build seminary, build formation house, computers for students, etc.
26.99% of total

PASTORAL = serves evangelization outreach
Build Church, build pastoral center, formation program for laity, vehicle for pastoral work
22.32% of total

SOCIO-ECONOMIC = serves human needs of people
Program to feed street children; care for the elderly, literacy program, health outreach, etc.
46.08% of total
PROJECT ANALYSIS BY ACTIVITY – the what

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OBSERVATIONS and NOTES

There is currently a heavy focus on construction. It is to be noted that the Curia uses the mission fund distribution to address operational concerns, particularly around formation, and directs building requests to the VSO. However, buildings are tools. I emphasize with you the need to choose this tool wisely.

Micro-projects represent 6.56% of the total of all grants received. Though representing a small percentage of the total, the micro-project grants have a large impact because their ease of use encourages confreres to take a first step in searching out resources to help meet the needs. The micro-project funds on hand, which now depend on the donations from individual CM’s, represent about 1.5 years of funding if the current rate of use continues. Let me encourage you to keep our confreres informed of the opportunity to donate funds to the Curia for the purpose of these Micro-Project grants.

The major portion of the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF) is positioned, due to a surplus built up over its 8 years of existence, to have available the normal level of funding for 2010 and 2011. In 2012 it is possible that the level of funds available to the VSF could drop by as much as 30% due to shifting priorities in the donor provinces. In 2013 the funding, compared to current levels, will drop another 20% as the surplus is used up. This challenges VSO to find other sources of funding to continue its current successful methodology of matching grants. Failing that, the method will change to a less robust contribution on the part of the CM.

REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCE OF VSO

OVERSIGHT BY VISITORS/VICE-VISITORS

The unity of the mission depends on the Visitor/Vice-Visitor. It is best that projects correspond to the long range goals of your province or vice-province. This is particularly important in your commitments to foreign missions where change in personnel can radically affect
the success of the project. Your signature on a project represents your judgment that the project is promoting, as best it can, the long term mission of the province. Nothing is more disheartening to a funding agency than seeing a building, which they funded, that has now fallen into disrepair and disuse.

The grant money, once received by the Curia, is quickly moved by the Treasurer General into your province/vice-province curial account. You alone, as visitor or vice-visitor, can authorize the Treasurer General to release the funds. It is easier for him if the details necessary for the transfer are accurately communicated in a timely manner.

People who help us with donations expect a report. Every application includes a commitment to do this reporting using the forms VSO supplies. Please be vigilant with the confreres about their fulfilling competently this task.

PARTICIPATION

There have been 43 entities that can send project or micro-project applications to the VSO. 37 have actually applied one or more times. Of the grants received, the 17 entities receiving the lowest number of grants have received 13.08% of the total grants received. The 17 entities receiving the highest number of grants have received 86.92% of the total grants received. Remember that the participation is optional and there is certainly a varied level of participation. The work of designing a project and writing a grant application can seem very difficult to complete, but obviously many are completing it and the poor are served. The VSO will help you get through the grant process. Please use our service!

A VISION

Reporting is, in general, a hated task. My dream is that all the provinces/vice-provinces will develop a province “culture” (“this is the way we do things”) such that transparent and well organized reporting of finances is the expected norm. You cannot imagine how important competent reporting is to establishing a good relationship with funding agencies! Please support the workshops for effective money management organized by our Treasurer General as a valuable step in this direction!

The Systemic Change Initiative has put at our disposal the experience gained from well designed projects. Well designed projects are collaborative efforts involving the people who benefit from the projects. The project has the personnel and resources to be sustained. My dream is that this process of designing and adjusting
projects in collaboration with the people who benefit from them will become the "culture" of the CM. I am quite certain that in this way the CM will strengthen its credibility and become a magnet attracting collaborators who want to support our work.

NEW and EXCITING PROJECTS FOR VSO – solicitation of funds

ZAFÉN

The project links, via a website, prescreened projects in Haiti to the international Vincentian Family and the Haiti Diaspora in order to facilitate loans or donations. On island, Zafén is connected to the "alternate bank of the poor," Fonkoze, which manages the paperwork and reporting.

The major branches of the Vincentian Family (CM, DC, SVDP, AIC, Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy) and an anonymous foundation have pledged 91,700 USD per year over the next 5 years (458,500) to establish a "seed money" fund to support the salary and expenses of an on-island Program Developer and the expenses of the Vincentian Family Board.

The goal is to have 1,000,000 USD. Counting the pledges and other donations that have already been voluntarily made, there will be some 777,045 USD available and some 222,954 USD left to be solicited, as of March 31, 2010.

The VSO will collaborate with the International Project Services Office of the Daughters of Charity to assist in soliciting these funds.

Please alert the Vincentian Family in your area to this opportunity. Please keep this project in mind when people express to you a desire to "help the poor."

PATRIMONY FUND PROJECT
(Constitutions # 148 § 1 “use goods as patrimony of the poor”)

VISION

The dream of a relative equality throughout the international CM in regard to financing the mission is the motivation of this project. The hoped for outcome is creative fidelity to the charism of St. Vincent expressed in missionary projects and in assisting the materially poor.

I would like to invite Fr. Mathew Kallammakal, visitor of the North Indian Province, to tell us what a Patrimony fund has meant to his province.
METHOD

An anonymous donor, over 10 years, will contribute a total of 5,000,000 USD. The CM is challenged to solicit an equal amount of donations, 5,000,000 USD. The ten years ends on December 31, 2015.

9 Provinces and vice-provinces have been selected based on need and lack of access to funds from other sources. A 10th fund will be established for the Superior General to benefit the members of the Vincentian Family of which he is director.

The funds established will be of various sizes and will remain under the administration of the Curia until such time as the province or vice-province has proven competency in managing the fund.

The distribution will be based on a spending rule. Each year the province or vice-province is allowed to receive 5% of the average calculated by adding together the year end value of the fund for each of the previous 5 years and dividing by 5. The “corpus” (total of donations and contributions received) of the fund must always remain. Only the earnings or increase in value may be distributed. In this way the fund helps the province or vice-province have the financial stability to be able to creatively respond to the needs of the mission and, at the same time, challenges the province or vice-province to humbly accept its limitations as the corpus is protected for future generations of confreres.

If we are successful in this first phase, a second 10 year period will begin, using the same strategy to build another fund of 10,000,000 USD. The beneficiaries of this fund’s distributions, using the same strategy of distribution as the first fund, will be determined by the Superior General and his Council. A major focus can be the creative fidelity to the Mission with an eye to huge projects, something like project “Dream,” that are beyond the scope of any particular province or vice-province.

NEED

About 2,000,000 USD has been donated or is pledged by the Curia, certain CM provinces, individual confreres or was received as legacies sent to the Curia in Rome.

The Curia, realizing that the international CM has already dedicated about 33.8 million USD to this type of solidarity in other “patrimony funds,” has directed the VSO to solicit funds outside of the CM in order to raise the remaining 3,000,000 USD.

Foundations and Funding Agencies fund concrete projects that have a specific time line of implementation. This Patrimony Fund Project is an endowment, not a specific, concrete project.
Individuals are attracted to endowments since their gift will continue after they are gone.

The VSO needs your permission and your help to establish contact with individuals whose heart has been touched by the charism of St. Vincent and who might want to help a province or vice-province become more financially capable of creative fidelity to the mission.

*Can you direct VSO to confreres who are good at soliciting funds?*

*Can you direct VSO to people who have interest in supporting the Vincentian Charism?*

*Could VSO talk with you to discuss some possible strategies of soliciting funds for this project?*

*Could you partner with VSO in encouraging the members of your province or vice-province to consider the Patrimony Fund Project in their legacies?*

**THANK YOU!**

Your attention has been greatly appreciated. May VSO be of service to you in the evangelization of the poor!

**ADDENDA**

VSO – Total Grants since inception by Type and Activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Pastoral</th>
<th>Socio-Economic</th>
<th>GRAND TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>145,588.24</td>
<td>949,861.20</td>
<td>844,271.82</td>
<td>1,598,104.82</td>
<td>3,537,826.08</td>
<td>65.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>35,000.00</td>
<td>207,661.00</td>
<td>35,550.00</td>
<td>120,518.66</td>
<td>398,729.66</td>
<td>7.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>8,750.00</td>
<td>96,613.69</td>
<td>39,180.00</td>
<td>98,981.62</td>
<td>243,525.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>10,000.00</td>
<td>23,707.71</td>
<td>45,436.00</td>
<td>587,846.76</td>
<td>666,990.47</td>
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<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>18,310.00</td>
<td>1,000.00</td>
<td>11,490.00</td>
<td>30,800.00</td>
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<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>30,234.00</td>
<td>174,831.96</td>
<td>237,718.25</td>
<td>64,154.00</td>
<td>506,938.21</td>
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<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>247,882.24</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1,202,156.07</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,481,095.86</strong></td>
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<td>4.60</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>22.32</td>
<td>46.08</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CEVIM
(CONFERENCE OF VISITORS OF EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST)

CORPUS JUAN DELGADO RUBIO, C.M.
Province of Zaragoza

The Conference of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission of Europe and the Middle East is composed of the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of Europe and the Middle East: Holland, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Hungry, Paris, Toulouse, Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Salamanca, Portugal, the Middle East, Turin, Rome, Naples, the Vice Province of Cyril and Methodius and the regional superior of Belgium.

CEVIM was envisioned during the Visitor’s meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1989) and held its first meeting in Paris during Easter (1990). From that time the Visitors of Europe and the Middle East have maintained, without interruption, their conference and have met every year in different Provinces during Easter week. We have also come together during the time of the General Assemblies and the meetings of the Visitors of the Congregation.

During the 2004 General Assembly, the missionaries who participated in this gathering, met as a continental group and accepted lines of action with regard to the commitment of the Assembly. This round table highlights the more important lines of action and outlines that path we have traveled, its lights and its shadows.

1. Strengthen the Conference of Visitors of Europe and the Middle East (CEVIM) with new statutes and a new structure

In order to fulfill this commitment, CEVIM studied and finally approved new Statutes for the Conference in 2005 during their meeting in Trier, Germany. The new structure is composed of a Permanent Council which meets three times a years and the President, vice-President and Secretary, who have held office for a longer period of time, have created a more effective way of working together and a more effective means of promoting the different initiatives.

The methodology that was followed during the general session of the Conference involved simultaneous translation in the four
official languages of CEVIM (English, French, Italian, and Spanish). We worked together in language groups to deal with those matters which would lead to specific proposals. All of this has provided us with wider participation in the decision making process and in carrying out our decisions and agreements.

The creation and actualization of the web page CEVIM, through a process of simple permission for the user, allows us to access information and documents and has become an important means for mutual sharing and knowledge.

2. Initiate a European plan for initial and permanent Vincentian formation

This commitment has become real with the creation of an Inter-Provincial Internal Seminary which was agreed upon by eleven European and Middle Eastern Provinces. The other two European provinces have occasionally participated in this project even though they did not sign the agreement. The formation at the seminary is done in one of these areas and languages: French, Italian and Spanish.

The meeting in Rome, January 2008 of the missionaries of CEVIM who work in formation led to an exchange of criteria and mutual knowledge. The Final Document of this meeting makes us aware of the formation processes of the Provinces, moves us toward the consolidation of a solid plan of formation and we are sure that this constitutes a valuable contribution to the revision of the Ratio Formationis of the Congregation of the Mission.

The CEVIM organized two meetings for young confreres: in Budapest (Hungary) during July 2007 and in Castellnovo (Spain) during June 2008.

In January 2007, CEVIM sponsored a meeting in Zaragoza (Spain) of the provincial treasurers. The General Treasurer of the Congregation participated in this meeting.

In January 2009, CEVIM sponsored a meeting in Naples (Italy) for those missionaries engaged in parish ministry.

All of these meetings had simultaneous translation in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish). This is one of the primary difficulties that we encounter during these meetings since the translation of the documents and interventions involves a costly infrastructure and laborious human effort.

CEVIM is planning to hold, by linguistic areas, a continental session on Systemic Change with the participation of the coordinators and advisors of the different groups of the Vincentian Family. This will take place after the General Assembly of 2010.
3. Promote collaboration with the Vincentian Family and other Organizations that are working in Brussels so that we can participate in projects of social solidarity with the European community

In successive sessions of the Conference of Visitors of CEVIM we studied ways to carry out this commitment that we made at the 2004 General Assembly. Finally, in the session that was held in Krakow during Easter 2008, which included the participation of Maritchu Ral, the European representative of the International Association of Charity, CEVIM agreed:

Aware of the importance of the participation of the Vincentian Family when making decisions that affect peoples lives, above all the poor,

a) The Visitors of CEVIM, through the Permanent Council, will maintain contact with and collaboration with the representatives of the AIC which by statute enjoys participation in European organizations.

b) The secretary of CEVIM will communicate to the Visitors information that may be of interest to the Provinces and the requests for information solicited by representatives of the AIC.

c) Each one of the Visitors can communicate to the representative of the AIC concerns, information or petitions related to persons or groups that are most neglected in their countries.

d) The Conference of Visitors of CEVIM will promote collaboration by reflecting upon the Vincentian response to poverty and by encouraging the AIC groups in each country.

This relationship is producing fruits, though not easily measured, with regard to sensitivity and participation of the Visitors and the missionaries in making decision that effect the poor.

4. Promote meetings for study and exchange of ideas among the confreres to examine the phenomenon of immigration and Islam in Europe and to do this from a common Vincentian perspective

CEVIM celebrated their annual conference in Istanbul (Turkey) 2006 and dedicated several sessions to the phenomena of immigration and Islam in Europe. The meeting of 2009 was held in Beirut (Lebanon) and focused on the same phenomena.

The provinces have agreed to an exchange of some missionaries in order to respond with greater competency to these new realities.

Certainly this commitment should be made more concrete in the coming years.
5. Promote an exchange of confreres among the European provinces

The Visitors must come to a concrete agreement in order to actualize this commitment that was assumed in the 2004 Assembly. In fact, the provinces of CEVIM have, during these last years, promoted an exchange of missionaries with some positive results.

The most significant inter-provincial collaboration (not only an exchange of missionaries) has become visible during recent years, especially in relation to the Vincentian Family.

This commitment must also be further developed during the coming years.

6. Other Commitments

At the time of the 2004 General Assembly, CEVIM formulated some commitments to be pursued on a local and provincial level. I limit myself here to recalling those commitments:

- To be mindful of the vocational dimension in all our apostolic activities.
- To promote in the European provinces a common style of evangelization and charitable activity.
- To promote community relations of friendship, confidence and respect.
- To promote the spiritual and Vincentian life of the members of the community.

Finally, CEVIM has taken on other commitments which, though not explicit commitments during the 2004 Assembly, have contributed to our creative fidelity to the mission:

- Mutual invitation among the Provinces to participate in the retreats organized by the Provinces.
- Supporting the Vice-Province of Saint Cyril and Methodius and the mission in Albania.
- Reflection in order to respond to the urgent mission needs of Turkey, Romania, and Greece.

Together with the commitments that are stated here and the accomplishments that we were able to achieve, there is no doubt that the Spirit wishes to invite us to break new ground. But I ought to stop here since I have been asked to review the past, to outline the path we have traveled during the past six years.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
I address the theme that was requested by the Superior General for this round table discussion and thus outline the path of the Congregation in Latin America and the Caribbean from the time of the last General Assembly until the present. I begin by stating two presuppositions:

a) CLAPVI has become an ordinary institutional reality in the life and the mission of our provinces and our local communities.

b) Thanks to this reality the natural resonance to the General Assemblies of the Congregation is particularly enthusiastic and has a great impact on us. In other words, our conference has created among us a very close relation with the General Assembly, a relationship that existed even before the Assembly of 2004 when the Final Document took on a new dimension by including the concretization of the challenges through means of continental lines of actions.

I now place before you my reflections which will deal with four levels.

1. The resonance in Latin American and the Caribbean to the XL General Assembly

There have been four sources which at the same time have become paths

a) The challenges of our provinces, among which I highlight: accompaniment of the people, especially the poor; missionary and evangelizing parishes with a traditional vision of reality, work with the laity and youth and with regard to the Vincentian Family; a more prophetic personal, community and institutional witness; planned vocational promotion; initial and permanent formation that is renewed and renewing; openness to the missions ad gentes; response to the new poverties, such as immigration; inter-provincial cooperation.
b) The dreams that we shared with the previous Superior General in the meeting that took place during the 2004 General Assembly: local communities centered on the Word of God and provinces with a missionary understanding *ad extra*; attention to youth; programs of vocation promotion and leadership formation; fertile ground for community life; missionaries involved in the formation of the clergy; specific Latin American spirituality.

c) The lines of action that we proposed in the last General Assembly: the Vincentian vocation as key in following the evangelizer of the poor; assimilation of the anthropology of the poor; Latin American school of Vincentian spirituality; inter-provincial missions and missions *ad gentes*; articulation of objectives with the Vincentian Family; youth ministry that is more than vocational; humanness of formation; inter-provincial cooperation; a sense of belonging that is more charismatic than institutional.

d) The postulata of the General Assembly referred to the Continental Conferences: the regionalization of formation and the establishment of a fund for provinces in need; fomenting youth ministry and vocational promotion; ecumenical and inter-confessional dialogue; the ministerial character of our priestly vocation.

2. The activities in Latin America and the Caribbean that responded to the challenges of the XL General Assembly

Here I refer to those that had a continental character, some of which were animated by the provinces, and others by CLAPVI; all of which were part of two different three year plans that were formulated in the last two Ordinary Assemblies of CLAPVI, that of Lima in 2005 and that of Buenos Aires in 2008. I list these according to the plans outlined in the last General Assembly.

a) Revitalize our vocation: Latin American school of Vincentian spirituality in Curitiba; meeting in Bogota that dealt with the anthropology of affectivity; meeting in Rio de Janeiro on Lectio Divina and Lectio Vincentiana; meeting of young missionaries in Mexico; meeting of brothers in Santo Domingo.

b) Strengthen our apostolic activity: respond to new situations of poverty and the more vulnerable with provincial and local plans for systemic change; defense of life that is threatened and planning this with the support of the commissions for justice and peace and creation; courses in Santiago, Chile for evangelizing and missionary parishes; two meet-
ings with the Vincentian Family (Mexico and Bogota); meeting in Caracas with the advisors of the Vincentian Family; Latin American and Caribbean meeting in Mexico on systemic change.

c) Renew our community life: provincial meetings to deal with the Practical Guide for Local Superiors; provincial formation teams; four formation courses for formators; inter-provincial Internal Seminaries; meeting of treasurers in Panama; normalization of the irregular situation of confreres; regionalization of CLAPVI by zones; publication of the magazine CLAPVI.

3. The principal ideas that have been highlighted in Latin America and the Caribbean during the last few years

Here we deal with convictions that have taken root in the heart, not only Vincentian convictions but also convictions with regard to the consecrated life and the Latin American Church.

a) The centrality of the Word of God as the rock of the Church and the foundation for the missionary following of the Teacher, the soul of theology, spirituality, formation, and pastoral ministry, the path for personal encounter with the living Lord.

b) The ability to listen which unites obedience with action, justice with love, witness with preaching, faith with righteousness, worship with social commitment.

c) The suffering face of Christ in the suffering faces of the poor: everything that has to do with Christ is also related to the poor and everything related to the poor has a claim on Jesus Christ.

d) Unity and diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean, our great nation, the common home of many people who reflect on their lights and shadows, their richness and poverty, the unity and the diversity of the Trinitarian community.

e) The possibility of a new Vincentian life, at the service of the poor with a lifestyle that reflects that of the poor and is more evangelical and significant.

f) The prophetic character of our Conference, CLAPVI which has been configured in a way that is proper to the Vincentian Family but faithful to our common roots and the international character of our charism and the inter-continental character of our provinces.
4. Difficulties in fulfilling our commitments

The majority of these pertain to the context in which we live; some, however, are reflected in the interior of the missionaries and the communities and stem from what the document of Aparecida considers as change: change that is rapid and profound; cultural change that has affected the spiritual well-being of our people and as a result, affects our candidates and missionaries. We prefer to catalogue these as new scenes and emerging issues and we can classify these in three categories:

a) Social-cultural: their impact is not only economical but also human and ecological and are a result of the world’s financial crisis; impoverishment and the increase of misery; the split between ethics and the economy; the increase of activities in search for natural resources which damage the environment; human trafficking; widespread and wholesale corruption; narco-trafficking and its impunity; neo-popular authoritarianism and dysfunctional democracy; anthropological reductionism of educational reforms; the disasters in Haiti and Chile; the undocumented status of millions of Latinos in the United States.

b) Religious and ecclesial: religious syncretism; the search for God outside of traditional institutions; the loss of credibility on the part of religious institutions as recognized by Aparecida as “declining structures” in the Church; the seeming irrelevance of traditional models of consecrated life.

c) Vincentian: decline in vocations, the aging of our missionaries, the absence of confreres, new illnesses, the deterioration of interpersonal relationships, the weakening of apostolic efforts, the loss of a sense of belonging, activism, the abandonment of personal prayer, the neglect of community life, the primacy of relationships outside the community rather than inside, the tight economy of our provinces.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
I bring you greetings from the continent of Africa and Madagascar. The CM is alive and well in Africa. It was in Kinshasa in 1994 that Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M., chaired the first meeting of the body of Vincentians in Africa and this body he named COVIAM – Conference of Visitors in Africa and Madagascar. COVIAM has really grown from what it was to where it is now.

COVIAM has 10 members:

1. Congo Province
2. Ethiopia Province
3. Madagascar Province
4. SJJ Province
5. Nigeria Vice-Province
6. Mozambique Vice-Province
7. Kenya Region
8. Tanzania Region
9. Rwanda/Burundi Region
10. Cameroon Region

In 2004, at the GA in Rome, COVIAM committed herself to 9 lines of action under the following subheadings:

1. Revitalizing our vocation
2. Strengthening our apostolic work
3. Renewing our community life

1. Revitalizing Our Vocation

1. Continue the formation of formators (in Kenya)
2. Collaborate inter-provincially in terms of personnel and students
3. Study English and French (for better communication and closeness between provinces, vice-provinces and regions)
ACTIONS TAKEN:

Over the last 6 years, we have continued the program in Kenya. It is designed for a two-year program of one month each at the end of which DePaul University offers the graduates a diploma of completion. The provinces of Ethiopia and Congo and Nigeria have sent 4 confreres to the vice-province of Mozambique. We are also exchanging students in places of formation. COVIAM has decided to open a joint mission in Chad on Easter Sunday next year with confreres from Madagascar, Nigeria and Cameroon. Although we have intensified efforts at getting our students to study another language, we still have not done much in this area. But it is good to know that the consciousness is heightened now more than ever. We have just committed ourselves to learning Portuguese in addition.

2. Strengthening Our Apostolic Work

1. Make a commitment to the mission \textit{ad gentes} in Mozambique.
2. Help in the formation of diocesan clergy.
3. Collaborate with the Vincentian Family in the struggle against poverty, especially against malaria and AIDS.

ACTIONS TAKEN:

The provinces of Ethiopia and Congo and Nigeria have sent 4 confreres to the vice-province of Mozambique. Due to the numerous vocations in Africa, the diocesan bishops have severally asked the CM to support the formation of their priests. Several confreres are full time formators in diocesan seminaries and ongoing formation of diocesan priests. The fight against poverty, malaria and AIDS is a continuous effort. Several provinces have jointly organized enlightenment campaigns against AIDS and malaria. We appreciated the workshop and meeting organized by the Systemic Change Commission in conjunction with the Delegate for the VF in Yaoundé in July 2009.

3. Renewing Our Community Life

1. Struggle against ethnic tribalism through sensitizing, human and Christian formation, equality, tolerance, balance, and respect for human dignity.
2. Struggle against insecurity and individualism through co-responsibility in the administration of goods, transparency and
solidarity having only what is essential for the mission and not accumulating things for ourselves.

3. Create a website with a bulletin to come out every two months.

**ACTIONS TAKEN:**

We feel these tensions in the admission of new candidates, appointments and general evaluation of confreres. We have included tribalism in our formation program. We have encouraged our students and confreres to speak freely about these issues in the community and how best to see our different tribes as wealth rather than division. The formators’ program in Kenya also has this included in the curriculum. We are on course in this aspect. Our institute in Nairobi has a strong program on poverty for our formators. We are taking accountability very seriously. John Gouldrick, C.M., the econome general gave a workshop to the COVIAM members in May 2008 in Mozambique on transparency and accountability. It went down well. We are very conscious of this in our formation houses and communities. We did create a website but unfortunately we have not updated it recently. Finally, the meeting of COVIAM continues to be attractive to members. Our annual meeting is something members look forward to.

Thank you!!!
APVC
(ASIA-PACIFIC VISITORS CONFERENCE)

MATHEW KALLAMMAKAL, C.M.
President APVC
Visitor of the Province of India North

APVC is a Conference of Visitors of the Asia-Pacific Region, representing at present the CM provinces of Australia, China, India North, India South, Indonesia and the Philippines. This conference is organized with the objectives:

1. to carry the spirit and charism of St. Vincent de Paul into the evangelizing of peoples and cultures of the Asia-Pacific Region
2. to foster interior renewal and on-going formation for the mission in our region
3. to search for common lines of formation and action
4. to foster inter-provincial cooperation
5. to exchange vocation and pastoral experiences
6. to foster meetings between provinces
7. to create an Asia-Pacific community conscience

As a line of action flowing from these objectives, APVC is organizing and conducting the following activities:

1. APRF (the Asia-Pacific Regional Formators)
2. The Commission for Charism and Culture (CCC)
3. Supporting Solomon Island mission with personnel
4. The Vincentian Center for Asia-Pacific (VCAP)

1. APRF (the Asia-Pacific Regional Formators)

The Asia-Pacific Regional Formators (APRF) was founded in 1994 and its very first meeting was held in Manila in 1995. The purpose of organizing the Asia-Pacific Regional Formators meeting was to provide a common forum for the formators of Asia-Pacific Region to come together and be enriched by the sharing of others. The formators of Asia-Pacific Region are having regular meetings every 18 months since 1995. An average of 25-30 formators participate in the meeting. It has become a support system for the
formation personnel in the region in their ministry of formation. A greater advantage is the bonding of the group as we work intensely together. It is one that powerfully transcends cultural boundaries. Preparation is underway for the next meeting of APRF and CCC which is going to be in Australia in the month of September 2010.

Places where the meetings were held and topics discussed

1. Manila, Philippines (January 31 - February 14, 1995): What does it mean to be Vincentians today
4. Nausori, Fiji-Australia (July 9-22, 2001): The goal of formation is the Integrated Vincentian Missionary
5. Tainan, Taiwan (February 9-19, 2003): Asian-Pacific Faces of Vincentian Formation
7. Mysore, Southern India (February 13-25, 2006): Vincentian formation for mission
8. Prigen, Indonesia (July 2-15, 2007): on political charity and Vincentian formation
9. Gopalpur-on-sea (February 2009): Interreligious dialog and Vincentian formation
10. Sydney, September 2010: on Human formation – next appointment

2. The Commission for Charism and Culture (CCC)

In 2003 the CCC (The Commission for Charism and Culture) started to have meetings facilitated by Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, the Executive Secretary of APVC, at Taipei. This commission provides a forum for confreres to engage in and develop theological, philosophical reflection with the priorities and emphases arising from our Vincentian mission and spirit, in an Asia-Pacific context and in ways sensitive to Asian and Pacifican concerns. It is meant to stimulate research and reflection on Vincentian charism in an Asia-Pacific perspective and promote the growth of Vincentian literature in the region. This commission meets every 18 months and committed to publish a book every 18 months containing the theological and philosophical reflection of the confreres in the region. Since 2006 APRF and CCC meetings are conducted together.
3. Supporting Solomon Island mission with personnel

The mission in Solomon Island consists of:
1. Holy Name of Mary Seminary
2. Good Shepherd Parish
3. Nazareth Apostolic Center
4. Formation of CM candidates

APVC supports Solomon Island mission with personnel. In the year 2007 APVC has signed an agreement with the General Curia to this effect. However the Solomon Island Mission remains open to confreres from other Provinces who, by applying to the Superior General, volunteer their services.

4. The Vincentian Center for Asia-Pacific (VCAP)

At the APVC meeting held in Manila in 2000, the CM Provincial Visitors agreed to establish a Vincentian Center for Asia-Pacific Region. Because of its central location and the availability of materials, the Philippines was chosen to be the site for the Center. The center offers courses on Vincentian matters, plans formation programs for the members of the Vincentian Family. However APVC is rethinking about the continuation of it as a project of APVC.

5. Strength

1. APVC does a good job in the formation of the formators, Asia-Pacific Formators' meeting is very effective in this direction.
2. Provinces assist each other in the formation of candidates, China sending the candidates to Philippines and South India sending the seminarians to North Indian Seminary for training.
3. There is a willingness in this region to support the common project. Commitment made by the provinces in this region to help the mission in Solomon Islands is an example.
4. There is a good level of communication between the provinces. Visitors in this region are having regular meetings every year for evaluation and planning.
NVC
(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF VISITORS)

MICHAEL J. CARROLL, C.M.
President NVC
Visitor of the Eastern Province, USA

CURRENT COMPOSITION
- Provincials of three USA Provinces
- Formerly five members
- Meetings twice each year
  - Fall meeting Provincials and Secretary
  - Spring meeting with Councils with the goal of future visioning

ACHIEVEMENTS/RESPONSIBILITIES
1. January 25, 2010 reconfiguration of three Provinces to one, the Western Province.
2. Agreement on common formation in Theology and Novitiate, Spring 2010.
3. Formation of a National Vocation Directors Conference.
4. Sponsorship of biennial Formators Conference.
7. Vincentian Translation Project (30 years of support).
8. Vincentian History Project.

CHALLENGES
1. Need to complete the reconfiguration discussion between the East and New England Provinces.
2. Need to continue to develop the relationship with the Vincentian Family.
3. Investigate the possibility for a National mentoring program for the newly ordained.
Very dear friends,

I am particularly happy to speak to you at this General Assembly and in the heart of your jubilee year. 350 years after the death of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Saint Louise de Marillac their heritage lives in you and in your missionary concern. Yours is a beautiful history of love for the poor. Yes, you — and we — have a Gospel to communicate to the world, to make known the joy of love and free, gratuitous giving to the poor. This is good news in a world where all is the market, where everything is bought and sold. Our two families — the family of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Community of Sant’Egidio — have formed bonds of friendship and brotherhood from the end of the 1970s. Santa Maria in Trastevere and our evening prayer have opened the doors to previous General Assemblies, and numerous friends, members of your congregation, have personally taken part in serving in the canteen which in the very heart of Rome, represents a haven for thousands and thousands of foreigners, gypsies, and Italians wounded by misery and at times by violence.

Today, together, ideally we wish to view the roads of the world, which as Paul affirms ‘groans in the work of giving birth.’ But are there still groanings in the world? Is it still calling out? Are there signs to be seen and heard? We wish to hear its groaning and take account of its sufferings, in order to respond with humility and courage: the whole creation is waiting — according to the apostle—the ‘revelation of the sons of God.’ We might say: the peoples and the poor are awaiting the shining splendour of the charisms of charity and of love which we have received. Those who are suffering are waiting for us. We must be aware of this.
Today around us, there are no great visions for the future. In the dark years of Polish communism, Karol Wojtyla wrote 'man suffers for lack of vision.' There is not much vision in this new century hardly begun. Two great feelings, among so many others, have run through the first ten years of the 21st century and dominated hearts: fear on the one hand, and on the other the desire for betterment. This 21st century began with two events which seem to me to be revelatory. The first is September 11th 2001: the terrorist attack against the twin Towers in New York. It reveals and expresses a period of violence and struggle between civilizations and religions. There have been wars against terrorism and acts of terrorism. The first ten years of the third millennium, in which there were also positive happenings, were marked by violence: terrorist violence, and also organised criminality. September 11 inaugurated a time of fear. The clash of civilizations and of religions seemed to be confirmed. Dialogue was considered naïve. Suddenly war was rehabilitated. It was said that we must defend ourselves from others. The time of naivety and of generosity is past, as well as that of open doors. There was much talk about security. Little about justice, less about love, only security... This security that was talked about, reveals fear in the heart of many of our contemporaries.

Meanwhile the world became a global market: just think of the entry of China to the world trade organization, on the 11th November 2001. At that time, 2001, much was expected of the global market, almost as if it had been the incarnation of providence: the market would bring peace and democracy everywhere. It has not been so, indeed in certain parts of the world poverty has increased.

The great world market, with its advertising, has created in each individual a strong expectation of goods and of well being. Today's expectations are material in character, and individualist: goods and well being. There is a new post ideological materialism.

It is the hour of fear, but also of very materialist and consumerist expectations

In the face of this world, many become resigned and pessimistic. Others — even good Christians — do not know where to begin. It was said that little could be done without considering complex difficulties. Everything is connected in the globalised world. Should one be pessimistic? The first decade of the new century has not made history, unless a history of too much suffering.

I am thinking of what has happened in Haiti, this beautiful, poor country, with its history of hardship, which has experienced a
terrible devastation caused by an earthquake of magnitude seven. Thirty five seconds were enough to destroy a whole world. About 200,000 people buried and almost three million out of nine million inhabitants struck by the quake. As the media loses interest in the sufferings of Haiti, I am happy to know that for you Haiti has become a place of commitment to reconstruction and of hope. The Sant'Egidio Community in Port au Prince also as well as the Sant'Egidio Community world wide has chosen to invest human and material resources to help this people be reborn. 

Truly, the earthquake in its shadow has revealed the fragility of human life. Psalm 11:3 describing the powerlessness of the just person says 'Foundations once destroyed, what can the just do?' Much was spoken about solidarity with Haiti after the events, but now silence. This earthquake of the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century has been forgotten. It is an event which calls for a universal solidarity, which calls all to leave limited, selfish materialist attitudes. The globalisation of markets and medias is dangerous without globalised solidarity.

**We must start from Haiti. One must start from the poor to reach the whole world**

In a world dominated by money, where everything is sold and bought, we must develop and ripen a great and beautiful vision of persons and peoples as one family. Christians, in this new 21st century, must place the poor in the centre, in the heart of this family: they are and they remain their first friends. Christian identity is profoundly linked to love of the poor. Not an ideological, nor a political Christianity, but one deeply rooted in faith and prayer. That is where the seed of 21st century Christianity is planted. If we wish to travel with passion the world's roads, we must start from the poorest, from Haiti, not from home, not from our problems, be they internal or institutional. In this way we will become people of history and people of the spirit.

Each person if he loves the poor can become a mystic, that is a friend of God, for mystic means friend of God. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome from 590 to 604, faced barbarian peoples who were invading Italy, the collapse of the world and its institutions, famine and poverty. Gregory had been a Roman politician, a prefect. Then he had lived in a monastery meditating on the Bible. But he had a mystical experience of the love of the neighbour. While the world collapses, Gregory considers the poor as a determining part of the Church family: 'In as much as a soul is wide in its love of the neighbour, so much will it ascend in the knowledge of God' he says
(in Ex II, 2:15). It is not romanticism. The one who reaches down to the poor is born again from on high.

For Sant'Egidio 2010 began with the visit of Benedict XVI to the canteen where the poor of Rome eat. On that 27th of December, in front of Pope Benedict, on the occasion of his visit, I thanked the poor, for I am convinced that they are the masters and the protectors of the Community, like unknown angels. I did this with conviction. The poor in many of our communities, in all our communities, are the vicars of the Holy Spirit: they inspire and guide us on the way of love. Starting from the poor grows a vision of the world as a family for those without family, a family of families, a family of peoples. That is why I always say to our communities: when you join yourselves to the poor, you create free open spaces built on free giving, in a world dominated by economic interest.

Starting from the poor we change the world, for the Gospel shines out in a brighter fashion. Gregory says: 'By bending down to one's neighbour, one acquires the strength to stand up....' We become strong. A Christian life, friend of God and of the poor, spiritual and social at the same time, without divorce between the sacrament of the altar and of the poor. That is how we overcome the divorce between, on the one hand spirituality cut off from people, and on the other social action without religious heart, which becomes politics, or ideology, or sociology. We return to the vision of the Fathers. In this time of market materialism, spirituality is the source of love, giving, solidarity. There is a common priesthood of the faithful in the service of the poor. Saint John Chrysostom says:

'Do you not consider it a great honour to take into your hands this sacred cup which even Jesus-Christ himself must drink, and take it to your lips? And do you not know that only the priest is permitted to present you the chalice where the blood of Jesus Christ is? I do not rigorously examine, Jesus Christ says to you, the grandeur of the things I give you in order to compare them with what I receive from you. I will receive gladly what you will give me. Although you are only a layperson, I will never reject your gift, and I do not ask from you as much as you have received from me. I do not ask for your blood. I only ask for a glass of cold water. Think then who this person is that you give a drink to, and tremble in fear. Think that you have become Jesus Christ's priest offering him from your own hand, not your flesh, but your bread, not your blood, but cold water. He has clothed you in the garments of salvation, and by himself has clothed you; clothe him therefore at least through the one you serve. He has given you an honourable place in heaven, then free him from this cold he is enduring' (Homily XLV on Matthew).
A person who loves the poor cannot accept that the world will always remain the same or get worse. That person keeps the hope of changing the world.

Changing the world?

The world can change. It can become a family starting from the poor. But can this be achieved in a world which appears irremediably divided? Think, for example, of the antagonism with islam. It is said: will Europe invaded by immigrants be islamiced? The West looks to Africa only to profit from it. The Chinese do the same. Disputes have arisen among countries and organizations which were meant to help Haiti. Many think that one should not change, only defend.

I believe that we Christians have a great task. At a time of antagonism and disputes, our duty is not to win, but to repair and patch the torn cloth between persons, groups, peoples. The world, invaded by the media (where everything is seen and known rapidly) suffers an absence of true communication. Speaking of dialogue: there are some who are against, others for. Is dialogue weakness? But the language of love becomes dialogue. To dialogue means to speak to the other, to someone different from a religious view point, as to a member of my family. There is no mathematical formula which gives immediate results. It is not a matter of winning but of cultivating love. I am thinking of the kind of high liturgy in the spirit of Assisi — John Paul II's heritage. It was at Assisi that the pope, as servant of humanity, took the initiative to reunite men who did not consider themselves brothers.

The language of love, over the years, creates a cloth of friendship and unity, a network across the world, so that the world does not divide. The results? The victory? 'In friendship, there is victory' was the saying of the old eastern patriarch. I think of Tayyeb, a dear friend of the Sant'Egidio Community, named Grand Imam of the al Azhar, who has accompanied our journey searching for peace and encounter between the religions, beginning with their spiritual roots and their deeper traditions. In this regard, I also think of my recent journey to the Ivory Coast, where I met one hundred native imams, as well at their leader, in order to sign a pact of cooperation and together to uproot violence in this country. Much is possible!

Our ideal is peace

Christians are — Clement of Alexandria taught — 'eirenikon genos' a peaceful race. Peace begins with the poor; peace continues in friendship. Peace today is threatened, many wars have opened up.
One need only think of the endless war in the Holy Land, of Iraq, of Afghanistan: tragedies which seem never ending. And then there are many other wars which are not under the projectors because they are being fought in regions which are not strategic for the current geopolitique. And then the threat of terrorism, the possession of the atomic bomb which is spreading widely, much more than in the cold war.... I think of ideological or political type guerrillas, now replaced by a diffuse violence, which becomes a way of life.

After 1989, with the end of communism, we hoped for a long and solid peace. Negotiations in the Holy Land had given remarkable results. In South Africa the apartheid regime had collapsed. In 1992 peace was reached in Mozambique which ended a forgotten war. In El Salvador also, after very hard years, peace was achieved. These are just some examples of these signs of hope.

But the 90s were unfortunately years of waste, as much of energy as of possibilities. Many national passions and nationalisms revived; many hatreds were stirred up; the beginnings of new conflicts were put in place. With time, the horror of the second world war was forgotten, its six million Jews dead in the Shoah, the many civilians killed by the violence of war, the use of the atomic bomb. We had believed that the free market would guide us quickly to democracy, to peace, to progress, provided that competition met no obstacle. But we were contradicted by the actual crisis. September 11th came, but the response to September 11th was not November 11th.

War is the mother of all poverties. War makes the rich poor but it especially strikes the poor, for it is the mother of all poverties. In lands where despair reigns States often fall apart. The lack of a state is an extra poverty for the poor who live outside any order. This is what happens in African countries, where resignation mixes with deep rage, a fertile ground for new violence. For many tomorrow's horizon is under the sign of despair. But we can risk peace.

What a heritage of peace the Lord left his disciples! Jesus expressed it in his last discourse in the Gospel of John: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you; I do not give it to you as the world gives it' (14:27). Gospel peace is the absence of war, of violence, of oppression; but it is something more, which is not subject to events. God is the author of peace, as the prophets proclaim and as the apostle Paul sings in the letter to the Ephesians: 'For it is he who is our peace' (2:14).

Resistance to violence, to war, to hate, is profoundly rooted in the christian's identity: in imitation of the peaceful Lord, peace pours out from our humanity. The words of a great Russian monk, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, come to mind: 'Acquire interior peace and thousands, around you will find salvation.' From the heart which receives the
Gospel of peace, flow energies of peace to the men and women around him.

The defence of peace is decisive, for, like everyone else, we allow ourselves to be carried away by passions, ethnicities, nationalisms, confrontations, fundamentalisms, vengeance and we finish by wasting miserably the great gift of peace. Being Christian does not immunise us from the intoxication of the passions. Christian communities are fraternities of peaceful people, who before being pacifist are peaceable.

Our duty is to achieve greater things! We are called to be peaceful and to live as peacemakers. In this world where everything is calculated, where everything is sold and bought, to be peacemakers means to generously spend one's life. Generosity sows something in history, even in the most complex contexts. Ecclesiastes affirms: 'Sacrifice your money for a brother and a friend, that he may not be ruined and lost under a burden' (29:10). The peaceful man is generous. When I think of a community such as yours, I see it as a little globalisation (a community of men from different Countries) in the world, living peace and fraternity. It is not an institution, but a prophetic fraternity.... But you might say: there are problems everywhere... in our communities, about our future, our becoming older.... What will our and your future be?

Psalm 37 says: 'For the peaceful man a future lies in store.' The future says the psalm will belong to men of peace, Christians are the wise, who do not let the passions or violence intoxicate them. In the Jewish prayer of Saturday afternoon one reads what Rabbi Eleazar said: 'The wise increase peace in the world.' Yes, the Gospel of peace is not a fashion, but it is rooted in the heart of every disciple and in the foundations of the community. Our communities are free and peaceful places. Because of this Christians are persecuted. Formerly it was because of ideology. Today it is for a different reason....

I am thinking of the Christians in Iraq. They are not killed because they represent a threat, but because by their lives they oppose a climate intoxicated by violence, by a predatory economy, by disdain. They are a landmark of peace and humanity. Annalena Tonelli has said 'our task on earth is to spread life. Life is certainly not condemnation, the rights of war, accusation, vengeance, putting the knife into the wound, bringing up the mistakes and faults of others....'

Peace is living together despite differences, for in history nobody is the same as another: man is not the same as woman, fellow citizens do not have the same religion, nor belong to the same ethnic group, nor have the same language, nor the same social class, or people. They live with difference.
Christian communities constitute a place and space of clean air in this world where one breathes in a heavy, selfish, bellicose atmosphere. Christian communities, with love and with a spirit of forgiveness, sew together again so many torn human communities, so many districts, so many city suburbs, so many peoples. Don Andrea Santoro, a Roman priest assassinated in Turkey in 2005, said: ‘To overcome ferocity the intelligence of charity is needed and the mobilisation of profound resources.’ Peace is not reserved to the politicians. Peace is something too serious and cannot be reduced only to politics or to diplomacy. Peace is up to us: it concerns us and it is our mission. There is a daring of the imagination, the school of fidelity in difficult situations which engender possibilities.

This is something which happened less than two weeks ago at Sant'Egidio, where we signed an agreement for reconciliation in Guinea Conakry. To support peace and democracy in Guinea Conakry has been one of the most recent objectives of the Sant'Egidio Community's peace work. After last year's military coup, the situation in this west African country became much more complex: on one side the military hanging on to power, on the other a civil and political society pushing to bring the country — for the first time in its history — towards democracy. Guinea is a rich country, but its people became poor because of authoritarian regimes, corruption and violence since independence.

Sant'Egidio helped the dialogue between the parties and supported structures for transition, put in place in the midst of great difficulties. We wanted to support the thrust towards democracy by inviting to Rome all the political parties and the representatives of civil society so that they would agree on common rules for transition and guarantee transparent elections in a peaceful climate of reconciliation. Two important documents were produced, signed by all parties: the global political agreement which fixes the rules for handing over power and the Rome appeal which established respect between the political powers, the acceptance of results, guarantees for the losers. One had to avoid ethnic splintering and make space for governments of wide agreement so that no one would feel excluded from this important moment of reconstruction of the country. At Sant'Egidio, representatives who had not spoken to each other for a long time rediscovered a spirit of dialogue around the construction of a common future for Guinea. This is one case from our recent history.

If we are small, we must be big, big in love and in hope. The orthodox patriarch Athenagoras, father of ecumenism used say: 'If we know how to stay big, unity will happen.' If we remain big, the human communities where we live will not tear apart, but will strengthen, the poor will no more be chased away, and humanity will flourish.
We will be big, if we become believers. Dreams will flower if we work with love. The great Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus said: 'Where there are no men, there force yourself to be one!' You are small, you are a small community, force yourself to be a man, to be human....

Dear friends, in our communities Christian universalisation is truly experienced, as has accompanied Christianity since its origins, as one sees in the letters of the apostle Paul. Each community, like yours, is a globalisation of gratuity and of peace. Our universal fraternities are a sign and a response to the logic of confrontation between races, cultures, different civilisations. They are a sign that men and women, belonging to different histories and nations, can be a family without frontiers. Our globalisation is a space of resistance to the laws of the globalized market, even if one must sometimes negotiate with them.

And our communities not only comprise the members, but the poor (whom we care for and who connect themselves to us) are a part of our family too. Our fraternities are also, in certain way, the international identity of the poor, belonging to different countries and continents. Such is the experience of Dream, which treats those sick with AIDS: in quite different situations a same spirit unites different experiences of taking care of the sick and the suffering. Our fraternities are as well a universalisation of solidarity.

**DREAM**

I know that you are familiar with the experience of meeting and of collaboration between the Sant'Egidio community and the Daughters of Charity, which in the diversity of our charisms, is built on the necessity of not giving up a vision of a different, better, more human world. I hope that, in the same spirit, we will find and seek new ways to battle together with you also. We need them, the sick need them. But our collaboration has not only been functional, but rather the sign of a friendship, which starting from the poor and the sick, has touched the depth of Christian communion. It is what I used say to our orthodox brothers: *in charity we are already united.*

We are two small international units without frontiers in many of the world's countries, friends of the poor, who still hold a vision of hope.

It is often asked how laity and religious can work together. Theory fills pages. The story of collaboration between church families with different histories and characteristics is tightly linked to the poor. Those who are sick with AIDS have allowed us to meet each other. This shows that each were searching to serve the sick and the poor. Dream, intended by Sant'Egidio for the care of those sick with AIDS,
started in February 2002 in Mozambique; in Choqwe, in the province of Gaza, the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul adopted Dream for the first time, dispensing care to more than 5,000 sick: a small people of women, men and children who were condemned to die and found their resurrection. In 2006 a centre was added at Kubwa in Nigeria with about 1300 sick (in Nigeria they wish to open other centres in the future); then the Nairobi centre in Kenya opened in 2008 with about 700 sick; Dschang in the Cameroon opened in 2008 with about 300 sick; Mbandaka in the democratic Republic of Congo opened in 2009 with about 300 sick. The next centre to open in 2010 will be at Masanga in Tanzania.

This general agreement, by which we aspire to excellence in care, to formation, to the equipment of laboratories of molecular biology, allows a dream to be realised. It is what Benedict XVI said when he met the Community of Sant'Egidio in Cameroon: to dispense to those sick with Aids in the South the same care which is dispensed in the North, avoiding and overcoming the death sentence represented by the pandemic through care of the adults and of the children and through preventing vertical transmission from mother to child. This is a real sign of communion between laity and religious nourished by love of the poor.

It must be said that the Sant'Egidio community has a long history of friendship with religious, who were the first to take seriously its charism when Sant'Egidio was taking its first steps in the 70s in Rome. Among these religious were the consecrated men and women of Saint Vincent de Paul.

We are a community of laity, with professional and family lives, but we are equally called to be spiritual men and women. As St John Chrysostom said talking to the people of Antioch, *it is the laity who need the Word of God more than the monks*, for they live in the difficulties and uncertainties of daily life. We become true friends of the poor, in being spiritual men and women, in listening to the Word of God, in opening our hearts to prayer.

Several decades of listening to the Word of God and of prayer together have transformed the little Sant'Egidio communities into sanctuaries where many men and women looking for the meaning of life find a refuge. Those who come to pray in the evening in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, see it filled with men and women, not all members of the Sant'Egidio Community, but coming from everywhere (among them numerous religious who live in Rome and are not simply passing through). I say this not to praise the Sant'Egidio experience, but to emphasise that our witness of welcoming prayer is often the greatest gift that we can give others. Places of prayer are sanctuaries of hope. In our houses, and churches
we must open spaces of prayer: may they be beautiful! Father Tavrion used say: 'Let beauty be shown and people will come....'

Of the numerous works we do, prayer has the first place. A welcoming place for prayer has been the first step which has marked the friendship of the Sant'Egidio community with many religious men and women. Many of these religious in turn supported us in economic difficulties.

The Sant'Egidio Community and you, together we venerate and love the poor in friendship and solidarity, in them we recognise the presence of the Lord: there is a sacrament of the poor, as Olivier Clement liked to say. For us the sacrament of the poor has also been a sacrament of unity, which has made us friends and fellow workers. This experience of fraternity in solidarity is for us all a sign of hope and a prophecy. Yes, prophesy that we ought not resign ourselves before a wall of impossibility. Rather we ought to pray, and feed our faith and hope. We must have visions of hope, for 'everything is possible to the one who believes.'

I will conclude. Without history, the world 'suffers from lack of vision' — writes Wojtyla. Many do not know where to go, and cannot see the next day. But, starting from Scripture we have a vision. God says to Abraham: 'Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, to the north and the south, to the east and to the west. All the country that you see, I will give it to you and to your posterity for ever' (Gen 13:14-15).

Abraham saw. What you see will be yours! What does that mean? You will gain and possess it? What you see with your eyes, with your vision, will belong to you. Possession to the limits of your seeing.

This faraway county, this distant poor person, that ignored person... will be yours. It is the Christian's gentle possession, possession without possession: to feel love for, to feel oneself responsible, connected. This gentle ownership, through love and taking responsibility, links those who are far, those who are divided, welcomes the poor, creates a family in the world. This is what makes history.

William, a young brother of the San Salvador Community of Sant'Egidio, in Central America, who was living in a district controlled by a mafioso type organization of gangsters, was killed. He was guilty of being a brave young man, whose honesty and generosity embarrassed their criminal activity, for it proved that one could be different in such a situation. It was an example of that diffuse but ruthless violence, without ideology or politics, which strikes so many men and women in many parts of the world. Christians also, are sometimes struck, because they are different.

Translation: ADRIAN EASTWOOD, C.M.
2. Creative Ministries

VINCENTIANS ON MISSION

MARY O’BROIN
Ember Team

My name is Mary O’Broin; I am the coordinator of the popular parish missions team in Ireland; we have ten years experience with a lay leadership team. As a team that constantly tries to be creative and faithful to the Vincentian tradition, I am here to share our experience; what worked and what did not.

Since the early 1990’s the team has named itself The Ember Team, Vincentians on Mission, taking its inspiration from the image of rekindling embers. Our mission statement highlights our new challenge as we go out in the spirit of St Vincent de Paul to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and work with people as they fan the gift of faith that God has given them into a flame. While the embers of their faith are still burning, the underlying reality is the need among clergy and lay people for restoration of faith and trust in the Church to which they belong.

Ireland is a First World country and the context of our mission is unique. The Catholic Church in Ireland has been rocked in the last couple of years by sex abuse scandals. Actually there has been a growing sense of anger and alienation over the last 10 years which the crisis has magnified. The sense of loss that exists is huge. People in general feel disillusioned and floundering. There is some bitterness towards the clergy, a sense of despair with the bishops, and mixed feelings about our Cardinal. There is a lack of direction among the clergy, a sense of not knowing what to do, or how to respond pastorally. This has had a negative effect on the number of missions for the team in the last year and a half. For some priests and parishes however our team is a model of a way forward given our make-up — lay/clergy and its Vincentian Way. While this is the situation on the whole island of Ireland, for Northern Ireland the impact has an extra dimension as a result of the conflict between Loyalists and Nationalists (the conflict is known in Ireland as the ‘Troubles’). Catholics are putting up with Loyalists who feel vindicated in their negative views of the Pope and the Catholic Church in general.
Now a little on our background and how we work as a team. The team has been at the centre of the Apostolate of the Irish Province since its foundation in 1832. In the 1950's there were 25 Vincentian priests operating on the mission team, by the '90's there were 2. The late 90's saw the experimental inclusion of lay people on some missions with varying success. In 2001 there was a significant change in our structure. A lay coordinator was appointed and a lay coordinator has led the team since. I joined in 2006 as the only full-time member of the team which now includes 3 Vincentian priests part-time, 16 lay people who contribute depending on the needs of each mission, and a consultant liturgist since 2008.

I will give you one case study and tell you what we did and what we learned. The parish is St Malachy’s in the Markets area of Belfast, an inner-city parish with active paramilitary organizations, and the area of Northern Ireland most affected by the Troubles.

The mission was in response to an invitation from the parish priest. The purpose of the mission was:

- To help prepare the parish for a major change — 2 priests will be reduced to 1. Our brief was
- Empowerment of the pastoral council
- Faith formation for the pastoral council
- Training in personal development, communication, and basic facilitation skills
- Work with the pastoral council to encourage involvement of lay people in parish
- Reach out to and build trust with ‘organisations’ in the parish

The early stages of planning with the parish consisted of establishing and building up trust. We listened non-defensively to the people as they told of the events in their community. In these early stages a weekend of mission was held to initiate the later launching of a newly formed pastoral council. The pastoral council has overcome almost insurmountable blocks but it took bravery and courage, faith and hope. They have launched themselves into a community that is supportive in part, but also hostile of their involvement with the Church because of historical/political reasons. The team facilitated a strategic plan for the parish on what they would like to see in place in their parish in the next 3 years. Evaluation of the 1st year takes place later this month.

What we learned in St Malachy’s is that the embers are still there. People have faith. They want to hear and live the Good News of Jesus Christ. People want missions but in a new form. Of course we try and respond, e.g. St Malachy’s is not an 8-day traditional mission, but a
3-year project. The most important thing we learned was to meet people ‘where they are at.’

In the last four years we have had 3 main responses from priests and parishes actually — some happy, some wondering, some resistant.

Priests and parishes want our style of mission, i.e. lay/clergy:

- Training in a range of skills and faith formation were key elements in these missions
- Pastoral councils trained
- Pastoral councils and parishioners applying new learnings in their parish when the mission was over
- For example we held a sports day to bring together a divided parish
- We worked with a Women’s Support Group in Derry in Northern Ireland in an area of heavy paramilitary involvement
- We brought liturgical celebrations outside the church

Priests and parishes wondering about our style of team but want to try:

- For some it was a positive and learning experience
- For others when faced with the reality of how the team worked in practice it was challenging and sometimes hard to accept

Resistance to a lay/clergy team — either by the parish or by the priest.

- In these cases there was a desire for the ‘old way’ and sadness at its passing
- Reluctance to engage with reality of falling numbers of priests
- Rejecting need for lay involvement

Given the circumstances of the Church in Ireland the challenge facing the mission team is huge. How do we deal with the woundedness? How do we deal with corporate disillusionment? How do we deal with disillusionment as a team when we face it? Our mission team is at the cutting edge. Well, even faced with these difficult times we have not backed down. We are faithful to the Vincentian tradition and the Vincentian Way, and continually seek to find new and creative ways to respond. As a lay/clergy team we model collaboration — a sign of hope for the years ahead.
FORMATTION OF THE LAITY IN RIO DE JANEIRO

AGNALDO APARECIDO DE PAULA, C.M.
Visitor Province of Rio de Janeiro

I am thankful to Father Gregory Gay, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, for inviting me to participate in this panel.

1. Lay Formation, a recurrent theme and a constant concern

During the last Encounter of on-going formation and renewal of life (April 12-16, 2010) in the Province of Rio de Janeiro, the Vincentian Missionaries who are ministering in different works spoke in small groups, as well as during plenary sessions, about the importance and the need of formation for our mission and for the laity.

At this time we are living in a rich environment of experiences in the area of lay formation, an environment that points out the need for a better and more organized formation (a system of formation plans and programs) in order to respond to the needs of the present realities, in order to attend to the demands of the laity and thus realign our human and financial resources.

2. Foundation

a) Article 1.3. of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission states: we shall help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.

We have defined missionary ends that we want to achieve. Among these ends is the preparation of people for pastoral ministry in the future, especially the preparation of leaders for diverse ministries. This means that we help to prepare people for different pastoral ministries: priests, deacons, brothers, religious women, catechists, teachers, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, music ministers, youth ministers, etc. The preparation of other ministers of the clergy and the laity for a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor is one of the principle ways of achieving the end of the Congregation of the Mission.¹

¹ LAURO PALÚ, Dimensão apostólica e pastoral de nossa vida, Encontro de Formação Permanente e Revisão de Vida na PBCM, 12-16/04/2010.
b) The Statute of the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission, Article 3 refers to the activities that are undertaken by the Province:

- To promote courses, talks, congresses, seminars, symposiums and conferences;
- To offer and foment education for good citizenship;
- To offer and support activities of formation and promotion in communities where this is lacking;
- To promote beneficent, philanthropic activities that are directed toward assisting those in need, activities that promote collectivity, the common good, and social concern. This involves the concession of gratuities for contributing their services and for providing the use of their moveable and unmoveable goods.

The formation of volunteers in the Province of Rio de Janeiro is moving toward a social solidarity among citizens. That is, the individual with a bond of solidarity with other citizens, with the guidance of a Social Service professional, with a critical awareness of the reality, with an ability to work with individuals in the process of social participation... such individuals engage in complimentary activities of social assistance that are directed toward the population that is socially excluded. This is a citizen who is aware of the political and social reality. This is an ethical social individual who is convinced of the importance of human dignity and life, who is not indifferent to the reality of selfishness and the lack of solidarity in the capitalist society. Thus, this is an individual who is inclined toward social transformation and human-social development.²

3. General Principles

“Our process of formation is dialectical: it does not divide but harmoniously integrates prayer and action, faith and life, and does this on different levels and in dealing with the specific content of each level. Thus formation consists of a movement of integration that is complimentary, enriching and more productive.”³

In the first place formation seeks the sanctification of the laity in their specific and proper vocation. Every Christian adult, mature in the faith ought to be a witness of the transforming encounter that

³ Diretrizes Básicas para a Formação na PBCM, 3.
flows from a personal relationship with the Lord and a commitment to the mission that was carried out by the Son of God who became incarnate and lived in the world: to evangelize the poor.

4. Constant Concerns – Principles

   a) **Vincentian identity:** “Christ and the poor are the essential and indispensable perspectives of Vincentian formation and the sources of true formation.”

   b) **Begin with the reality** of the poor and the reality of the agents of transformation (lay missionaries and Vincentian volunteers). To seek concrete responses and transformations for the challenges presented by these realities.

   c) **Integral formation.** To carry this out it is necessary to be mindful of Christological-Trinitarian elements, mystical, human, communitarian, relational elements, attentive to the sign of the times and the reality of the poor and the community.

   d) **Team work and fraternal life** in accord with the Vincentian charism and Vincentian spirituality.

   e) **Generate new multipliers.** Mature Christian and Vincentian individuals who are willing to become involved in the recruitment and formation of new missionary followers of Jesus Christ.

5. General and specific formation

   We are firmly convinced that formation does not occur and cannot be limited to courses (whether, long, short or medium in their duration), seminars, congresses and other activities of this type. Formation accompanies people in every moment and condition of life and includes every dimension of their existence, that is, human-christian, communitarian, spiritual, apostolic and Vincentian. The local community is the place where the laity will encounter the specific sphere for their formation because it is there where they live and ordinarily where they are involved in the mission.

   Within this broad process it is important to develop a specific formation so that the laity can make a specialized contribution to ministry and confront specific problems with regard to the Vincentian mission.

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4 Cf. Síntesis del Encuentro Internacional de Visitadores de la CM, México 4-14/06/2007.
5 Ibid.
6. Levels of formation

In the Province of Rio de Janeiro, lay formation involves three levels:

a) Permanent Accompaniment
   - branches of the Vincentian Family, appointed or chosen spiritual advisors for the Vincent de Paul Society, AIC, AMM, VMY, MISEVI, and others
   - other works: missions, parishes, schools, and others

b) Systematic Formation (evangelization and human promotion)
   - classes that involve theological courses
   - publication of books and articles
   - courses in theological-missionary-Vincentian formation (Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro)
   - post-mission
   - social projects developed in areas where there is a lack of resources
   - education of young people and adults (Saint Vincent de Paul School, Rio de Janeiro)
   - social center Padre Raimundo Gonçalves
   - financing of formation courses and activities

c) Occasional activities (talks, retreats, formation encounters, etc.)
   - pastoral ministries, movements, parishes and diocese
   - Congregations of Religious Women, Brazilian Conference of Religious (CRB)

PROJECTS OF LAY FORMATION:
   two experiences

1. Course of Vincentian Missionary Formation

Responsible:
   Vincentian Family, Region of Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro.

Objectives:
   1. Provide the laity with a greater understanding of the missionary vocation: the objective and content of the evangelizing
mission of the Church, and specifically, the popular mission of the Vincentian Family.

2. Strengthen the missionary spirit for service together with the poor.

3. Seek responses to the challenges that are presented to the Vincentian mission with regard to the social, political, economic and cultural realities.

4. Capacitate pastoral ministers for the popular missions of shorter duration.

**Beneficiaries:**
Lay people committed to the evangelizing mission in the church, preferentially with the poor; lay people committed to works in the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family, especially those who participate in the missions of the Vincentian Family. Minimum age: 16.

**Organization of the Course:**
Initial Formation (Basic Course) is offered in two modules with the following way: eight bi-weekly encounters of three hours.
On-going formation occurs through seminars. Each participant registers for two seminars a year. Each seminar is composed of four encounters that take place bi-weekly and the session is for three hours (one theme is dealt with).

**Places where these are undertaken:**
Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro.

**Finances:**
Financed by the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

**Subsidy:**
Each participant is asked to contribute 5.50 to cover costs of photo-copying and refrigeration.

**Content:**
- Integration of the participants
- Sacred Scripture
- Introduction to Ecclesiology: the Church of Vatican II and the Latin American Church
- Vincentian Studies
- Liturgy
- Methodology of the Vincentian Popular Mission
- The reality of being missioned
- Spirituality: spiritual retreat
- Sociology: analysis of the Brazilian reality

2. Volunteers of the Social Projects

Responsible:
The Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

Objective:
To capacitate the volunteers who develop activities in the area of social projects in the Brazilian Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

Beneficiaries:
Volunteers involved in the social projects.
At the present time we develop reflection activities on Vincentian volunteer work into three groups:
- Volunteers of the CPF Project (Building and Preparing for the Future)
- Students embarking on social projects (students in the middle school and the Saint Vincent de Paul School)
- MAS groups (Multipliers of Social Action) – a group of mothers and friends of the Saint Vincent de Paul School.

Organization:
Formation and spirituality encounters at least twice a year.

Content:
The work themes in these encounters are developed with the methodology of Vincentian social action. Initially we contextualize the life and work of Saint Vincent de Paul. Then we begin and continue a study of the five virtues and reflect on the practical application of these virtues in our lay personal and community life.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
On December 4, 1648, Vincent de Paul wrote to Jean Barreau, the French consul in Algiers:¹ “There is no better way to assure our eternal happiness than to live and die in the service of the poor within the arms of providence and in real renunciation of ourselves by following Jesus Christ.” All of us here today believe deeply in those words. We are sons of St. Vincent. With literally millions of others over the centuries, we have been stirred by his life, his words and his works, and, like him, we have given our lives to God in the service of those living in poverty.

But how do we serve the poor? Our Constitutions, article 18, tell us that Luke’s parable of the Good Samaritan dramatizes the principle that love of God is displayed in effective love of neighbor. But today we recognize more and more that effective love involves not just binding up the individual victim’s wounds and pouring oil on them, but also making sure that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is safe for all in the future.

Today Fr. Erminio and I have been asked to introduce a round-table discussion about “Systemic Change and the Poor.” It is a topic that all the branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family have been emphasizing over the last several years.

Let me introduce the theme of Systemic Change in three steps: 1) some background; 2) the notion of systemic change; and 3) the systemic change project chosen by the international leaders of the Vincentian Family to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

¹ SV III, 392.
I. BACKGROUND

1. The Naming of a Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and its Mandate

In 2006, with the encouragement and support of a foundation, Fr. Greg Gay, the Superior General, named a Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and gave it the following mandate:

*To help bring about systemic change through the apostolates of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially those ministering to the oppressed poor.*

2. The Members of the Commission

**Fr. Norberto Carcellar Lagrosa, C.M.**

Founder of the Homeless Peoples Federation of the Philippines (HPFP). His training in social development and microfinance has enabled him to focus on systemic change projects like the one at Payatas in Manila.

**Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C.**

Until recently, Chief Executive of the Passage, a multi-faceted program for helping homeless people in central London.

**Fr. Joseph P. Foley, C.M.**

NGO representative of the Congregation of the Mission at the United Nations.

**Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M.**

Coordinator of Project Dream, a collaborative project of the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio against AIDS in Africa, and now the Chairperson of the Vincentian Family Board for the Micro-Credit Project in Haiti.

**Mrs. Patricia Nava (AIC)**

Formerly the International President of AIC and formerly its representative for relationships with the international Vincentian Family.

**Fr. Pedro Pablo Opeka, C.M.**

Founder of Akamasoa (“Good Friends”), an extraordinary systemic change project which I will tell you about in a few minutes. Pedro was recently named a Knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest honor awarded by the French government.
Rev. Mr. Gene Smith (SSVP)

Formerly the national president of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States and the Executive Director of Seton Institute in Daly City, California.

3. The Choice of Systemic Change as the Theme for the Vincentian Family

Each year at their annual meeting, the international leaders of various branches of the Vincentian Family choose a common theme for reflection and action for the year ahead. The theme is then launched on September 27th, at the annual Family Day of Prayer.

In 2007 the leaders of the Family, gathered in Rome, invited the members of the Commission to make a presentation at their meeting. Afterwards the leaders chose “Systemic Change” as their focus for three to five years. Since then, all the branches have been working on this theme actively.

4. The Goals of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change

When Fr. Greg named the members of the Commission, he asked us:

– To study available material concerning Systemic Change
– To discuss our own involvement in Systemic Change
– To formulate a series of effective strategies (called “best practices” in some cultures) which would subsequently be shared with the members of the Vincentian Family
– To propose how the effective strategies might best be disseminated among the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world.

5. The Procedure we Followed

To respond to its mandate, the Commission started to reflect about Systemic Change and about how to share the results of its work:

– At the beginning of the process, each of the members of the Commission wrote a story, based on his or her own experience, about a work in which Systemic Change has taken place.
In each of the stories presented, we identified effective strategies that might be used in working toward Systemic Change in our projects among the poor.

We saw that successful projects placed particular emphasis on self-help and on becoming self-sustaining, so that the poor themselves are active participants in the planning and realization of the projects.

As we reflected, we stressed the spirituality that lies behind a Vincentian Family Systemic Change approach.

6. What has Been Done so Far

We have focused on different ways to communicate the work done by the commission:

A book. Its title is *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*. It is now available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. It is currently being translated into Italian, Korean, and Vietnamese.

A Tool kit. Besides the book, we wanted to give people tools for teaching others about systemic change. At first, we envisioned a box, containing documents, brochures, questionnaires, and DVDs with films and PowerPoint presentations, etc. But, finally, we wound up with a 2 gigabyte memory stick containing all those materials, so that those who receive it can modify the materials to fit their own culture. It was distributed for the first time in Mexico in 2009 and is available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

The FAMVIN website. For the last three years, the FAMVIN website has been publishing articles on systemic change regularly and has been gathering these in an encyclopedia (called a Wikipedia) as a resource for the members of the Family. It is an extraordinary collection of articles.

Start-up Grants. A foundation has enabled us to offer $100,000 each year for the last three years in start-up grants to the Daughters of Charity and to the lay branches of the Vincentian Family who design systemic change projects. With the help of the same foundation, the Congregation of the Mission offers a similar systemic change award.

6 continental workshops. These workshops aim at training leaders, or "multiplying agents," to give other workshops on systemic change. Four have already taken place. The schedule of these workshops is as follows:
1. Mexico February 2009
2. Brazil June 2009
3. Cameroon July 2009
4. Bangkok November 2009
5. USA November 2010
6. Europe dates to be fixed in 2011

That’s the background. In our book, *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*, we tell the stories of many systemic change projects that have transformed the lives of the poor. The contents of the book are as follows:

**Prologue**

1. Akamasoa, a Community of Good Friends
2. I Have a DREAM
3. Mission-Oriented Strategies
4. The Perfect Storm
5. AIC Madagascar, a Story of Systemic Change within an Association
6. Person-Oriented Strategies
7. The Story of the Passage
8. The Homeless Peoples’ Federation of the Philippines
9. Task-Oriented Strategies
10. The Clancy Nightshelter
11. The Mindoro Project in the Philippines
12. Strategies Directed toward Co-responsibility, Networking and Political Action
13. The Vincentian Mission at the United Nations

**Epilogue**

**II. THE NOTION OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

1. **The Basic Idea**

Today, those working among the poor speak more and more of the need for systemic change. In order to understand a systemic-change approach better, some analysis of the idea may be helpful.

Essentially, a system is a whole, a unified composite of things that work together. As a system’s parts interact, they affect each other constantly, either for better or for worse.

Today scientists focus continually on “systems.” Astronomers view the universe as a system. If a star explodes, everything else in the
universe feels the effect. Doctors view the body as a system. If my blood is diseased, it affects everything else. Economists and sociologists view society as a system. If the economic and social elements that make up society function together positively, people thrive; if one or several of those elements are functioning badly, the whole system begins to break down.

So, basically, systemic change thinking affirms that "everything is connected to everything else." Recognizing this, it becomes clear that, in order to change the situation of the poor, we must focus not only on one particular problem, like supplying them with food, important as that may be at times, but on the overall circumstances of their lives. Experience teaches that "quick fix" solutions, while temporarily helpful, prove inadequate in the long run.

2. An Illustration of how Systemic Change Works

Each of us lives within a socioeconomic system whose parts interact with each other. If the system is working well, it favors personal growth. If not, it thwarts growth and accelerates decline. If, for example, I don't have a job, I don't earn money. If I don't earn money, I can't buy food for my family. If my son doesn't have sufficient food, he suffers malnutrition. If he suffers malnutrition, he can't study well. If he can't study well, he won't graduate from school. If he doesn't graduate from school, he may not get a job. If he doesn't have a job, he doesn't earn money. So the cycle begins again.

The challenge for a systems thinker is to know where and how to break the cycle. In Akamasoa, Fr. Pedro Opeka began by creating
jobs. These, in turn, generated revenue. Gradually, people were able to buy food, build homes and send their children to school. Their lives improved dramatically. In other systemic change projects, the point of intervention is different. In San José de Ocoa, water was the key. Clean water brought improved health. Irrigation brought crops that provided nourishment and also revenue. Revenue led to better homes and sanitation. With the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, micro-credit was the key. It enabled people to buy land, build homes, and organize other projects like digging wells, creating a sewage system and opening shops.

3. Criteria of Systemic Change Projects

As is evident from what I have said, not every project involves systemic change. Many good projects address urgent, immediate needs, but do not go beyond that. Different from these, a systemic change project has, among others, the following characteristics:

1. **Wide-ranging social impact on the life of the poor person**
   This is the most basic characteristic of systemic change: that is, that the project helps change the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it.

2. **Sustainability**
   The project helps create the social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the lives of the poor, like employment, education, housing, the availability of clean water and sufficient food, ongoing local leadership, etc.

3. **Replicability**
   The project can be adapted to solve similar problems in other places. The philosophy or spirituality that grounds the project, the strategies it employs and the techniques that it uses can be applied in a variety of circumstances. Concretely, this is demonstrated when the project actually spreads beyond its initial context and is put into effect successfully in settings other than the place where it began. For, example, the project of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in San José de Ocoa has been replicated in 120 villages.

4. **Innovation**
   The project brings about social change by transforming traditional practice. Such change is often achieved through the implementation of a pattern-changing idea. To use a phase often attributed to Albert Einstein, systemic-change thinking helps us “to learn to see the world anew”.
Having looked at those systemic change projects, let me state an important, fundamental distinction. Immediate assistance to the poor and systemic change projects are:

- not either/or options
- but both/and imperatives

Sometimes immediate assistance to the poor is an urgent necessity that we cannot neglect. So, there are good works among the poor that are not systemic change projects. But still, it is imperative that we go beyond immediate necessities to long-range solutions.

**III. THE PILOT MICRO-FINANCE PROJECT IN HAITI**

Today, I want to say a word about the pilot micro-credit project that the Congregation of the Mission, along with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, has chosen to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Louise and St. Vincent. Even before the tragic earthquake on January 12, the situation in Haiti was disastrous. Here is a quick picture of conditions in Haiti before the earthquake:

- 9.8 million people
- Poorest country in the western hemisphere
- 7th poorest country in the world
- 54% of the people live on one dollar a day; 80% live under two dollars a day
- 47% of the population is illiterate
- Unemployment is estimated at 60-70%
- Life expectancy is 52 for men and 56 for women
- In 1923, more than 60% of land was forested; in 2010, less than 2%

The center of our Vincentian Family project is a micro-credit website. The site is in three languages — English, French and Spanish — and provides an attractive, easy-to-use way for people throughout the world to help the poor of Haiti. It contains projects submitted by groups of people in Haiti. These projects are carefully screened by a Business Analyst and a Steering Committee and judged to be sustainable.

The main audience for the site is the worldwide Vincentian Family and the worldwide Haitian Diaspora. They, and anyone else, are able to make interest-free micro-loans and donations to projects in Haiti.
They are also able to donate scholarships (e.g., $50 a year to send a child to primary school, plus giving him books and a back-pack).

How can the confreres, a house, or the province get involved?

- Make micro-loans or donations as individuals
- Make micro-loans or donations as groups (the province, a house, a parish, a school, a class)
- Give micro-credit as a gift (e.g., for a birthday or for graduation)
- Offer a year-long scholarship, with food, for a primary school child
- Help in re-forestation (plant a tree)

If you lend on the site, you can follow your money as it comes back. Then you can re-lend it or take it out. You can lend as an individual or you can form a lending group (e.g., the province, a house, a parish, a school, a class, an office, a conference of the SSVP, etc.). You can give micro-credit to others as a gift. For example, I gave my niece $100 in micro-credit for her graduation. She loved it. She told me recently that the full $100 of her loan has come back.

The site became fully functional on April 1st. Within a few weeks, we had provided 1000 scholarships to grammar school children in Haiti and fully funded 16 micro-credit projects.

What can we learn from this pilot project? Are there other similar collaborative projects through which we can help the poor significantly in Haiti and in other parts of the world?

**VIDEO OF FIRE**

As the General Assembly, you are the supreme authority in the Congregation of the Mission. As the supreme authority, what can you do during these three weeks together to move the worldwide Congregation to serve the poor more effectively?

On May 30, 1659, St. Vincent said this to the confreres: "Our vocation... is to set people's hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire, to inflame it with his love."\(^2\)

I urge you today to encourage the confreres of your provinces to be on fire to help the poor both in their immediate needs and in the promotion of systemic change.

\(^2\) SV XII, 215.
Encourage them to have spiritual fire within. Fire brings light into the night. It warms us. It is the energizing center of homes. It prepares and gives taste to the food that we eat. In the chemical world, fire purifies and refines metals, like gold. It forges steel, making it strong. It molds pottery so that it becomes beautiful and lasting.

Vincent's love for the poor was like a forest fire that quickly jumped from tree to tree, from town to town, from country to country, a fire that he has communicated to you, the leaders of the Congregation today. Like Vincent, be confident that the Lord loves us deeply in calling us to serve the poor. The Lord is sharing with us his own vocation and his own vision! Let the spirit of Christ, the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, dwell in your heart, as it dwelled in the hearts of Vincent and his companions. Let it set you and the confreres of your province on fire.

Empower the confreres to be creative in designing projects that will help the poor not just short-term, but long-term, systemic change projects that will be viable and sustainable. In these few minutes with you here today, I want to encourage you to be grateful and joyful that Christ has called you to this wonderful way of serving others, and I urge you to communicate the Lord's presence, his joy, and his fire to your confreres and to the poor in your own countries.
CAMPAIGN: WATER, A DROP FOR LIFE

HERMINIO ANTONELLO, C.M.
Visitor of the Province of Turin
Coordinator of the Vincentian Family in Italy

Since 2003 the Vincentian Family has gathered together twice a year. Between 2008-2010, all the branches of the Vincentian Family in Italy have been involved in a campaign on behalf of the poorest missions where men and women missionaries from Italy are ministering. This campaign is called: water: a drop for life.

First phase: initial study

We focused on water because we are aware that this is a precious resource that the poor are deprived of. Those involved include the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Charity and lay Vincentians who work in the missions of Madagascar, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, Eritrea, Albania, and the Ukraine. These missionary and poor lands have presented us with fifteen concrete projects (wells, cisterns, hydraulic operations). Their cost totals 370,000 €.

As this information was gathered, we put together a dossier on the problem of water and printed 12,000 copies. While the dossier was presented in order to obtain grants for these projects, it was also meant to be an educational tool that would help groups become aware of the good that water represents, recognizing that "access to water is a universal right of all people, with no distinction or discrimination (Caritas in veritate, 27)."

Second phase: beginning of the campaign

Symbolically the campaign: water: a drop for life, began on Easter, 2008. Contact was established with some newspapers and a written communication was given to them so that they could highlight this initiative. Thus the plan began to move forward at the speed of molasses. In 2009, just before the beginning of the Vincentian Year, the campaign was re-launched with three instruments. This missionary calendar of 2009, which was focused on this project, opened paths for the publication of our documents. A flexible
prospectus (40,000 were printed and distributed throughout Italy) provided a synthesis of the fifteen projects. Finally a DVD, which presented a visible illustration of the campaign, was produced and duplicated. The campaign was re-launched under a new slogan: the gift of the Vincentian Family of Italy to the most poor on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of our Founders.

**Third phase: development of the campaign**

It is truly admirable to see how this campaign has been received by people of all walks of life. Distinct groups, some certainly more than others, have organized themselves to spread the campaign. We have seen schools where students, during Lent and Advent, had their friends commit to this project and the money that resulted from their Lenten or Advent sacrifices were donated to the project. Groups of families made a decision to not buy Christmas gifts and instead donated this money to the project. Missionaries of Saint Vincent organized charitable dinners. We were also able to participate in a group called, *Human Life – Vida Humana*, in Rome where we presented some of the projects. I would say that the Daughters of Charity were always on the front lines: through their works they involved many people. The elder Daughters in the infirmary made articles to sell and in this way raised money for the project. It is impossible to narrate here all the initiatives of the different groups. Contributions have arrived from every part of Italy and at this time, with 350,000 € collected, we are very close to our goal.

**Fourth phase: remaining concerns**

What remains to be done involves the most delicate step: to make these projects a reality and to continue to inform the donors. At this time we have given money to those projects that have been begun, distributing 160,000 €. The other projects will be gradually accomplished. Our coordination involves giving attention to those projects that have begun and asking for documentation of the work as it is finished. This documentation is then published and circulated through the Vincentian magazine of Italy. On the occasion of the National Congress of the Vincentian Family which will be held in Rome in September 2010 we will have a film presentation of the current situation of the project and will provide all the contributors with the means that will enable them to know the ultimate destiny
of their contributions. Yes, some projects have had bureaucratic problems and others have needed at least a year to bring the campaign to a good conclusion. In any case, donors are willing to become involved in other projects if the original one cannot be accomplished.

We believe that this is a beautiful gift that the Vincentian Family of Italy has presented to our Founders.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
4. Ongoing Formation

THE ONGOING FORMATION OF THE C.M.

JOSE ANTONIO UBILLUS LAMADRID, C.M.
Assistant General

The idea of ongoing formation in the Congregation began during the time of Saint Vincent de Paul. In the Minutes of the First General Assembly that was celebrated during Saint Vincent’s lifetime (1642) we read the following:

Next the Assembly determined two things: Henceforth there would be a second probationary period, at Saint-Lazare or wherever else the Superior General would indicate; that it would take place only six or seven years after the seminary for an interval of one year, without, however, limiting the power of the Superior General, who can always delay the six or seven years or shorten the year of probation, as he deems advisable for the good of the individual and the need of the Company (CCD XIIIa, 329; SV XIII, 295; ES X, 360).

Even though the desire of the Assembly was very clear, the time was not right to undertake such a program. Nevertheless the Assembly of 1711 believed that the time had arrived and as a result Father Jean Bonnet, Superior General, (1711-1735), with the consent of his Council, decided to initiate said program on August 15, 1712 at Saint Charles (previously a seminary on the property of Saint Lazare). This renewal seminary, (the name it was called), continued for several years but because of financial difficulties in France it had to be closed (cf. JOHN RYBOLT, “Report on the International Formation Center: Saint Vincent de Paul – CIF,” Vincentiana 3 [2002], p. 2).

Several generations would pass until the Constitutions of 1984 would once again point out the importance of ongoing formation. Article 81 of our Constitutions states: The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life. In the same way Statute 42 reads: Individual provinces, through the help of their formation commission, should organize and promote both common and personal continuing formation. But it was the General Assembly of 1992 that decreed the establishment of these renewal courses.
As a result of this decision, Father Robert Maloney, Superior General, and his Council established what would later become known as the International Formation Center: Saint Vincent de Paul (CIF). The Center began to provide services in September 1994.

Since the time that the Second Vatican Council pointed out new paths for priestly and religious formation, the concept of formation in general as well as ongoing formation have evolved as a result of various experiences that were promoted by the Council. Ongoing formation implies a constant dedication and effort in the areas of spiritual, intellectual, practical and operational renewal that allows us to understand and respond to the new realities of a constantly changing world and to transmit the Word of God to women and men of our time, especially the poor and those who live on the margins of society. We are dealing with an integral dimension of the process of ongoing conversion.

It is this spirit that motivates the efforts that the Congregation of the Mission has made with regard to the ongoing formation of its members. Two signs of this concern are CIF and the International Meeting of the Visitors in Mexico (June, 2007) where the central theme, The Continued Formation of the Missionary Today, was discussed (cf. Vincentiana 3 [2007]).

In a letter addressed to the directors of CIF by a missionary who had participated in the course of ongoing formation we read the following:

"[T]he time at CIF was the best experience I had in my community life. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on my ministry and vocation, it gave me the opportunity to share with and listen to the life experience and ministry of other Vincentians, and, more importantly, it gave me the opportunity to become closer to and to learn more about the charism and history of Vincent and the Congregation.... I came back renewed and with an open mind about what it means to serve the poor in many different ways as a Vincentian (cf. Rybolt, op. cit., p. 1)."

In a letter of Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, addressed to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, a letter that was written after the Visitors meeting in Mexico and that spoke about ongoing formation, we read:

"The following of Christ, evangelizer of the poor, constitutes the principal axis of all Vincentian formation. Our identity as missionaries is not given once and for all; rather it is the result of our daily relationship with Christ, with the community to which we belong, with the world, and with the poor. We are convinced..."
that formation is not an acquired state, but rather a way: initial formation is an introduction to this way which lasts a lifetime (cf. G. GREGORY GAY, “On-Going Formation,” Vincentiana 1/2 [2008], p. 12).

Finally, I believe that ongoing formation is a demand of our spiritual and apostolic vocation because we need to continually renew the gift that we have received. We need to keep the fire burning and refresh the permanent newness of God’s gift. Following Christ evangelizing the poor implies a dynamic that requires continual nourishment and renewal. The call to follow Christ is repeated at every moment of our lives and requires of us a constant effort to progressively clothe ourselves in Jesus’ attitudes. Because of our sinful state we can never think that we have fully accomplished the task of becoming new men nor can we ever think that we fully possess the attitudes of Christ. As pointed out by Father General, it is from this perspective that ongoing formation implies living a process of ongoing conversion and spiritual renewal.
ONGOING FORMATION IN CLAPVI

DANIEL ARTURO VÁSQUEZ ORDÓÑEZ, C.M.
Visitor of the Province of Colombia
President of CLAPVI

1. Since the time of its foundation in 1971 in Colombia, the on-going formation of its members has been one of the objectives of CLAPVI. Later, when its Statutes were approved in the V Assembly (January 25, 1983), the first specific objective was stated in the following way: The Interior Renewal and the On-Going Formation of its Members (Statutes of CLAPVI, Article 5, paragraph “a”). At the present time, at what could be called a stage of maturity for CLAPVI, on-going formation of the confreres, that is, the members of CLAPVI, is the first objective.

2. What have been the methods or resources that were utilized to provide this on-going formation? Fundamentally it has been a spirit that we have created, an environment of encouragement that has been fomented from the beginning and has influenced the life and the activities of CLAPVI. We can point out four modes or instruments which have enabled CLAPVI to promote and provide incentives for the on-going formation of its members and to do this from the time of its establishment. A) Courses during the first years of CLAPVI’s existence which were lengthy in duration. B) Encounters which replaced the courses. During each of these encounters there was the opportunity to share experiences and on-going formation was a part of each of these gatherings. C) The Assemblies of CLAPVI which are held every three years. D) The publication CLAPVI which is viewed to be very important and significant. The meetings and work sessions of the Executive Committee of CLAPVI are also a type of on-going formation. In our search for ways to give more attention to on-going formation CLAPVI has established two other avenues: THE SPIRITUALITY SCHOOL OF CURITIBA (BRAZIL) and THE SCHOOL OF FORMATION FOR FORMATORS OF VILLA PAUL, FUNZA (COLOMBIA).

3. We consider that the successes of this work of on-going formation in CLAPVI could be the following: A) the renewal and emergence of new perspectives for living the charism in Latin America. In other words, the renewal of individuals has enabled us to
live our charism in a lively and novel way. B) We have been able to bring to the forefront a series of strengths and values, for example, a deeper fraternity among the missionaries, a greater awareness of the universality of the Congregation — an awareness of the powerful call to the universal and particular mission of each one of the Provinces — the generous and free decision to collaborate on an inter-provincial level in the different areas of the life and the activity of the mission, an openness to the Latin American and universal reality that has allowed us to study, reflect and accept with greater responsibility cultural dialogue. C) The insistence on the whole of CLAPVI to maintain before our minds the need for on-going formation. D) The importance that is given to vocational promotion, which is shown in the structural organization of the program of initial formation in each Province as well as in the interprovincial formation programs. E) A greater awareness of the need for lay formation, the work of accompaniment and the responsibility to take on the role of advisor for the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family.

4. With regard to limitation or difficulties in this area of on-going formation in CLAPVI we point out the following: A) The lack of greater resonance on the internal level of the Provinces of the fruit that has been harvested during the different formational moments of CLAPVI. B) The lack of economic resources in some provinces can limit the participation of the confreres in the encounters and other programs of on-going formation. C) The absence of a global and integral concept of the implications of a true process of on-going formation and thus on-going formation is reduced to something that is academic, intellectual and does not take into consideration the necessary reflection (theological, spiritual and pastoral) on the mission or the formulation of a personal plan for life or the community and provincial plans. One easily takes on a pragmatic attitude and confuses programming with the elaboration of a true plan of life and action. D) There is a mistaken idea that on-going formation only affects those responsible for the houses of formation and the confreres responsible for the seminaries, school or similar institutes.
ONGOING FORMATION
AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL A SHARING
(INDONESIA)

PAULUS SUPARMONO, C.M.
Visitor of the Province of Indonesia

I have been asked by Father Superior General to speak today, in 10 minutes, about Ongoing Formation at the Provincial Level. My presentation is just a sharing. I want to share with you what we have done and tried to do, and what successes and difficulties we have found in the Indonesian Province. When I was elected Visitor at the end of 2006, we had just finished Provincial Assembly with the important result: Provincial Norms 2006. On ongoing or permanent formation, there are two sections in Provincial Norms 2006 as the point of reference, namely on *Ongoing Formation* itself and *The Commission of Formation*.

**Ongoing Formation (Provincial Norms 2006: 87-91)**

87. The members should do their own ongoing formation through reading, attentive to the advance of the science, philosophy, theology or follow an ongoing formation suggested by the Province, either for deepening the Vincentian charism or for ever-increasing the service to the needs of the time effectively.

88. The Visitor and the Councils should be responsive to the needs of the confreres regarding the expertise needed in the pastoral ministry, either for accompanying the people, the service to the poor, or for other various missions.

89. A confrere should be prepared accordingly before taking the particular assignment.

90. To choose the confreres to follow an ongoing formation program is subject to the Visitor and his Councils considering a variety of aspects such as the time of their service, the needs of the province, personal needs, etc. On the other hand the confrere should actively propose an ongoing formation program related to their needs and interests.
91. The confreres should use the sabbatical period or the long break in conjunction with the needs of personal ongoing formation and should be discussed with the Visitor at least 6 month before it.

The Commission of Formation

141. The Formation Commission has the following tasks and capacities:

a) To help the visitor in formulating basic policy regarding the formation of the members in the form of Ratio Formationis corresponding with the situation of the Indonesia Province (cf. Sta. 41-42).

b) To help the visitor in the animation and formation of the members for apostolic ministries.

c) To foster relationship and cooperation with other provinces in Asia-Pacific Region on formation.

d) To document activities of the commission and give reports to the visitor regularly, at least once a year.

142. The members of the Formation Commission will be appointed by the visitor considering representation from various stage of formation and age groups.

Implementation of Provincial Norms 2006 and Experience

To formulate norms is not a short and easy process. Yet, experience tells us that to implement or to actualize the norms, which is really good and beautiful, is more difficult! It needs longer process, effort, patience and perseverance. How to put into practice the normative imperative that “the Visitor and the Councils should be responsive to the needs of the confreres regarding the expertise needed in the pastoral ministry, either for accompanying the people, the service to the poor, or for other various missions?”

At the provincial level, we have been trying to contextualize the program of ongoing formation, which corresponds to what most of the confreres really need and propose for their own ongoing formation at the Provincial Level. So, at the beginning of my ministry as Visitor, I asked the Commission of Formation to make a survey, just a quick and simple survey, sending sheets of questionnaire based on 5 important areas: 1) human maturity development; 2) spiritual life; 3) community life; 4) apostolate; 5) Vincentian charism. The confreres were given also a free space to give suggestions or
proposals. From the responses they sent, these are the results of the survey as to what most of the confreres need and want:

1. Developing the capacity and skill in communication and human relations
2. Spiritual discernment and prayer
3. Conflict management
4. Deepening priestly identity in the contemporary circumstances and Social Teaching of the Church
5. Contextualized Vincentian Study

And we have received suggestions or proposals from most of the confreres:

- To create an ongoing formation program which includes experience of immersion or direct contact with the poor, accompanied with personal reflection and sharing, not merely an intellectual workshop nor pure study about poverty and Vincentian spirituality.
- To provide an opportunity to experience the internationality of the Congregation through international formation together with the Vincentian confreres of other provinces.

**Formal Ongoing Formation Grouping**

Considering the number of confreres in the Indonesian Province and human stages of socio-psycho-spiritual development, though we are all adult persons, we see the importance of grouping for the sake of effective ongoing formation meeting and sharing. Though every person is unique, yet slowly but surely we come to see that in fact almost all confreres in the group have a kind of common personal experience, joy, dream, struggle, crisis, and life question in their search for meaning as priests in their personal life, community life and pastoral ministries. So, for that reason we divide ourselves into 4 ongoing formation groups: 1-7 years of priesthood (23 priests + 1 brother); 8-15 years of priesthood (25 priests); 16-60 years of priesthood (17 priests); 60 years old and more, including our aging confreres in retirement (23 priests). The only one incorporated brother we have now belongs to the classmate in his initial formation.

Each ongoing formation group has one coordinator, who represents his group in the Commission of Formation. Then one of the group coordinators must be chosen by the Visitor as the coordinator of the Commission of Formation for a term of three years. I have entrusted to this commission the tasks of formulating basic policy
concerning the formation of the members which corresponds with the situation of the Province and to animate the members for apostolic ministries.

In dialogue with the Commission of Formation and the Provincial Council, I have been trying to be attentive and responsive to the actual situation of the Province and the needs of the confreres. Then, based on our observation, we decide and formulate an annual theme to guide all confreres in the Province in their ongoing formation meeting, though till now we are still unable to formulate Ratio Formationis. But this Commission has done something meaningful also. For example, in 2009 our annual theme was “Incorporation in the Congregation as spiritual journey”; and in 2010 our annual theme is “Love, like that between brothers, should always be present among us” (The Common Rules VIII, 2). In 2009, I asked the Commission to write and disseminate a reflection on the annual theme: Incorporation in the Congregation as spiritual journey. Then all ongoing formation groups used this reflection as the point of reference in their annual meeting.

In general, every ongoing formation group has a meeting at least once per year. But they are free to decide to have more than one meeting per year. Some groups, according to their own needs and agreement, have two or three meeting. In these formational meetings usually they invite an expert or a person of rich experience in a certain field to give them input, and then they continue the process with personal reflection and sharing. Another time they just go for vacation or recreation together to foster fraternal relationship.

TEMBIKAR: Informal Group and Meeting

It is good that some confreres are still faithful and committed to continue our informal group, named TEMBIKAR (Temu Bina Diri dan Karya), which means informal meeting for ongoing formation and apostolate sharing. Originally this informal group was initiated by young confreres under 5 years of priesthood, but then many older and even aging confreres are willing to come to their meeting. So, now TEMBIKAR meetings are open and invite all confreres. Sometime they invite speakers to talk important and urgent issues. And when Indonesian missionaries working in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, China/Taiwan Province are coming for vacation, they will invite them to share their experiences. Though undergoing ups and down, this informal meeting or gathering has been very meaningful and enriching in term of ongoing formation.
**Annual Retreat and Popular Mission**
- Annual Retreat and active participation of the confreres in the Popular Mission are always special and important opportunities for ongoing formation.

**Providing Opportunity to Experience International Formation**
- Sending confreres to participate in SIEV and CIF Formation Program in France.
- APRF-CCC Joint Meeting.

**Sending Confreres for Further Study**
- Attentive to the talents, interests and special competence of the individual confreres which corresponds to the needs and apostolate of the Province.
- Requesting scholarship and financial assistance from other Provinces.

**Observation and Reflection**

We are reminded in this General Assembly that our main resource is ourselves. But our Province has been punched several times by painful surprises. Some of our confreres that look very good and exemplary suddenly left the Congregation. So, what? How to hold and to help them in permanent creative fidelity to the mission?

All that we can do in our formation program is just to provide opportunity, assistance, context and material for ongoing transformation of our beloved confreres. But I think the innermost domain and the goal of ongoing formation are beyond our reach, that is, the world of the individual’s freedom of our confreres and their personal response to the action of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we should continue to believe and to strive that ongoing formation really deserves our special attention, because our confreres are our main resources.
ONGOING FORMATION AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

ROBERT PETKOVŠEK, C.M.
Province of Slovenia

1. Preliminary Remarks

The subject in question — ongoing formation at the individual level (in other words: formation or self-formation) — is above all a question of personal initiative. The issue at stake: how can this initiative be cultivated, an initiative which can neither be forced nor predetermined nor systematised. It can be said that responsibility for the formation of personal initiative should be the duty of the community. The community should put in place structures and means which nourish the self-formation of its members. But it has to be said that if there is no desire or disposition in the individual, the best structures and means fail. It is because of this, in my opinion that the principal question in formation is: how can an individual be motivated and encouraged to desire ongoing self formation?

Self-formation is a transformation of one’s self; it is a work on one’s self which has as its aim the transformation of one’s consciousness and one’s attitude to the world and to the other. One has only to think of the transformations which St. Vincent experienced from his youth to his maturity. Without doubt St. Vincent was capable of reading the signs of the times.

Where then is this strength found which challenges me to develop myself, to transform myself and to become another person?

2. The spiritual attraction of the new man

The apostle Paul indeed saw in what consists the essence of a permanent formation: “And while our exterior man is being destroyed, our interior man is being renewed from day to day”

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1 Preparation of a new Ratio Formationis (suggested in the postulates)... a systemic change?
2 Word of God, sacramental life, community and personal prayer and Vincentian spirituality (C 78 § 2). Principles: Christological, mystical.
(2 Cor 4:16). Ongoing formation is a rebirth which has as a consequence a spiritual attraction. To underline the importance of it, I refer to a personal experience. I call to mind the Parish Priest of my village when I was an adolescent who had a great influence on my vocation — a man sixty years of age, his breviary in his hand, who was interested in theology, philosophy, music, languages, but also in old people, the handicapped, the young etc. He was, despite his age, in the eyes of one adolescent an integrated man, ageless and radiating a spiritual attraction.

3. Formation for sanctity and the Holy Spirit

The Synthesis, which the visitors made during their meeting in Mexico City (4th to 15th June 2007) on ongoing formation, remarked: "The first aim of ongoing formation is sanctity." Because sanctity is the work of the Holy Spirit, we are obliged in the first instance to open ourselves to its initiative.

1. It is because of that, that in our self-formation we should always take into account the impossible, because "nothing is impossible to God." Openness to God opens the possibility of the impossible, the unexpected. Formation does not depend only on us, on our faculties, on our energies; it is also the fruit of collaborating with God who can turn our life upside down, rendering the impossible possible.

2. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit leads us to integrity, as the etymology of the word suggests in many languages: "sanctity" means "integrity." It renders a person integrated, being of one piece, neither broken into fragments nor closed to the diverse challenges of life.

3. Finally, it has to be realised that without our response to its initiative, the Holy Spirit, remains in us without fruit, without success. It is up to us to choose sanctity as a first priority. Without our free choice, the Holy Spirit remains mute. Just as nobody can live for me nor die for me, so nobody can choose sanctity for me.

Here is the foundation (spiritual, sacramental) of all self-formation which aspires to be missionary and priestly.
4. Obstacles to self-formation

The reality is however otherwise. The initiative of the Holy Spirit is paralysed by contemporary culture which is dominated by a hidden naturalism. Naturalism suggests: “One must be as you are, spontaneous, without restraint; one has got to let go.” Lightness and spontaneity become a supreme value. Just as the free fall of an object demonstrates that nature chooses always the line of least resistance, in the same way today’s person chooses lightness, convenience, whatever is easiest. It is this naturalist logic of contemporary life which kills the spirit of service, provokes a decline in generosity and weakens the sense of belonging and perseverance.

It is not an abstract theory. This spirit often comes in through the door of our communities, invading us with its relativism and its scepticism, with its consumerism and silent laicisation, even with the loss of awareness of the meaning of life. Lightness of spirit is manifested when we have to choose between information and formation, between the newspaper or television and classic or spiritual reading. We turn away from formation towards information. Add to this the many obstacles which are carried in by ourselves and our communities: clichéd attitudes, conservatism or exaggerated liberalism, etc.

5. Formation comes from dialogue

Personal formation is a permanent necessity. If one does not form oneself, one deforms oneself, one deteriorates. Between formation and deterioration, there is no neutral place. If one does nothing for formation, one is already deteriorating. C.S. Lewis says that if one does not fight for God, one opens by that very fact the door for the devil.

Self formation has however a privileged place: it is dialogue; it is there that it discovers a real motivation and encouragement.

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3. Obstacles presented for the community: stereotypes, conservatism of exaggerated liberalism, etc.
- Modern culture: relativism, skepticism, over-consumption, silent, laicization, loss of significance and the purpose of life (Consultation Document).
- Practical problems: Do we keep the balance between informative reading (newspapers, magazines, television) and formative reading (spiritual reading, classical works, etc.)?

4. Am I able to enter into dialogue with myself, with others, with God, with the poor, with a book, with the signs of the times?
Dialogue is not just a simple slogan, but a high school of mutual listening and service. One listens — not just to hear news, information, but in order to change oneself, to begin thinking in a new way, to see what I cannot see myself, to grow personally and become another person, a new person. Dialogue does not just inform; it transforms. It allows me to see myself through eyes of the person with whom I am speaking. The consequence of this is a personal transformation which reveals the incredible richness of my personality. From this comes a personal opening out — a blossoming and enthusiasm.

6. Dialogue with talents – Community life

Permanent ongoing self-formation is therefore encouraged and motivated by a community which dialogues, in which the confreres reveal themselves and in which the richness of their personalities and talents are seen.

"I am at the disposal of your talents!" That is the saying of one of the ex-visitors which shows his way of working whereby he changed the spirit of his province. In this way, he made space for faithful and creative fidelity. A mission which succeeds is founded on the enthusiasm which generates the spirit of sacrifice and service. To help the confreres to develop their talents is not to bow to their whims; it is to use their gifts for the good of the mission, to stimulate their sense of belonging, it is to encourage them to live the mission fully. Without dialogue between the community and its members, the community remains rigid and its members blind.

In paraphrasing the Chinese proverb which says that one does not help a poor person if you give him or her a fish, but if you teach them to fish; we can say that one does not help the confrere if you tell him what the Congregation is but if you teach him to search — together with the others, in faithfulness and creativity — to find what is essential for the Congregation.

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5 Dialogue is my willingness to look at myself through the eyes of the person with whom I am speaking; and it is the willingness of that person to look at himself/herself through my eyes. Dialogue between God and humanity is made real in the person of Christ in whom God looks at himself through the eyes of a human being and the person looks at himself/herself through the eyes of God. It is in this exchange that God discovers how he is seen by man. Man discovers there how much God respects him and loves him; God discovers how much man, i.e. human beings have need of him.

6 Principles: principle of communications, principle of respect, unity in diversity, progressive evolution.
7. To see in a different way – To see in a Vincentian way

In the documentary about the lepers in India, a leper says: “Nobody wants us, nobody sees us: neither society nor our religion.” But in reality, the confreres saw them. In the eyes of our confreres, the lepers are seen as valuable in themselves. This way of looking is the result of a formation. The “product” of a formation is the transformation of our way of looking, of our way of seeing, of our consciousness, of our sensitivity and of our attitude towards the world. Let us think back to another documentary about the prostitute in which an unknown man saw first of all a means to an end, then gradually he began to see in her a value in herself.

The object of ongoing Vincentian formation is to change our way of seeing — of seeing the needs of the world and of taking on for ourselves a spirit of service. The spirit of service seeks to give without thinking of being rewarded; it seeks to give more than it receives. It is therefore a spirit of generosity, a spirit which is opposed to the contemporary culture of gratification and its principles of satisfaction which seeks to receive more than it gives. Indeed the norm of Vincentian self-formation goes further still. It takes as the norm the Lord himself: his closeness to the poor shows that he wanted to help them with his entire being, without holding back, without limit and without bounds.

8. Creative fidelity to the mission

Creative fidelity to the mission results from a constant desire to renew oneself, from an ambition to become better and more effective in one’s spirit of service. This attitude is the result of self-formation and ongoing reformation. To come to a conclusion: I consider that the essential question is one of knowing how to create and nurture the enthusiasm which is the foundation of a successful mission. In my opinion, the answer to that question is found in a community which dialogues, in which the individual is accepted with the gifts that are part of him, in which his talents are valued and used for the sake of evangelisation and charity. The community does not demand; it suggests. Evangelisation and charity are not suggested; they are demanded!

Translation: KIERAN MAGOVERN, C.M.

Principles: Christian realism, spirit of service, spirit of generosity.
ONGOING FORMATION AT CIF

MARCELO MANIMTIM, C.M.
Director of CIF

A brief History

After Vatican II the need for ongoing formation of confreres was discussed in many General Assemblies. Finally the Assembly of 1992 decreed that a center for such a program should be established. After his election, Fr. Bob Maloney declared, "We will not discuss the question of a Formation Center anymore, we will establish one." As a result two confreres were recruited for the project: John Rybolt of the then U.S. Mid-West Province and Jean-Pierre Renouard of Toulouse. A bit later Luis Alfonso Sterling of Colombia joined the team. Thus, the Centre International de Formation-Saint Vincent de Paul was born. It found home at the Maison Mère here in Paris. The first session was held from September 4 to December 9, 1994. In 1996 Jean Pierre Renouard returned to Toulouse and his post was taken over by Kasimierz Stelmach of Poland. In that same year Luis Alfonso Sterling returned to Colombia. In the beginning of 1999 Kasimierz Stelmach was replaced by Florian Kapusciak. Later in the year Juan Julián Diaz Catalán took the place of Florian Kapusciak. In 2003, after nine years as director John Rybolt was replaced by Hugh O'Donnell. In 2008, also after nine years as Assistant Director Juan Julián was replaced by José Carlos Fonsatti. Last year Marcelo Manimtim replaced Hugh O'Donnell as director. You see, the team at CIF is rather young.

Aims of CIF

The mission of CIF is to cultivate the vocation of each confrere to follow Christ the evangelizer of the poor as a member of the Congregation. This basic mission is realized in the following objectives.

1. To deepen the personal commitment of each participant. A deeper appreciation of St. Vincent and the Constitutions and the experience of community among the participants contribute to this personal renewal. According to the former directors, the objective of personal renewal is achieved through the
experience itself rather than through specific sessions focusing on personal renewal. Many participants liken the experience at CIF to that of the Internal Seminary.

2. To help the participants to know each other. At CIF we witness how the gifts and goodness of the confreres break through the barriers of language, culture and background. Here is the dynamics: in the time that they spend together confreres spontaneously build community.

I would like to make a point here. The personal renewal and the community building that happen at CIF depends significantly on the readiness and conditioning of each participant. CIF is designed neither for therapeutic treatment nor for spiritual direction. Yet the wonderful things that have been happening do happen because of what the participants bring and contribute to the session. CIF is a place not so much where one looks for a solution to a problem. Rather it is a place where one deepens his commitment to missionary life.

3. To promote the unity and internationality of the Congregation. When confreres from different parts of the world come together they realize that amid the variances in formation due to cultural adaptation, they possess the same spirit and aspiration. At the same time, the experience of community at CIF gives the participants a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves and their own provinces. CIF provides the setting for an experience of a truly international community.

4. To promote inter-provincial collaboration. Ways in which this happens: confreres enrich each other by living and forming community, confreres from different provinces share their expertise and experience, provinces support the participation of other provinces through the scholarship fund. We wish that when the participants go back to their own provinces they would undertake initiatives that would further collaboration with confreres from other provinces they have met at CIF.

Programs of CIF

1. The backbone of the CIF is the three-month long program of ongoing formation. Aspects of Vincentian life as covered by the Constitutions and Statutes are treated with in-depth presentations by experts. This is enriched by a look into St. Vincent and his life, the history of the Congregation and complemented by visits to the Vincentian places.
2. The Heritage Program started in 2000. This is intended for confreres who have considerable experience of community life and ministry. Here, there is less input from "experts;" instead, the participants are the experts who share their experience.

3. Servant Leadership Training. This was designed as a response to the felt need for leadership training among the confreres. The first leadership program in 2006 was for local superiors and other local leaders; the second in 2008, for Visitors and other provincial level leaders.

4. Session for Brothers. You have heard of the first international gathering of the Brothers on the congregational level. This was done in the context of ongoing formation. The Brother-participants look forward to continuing the contact and collaboration among the Brothers in the Congregation.

Our Proposals

The numbers show that there is still room for more sessions at CIF, either for the long session or for the Heritage session. There are reasons why certain provinces are not able to send confreres in greater numbers.

1. It is difficult to free confreres for three months. Yet with advanced planning this can be done. We acknowledge the efforts made by provinces. Because confreres could not be freed for three months, they come for the shorter Heritage session.

2. The course as it is done in Paris is expensive. At the moment the cost of participation is 5,000 euros for the long session and 2,000 euros for the Heritage session. That is a stiff price for many provinces, but especially for those which may have the numbers to send but find themselves with severe financial limitations. The numbers we have provided show that the potential candidates for CIF programs may be coming from these provinces.

There is an existing scholarship fund. Each year CIF receives from the General Curia 10,500 euros. This is complemented by donations from some generous provinces. The practice we follow is to offer half-scholarship to provinces which request them, i.e., 2,500 euros per participant for the long session and 1,000 euros for the Heritage session. What we have is sorely limited, as Visitors in increasing numbers have asked for scholarship.
What can we do?

CIF is an organ created to answer the need of ongoing formation of confreres in the level of the Congregation. If we believe that the confreres are our greatest resources and that ongoing formation of confreres is of vital importance, we need to pull our resources together.

1. We would like to encourage the provinces to make the sacrifice for the future by freeing up confreres so that they can take part in the programs at CIF. Financial assistance may be sought from aid institutions outside of the Congregation. We understand that, in many instances, it is far easier to secure funding for projects of apostolates than for formation of our members. There exist, however, possibilities that provinces can tap into.

2. Participation at CIF by confreres from poorer provinces have been helped by generous contributions of certain provinces. We would like to continue to appeal to the provinces to the sharing of resources by contributing to the scholarship fund of CIF.

3. This Assembly may recommend to the Superior General and his Council some specific ways in which the ongoing formation of confreres is supported for the long term in the congregational level.

We have another proposal: that the program of CIF be opened to other members of the Vincentian Family. In the past we had participants among the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy, Vincentian Congregation and several lay persons. We will continue with the sessions of ongoing formation programs for confreres. At the same time, however, we will address the expressed need of Vincentian formation from among the leaders of the other branches of the Vincentian Family. This will be a new program since the program for confreres is centered around the Constitutions and Statutes. We can design a program in collaboration with representatives from the other branches of the Vincentian Family. They will help us define more concretely the needs of more diversified participants as well as devise the content and methodology that would best answer those needs.

Thank you so much for your attention.
5. Reconfiguration

RECONFIGURATION IN AND FOR THE C.M.

José María Nieto Varas, C.M.
Assistant General

Introduction

I have been asked to participate in this roundtable discussion on reconfiguration. I want to make it clear that even though I am a member of the General Curia, my comments are not an official expression of the position of the Superior General and his Council, but rather they are my personal opinions that have been further clarified through dialogue with the General Council and with Missionaries from different provinces.

Reconfiguration is one of the themes presented in the Consultation Document that was sent to you. There we find a description of the concrete experience of reconfiguration and its impact on different levels of community organization.

At the same time, reconfiguration is an intra-community theme (interior reorganization) and an apostolic theme (how to fulfill our mission in a better way).

Reconfiguration in its intra-community dimension is a transversal theme, that is, it cuts across many dimensions and can affect various realities of our Vincentian life: the individual person of the missionary, our local communities and provinces, our regional conferences of provinces, the whole international community, that is, the Congregation of the Mission as a whole.

The intention of my presentation is to propose a way to approach this theme and above all, to stimulate a dialogue in the Assembly that will enable us to look for some points of reference and enlightening criteria in the process of reconfiguration that the Congregation might have to confront in the coming years.
I. SEE AND LOOK AND LEARN

1. Reconfiguration: some terminology and a description

Terminology

When speaking about this theme it might be helpful to use other words that are similar to reconfiguration: restructuring, reorganization, reconversion, transformation, etc. But more important than the words is the content of the theme and above all, the result of the process.

A possible description

Reconfiguration in its fundamental and basic meaning could be described as:

- a profound transformation (a structural, systemic change)
- of an entity/unit of the Congregation of the Mission (province, vice-province, region)
- that affects all or many of its dimensions (apostolic, community, institutional administrative, financial, juridical)
- and becomes a new institutional entity within the Congregation of the Mission (birth of a new province, union of provinces, direct dependence on the Superior-General, dissolution, disappearance, etc.)
- through a process of Vincentian discernment that involves the community and dialogue.

It seems to me, however, that reconfiguration, in the sense that I have indicated, is not, in every case, the same as interprovincial collaboration and it is not limited to interprovincial collaboration but presupposes and promotes this reality as it also moves toward a new reality that goes beyond interprovincial collaboration.

Reconfiguration, in a less restrictive but very important sense, could be described as an internal transformation that is promoted within an entity/unit of the Congregation of the Mission that does not terminate in a new institutional reality but in a consistent reform and renewal of its community, apostolic and structural dimensions.

This is a description of only two possible movements of reconfiguration — there are many other possibilities. I invite you to look more deeply at this reality, make it more precise, change it, compliment it, disagree with it, but do not make it vague or dilute it because not every transformation becomes reconfiguration.
2. Reconfiguration: a past, present (and future) reality in the Congregation of the Mission

Past history of reconfiguration

Our General Catalogue can help us recognize the different way in which reconfiguration has occurred in the Congregation of the Mission. There in the catalogue on the pages where each Province is listed, there appears one or several dates after the name of the Province. For example, we see the Province of Rome listed with the dates 1642, 1703 and 1825. These dates highlight important moments in the history of this Province and highlight true intra-provincial and supra-provincial reconfiguration.

There are Provinces that at one time existed and that today have disappeared; other older provinces continue to exist in some way in some of the present provinces.

Reconfiguration for expansion (birth, growth, "reproduction...")

In the Congregation of the Mission there exists at least two forms of reconfiguration: reconfiguration for expansion and reconfiguration for retrenchment.

The following dates might not be completely accurate but in the past twenty years reconfiguration has taken place on several occasions for reasons of expansion:

- 1991: birth of the Province of the Congo that was previously a region and a Vice-Province of Belgium;
- 1997: birth of the Province India (South) and India (north), previously one Province of India;
- 1998: birth of the Vice-Province of Nigeria which previously belonged to the Province of Ireland;
- 2001: birth of the Vice-Province of Saint Cyril-Methodius, previously an international mission;
- 2006: birth of the Province of Saint Justin de Jacobis, previously a Vice-Province (1992) and before that, part of the Naples Province (1982).

It is possible that in the not too distant future other areas of the Congregation of the Mission will engage in this process of reconfiguration as a result of expansion and thus become Vice-Provinces and Provinces: Nigeria, Vietnam, Cameroon, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi.
This form of reconfiguration, "for expansion" produces joy and enthusiasm but also causes pain and difficulties. The Superior General and the various protagonists of this path (Missionaries of the Province of Saint Cyril and Methodius) can offer their experience and testimony in this regard.

Reconfiguration for retrenchment (union with, reduction, disappearance...)

- 1991: the Province of Belgium disappeared as a province and became a region of the Province of the Congo;
- 2010: three Provinces of the United States (Midwest, West, and South) no longer exist as individual Provinces but after thirty-five years of different histories and after several years of discernment have become a new distinct Province (Western Province of the United States).

It is possible that in the near future, because of retrenchment, other provinces of the Congregation of the Mission will move toward reconfiguration with various results: union of several provinces, disappearance, a regions dependent on another Province or the Superior General or something else.

Initiatives of the Superior General and his Council with regard to reconfiguration

The Superior General, Rev. Robert Maloney (1998-2004) seems to have had in mind some form of reconfiguration for several provinces. In different ways, Rev. Gregory Gay has invited some provinces to think about an interprovincial reconfiguration with a view toward possible union of provinces.

Here are some examples:

- June 24, 2005: letter to the Provinces of Germany, Austria, Holland and Belgium;
- June 2009: consulted various Provincial Assemblies about the way to strengthen interprovincial collaboration and to receive input with regard to their thinking about eventual interprovincial reconfiguration, understood as the joining together of Provinces. He consulted the four provinces of Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Salamanca, Zaragoza), the three Provinces of Italy (Naples, Rome, Turin) and the two Provinces of France (Paris and Toulouse;
• In the Project of the Superior General and his Council 2006-2010, Convictions, Objectives and Lines of Action (cf. Vincentiana #1-2 [2007], pp. 18-25), in the section on the international community (#20), it is stated: Promote, in dialogue with the provinces and on the various continents, a presence of the Congregation that, restructuring and expressing better all our resources, strengths and persons, can give better service evangelizing the poor.

"Internal" reconfiguration of the provinces

In a certain sense all the Provinces are reconfiguring themselves when they open or close houses or communities. Thus the provincial question concerning the revision of ministries, works and houses can be viewed in this manner. It is significant that when a Province considers a possible revision of their works, there are missionaries who want to close some houses, but very few missionaries are willing to close the house in which they are living and working. The majority of the missionaries prefer that the reform begin with their neighbor’s house and not with their own house.

Perhaps the same way of thinking could be applied to the Congregation as a whole. Imagine this situation. In the Congregation is it necessary to maintain the 49 present Provinces or would it be better to have fewer Provinces, to dissolve some in order to respond to our mission in a better way? Perhaps many missionaries think: yes, it is true, we have to engage in reconfiguration, but this should not affect the reality of my Province.

In reality there are Provinces that reconfigure themselves through expansion (opening houses) and others through retrenchment (closing houses). This reality can be seen very clearly by looking at the catalogue and comparing the Provinces from one year to the next. Southern India and Nigeria, for example, are provinces that are expanding; on the other hand, Ireland and Madrid are provinces that are in a process of retrenchment. The Superior General and his Council are very aware of these types of interprovincial reconfigurations when they are consulted about opening or closing some community house (cf. Constitutions 125, 3).
A profile of our provinces: number of missionaries

Of our 49 provinces, 22 (44%) have less than 50 missionaries; and only 10 provinces (20%) have more than 100 missionaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Missionaries</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>150-199</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-24</td>
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<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>99,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Various contexts of interprovincial reconfiguration

Our organizational history and reality: centralization/provincialism

In the history of our Congregation there have been different organizational models that have accentuated one or another vision of the congregation. Father Etienne could represent the most significant expression of the centralized model. After Vatican II the Constitutions of 1984 provided a model of decentralized organization that is
characterized by notable provincial autonomy. In this organizational model, the Superior General certainly continues to be the center of unity for the Congregation of the Mission and simultaneously the Visitors enjoy important competencies.


What reasons motivated and justified the study of this theme and the publication of these documents? Is it perhaps necessary to introduce some reform into our present organizational structure? We formulate these questions and invite you to look for some answers.

The international dimension of the Congregation of the Mission and interprovincial collaboration

Since 1992 there has been an increased awareness of our international dimension and the desire for interprovincial collaboration and solidarity. The situation of the present world (new forms of poverty, globalization, massive immigration, rapid and almost instantaneous communication) and the Congregation itself (inter- and multi-cultural, growing importance of Regional Conferences of Provinces, international mission, CIF) have contributed to a greater desire for actions that involve interprovincial and international collaboration. We are perhaps at the beginning of a long journey.

An ecclesial context: we can learn from others

In the Church different congregations have traveled or are traveling on the path of reconfiguration. The Daughters of Charity have embarked upon this journey in France where they moved from six provinces to two. This theme is also being discussed in other countries such as Spain and the United States. The theme of their reorganizational plan is attractive: Charismatic impulse. New Organization of the Daughters of Charity in Spain. Their goals in this process include: 1) revive and revitalize the charism; 2) open ourselves to the new; 3) practice discernment.

The Redemptorists, 5,500 members in 78 countries, held their last General Assembly in Rome in November, 2009 and the theme was that of restructuring. This theme was expressed with the words:
Preach the Gospel in a new way! Renewed hope, renewed hearts, renewed structures for the mission. In that Assembly they approved principles to guide the discernment and the carrying out of a restructuring process for the mission.

Other Congregations or Institutes (the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Marist Brothers, Jesuits, the Salesian Brothers, etc.) have organized or are organizing their Congregations by reducing, more or less significantly, the number of their provinces, especially in the United States and Europe.

Can we not learn from the experiences and the processes that other congregations have lived or are living?

Other contexts

Certainly other contexts could help us see more clearly the distinct aspects of reconfiguration. What might these contexts be?

II. SEEK, JUDGE AND DISCERN IN CONTEMPLATION

1. Some criteria from our guide for life: Constitutions and reconfiguration

- Number 2 of our Constitutions: With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.

- Number 9 of our Constitutions: Moreover, our vocation — that is, our purpose, nature, and spirit — should direct the life and organization of the Congregation. Our organization, which is regulated in the third part of our Constitutions, includes two crucial themes, government and almost all our provincial institutions and structures (province, local community, assemblies, councils, superiors, etc.) and temporal goods.

- Number 107, 3 of our Constitutions: Besides the faculties granted him by universal law or by special concession, it is the function of the superior general having consulted the interested members, and with the consent of his council, to set up, join, divide, and suppress provinces, observing the norms of the law.
2. **Objectives and principal guides for our reconfiguration**

Reconfiguration must begin with and direct itself toward:

- Our Vincentian vocation and charismatic identity;
- Apostolic and missionary vitality: we are a Society of Apostolic Life born of and for the mission;
- The promotion of the internal, spiritual and community vitality (quality of community life, spiritual life, formation, animation and government, economic resources...);
- The unity of the CM, mutual solidarity and coresponsible solidarity;
- The viability (non-viability) of each one of the entities/units (Province, Vice Province, region);
- A diversity of forms and models of reconfiguration because the situations are distinct;
- The first and the last, the poor and the abandoned.

**III. CARRY OUT RECONFIGURATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OUR VOCATION AND MISSION**

1. **A previous question**

Are we willing to accept reconfiguration because we view it as a true value and a challenge for the International Congregation and for different regions in the world or do we prefer to put off consideration of this question, viewing it as secondary or something on the margin because it is a difficult question to confront? Do we desire this or not? Should this not be one of the commitments of the Congregation of the Mission during the next six years?

2. **In acting, examine the real viability of each Province**

If we view viability as the ability to make real our Vincentian identity, the ability to fulfill the Vincentian mission and the ability to sustain a healthy life in community and the mission, then we can ask: what realities make a province viable and, in their absence, make a province non-viable?

Viability is a sign of community and mission well-being while non-viability is a sign of fragility and deterioration. It could be useful and might clarify things to translate viability into its three principle concrete dimensions.
- Is this province (vice-province, region) viable, that is, does it have the ability to sustain and continue the Vincentian mission (apostolic activity, Vincentian ministries, attention to the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Family)?
- Is this province (vice-province, region) viable, that is, is it able to carry out the basic elements of our Vincentian community and organization (a qualitative common life, a clear sense of belonging, initial and on-going formation of the missionaries, adequate formators, healthy institutions of leadership, encouragement, local government and provincial government, sufficient financial resources for the mission)?
- In summary, is this province (vice-province, region) viable, that is, does it have a minimum and sufficient number of missionaries and candidates, the missionaries of our future, to respond to the two key elements of viability that were previously indicated, the mission and community? In the final analysis, without missionaries there is no mission or community to sustain.

On the other hand, is this province (vice-province, region) in a fragile position and therefore perhaps non-viable? What are the most important signs of this reality? On various occasions during these past six years I have asked this question with regard to some concrete provinces (which I will not name here) and I now invite each one of you to ask this question about the viability or non-viability of your own province and the provinces of your continental region.

Reconfiguration has to begin with a sincere question concerning provincial viability or non-viability. If viability is weak or in the balance, then perhaps a process of reconfiguration is needed in order to revitalize and recreate a province.

Nevertheless, interprovincial reconfiguration would be of little use if the end result of this process were that of maintaining the viability of one or several provinces for only a few years. This would be an artificial prolongation of community and missionary life that is on its deathbed. In such a case it would not be worth the effort to promote a reconfiguration that would be the announcement of a death already proclaimed. The ethical questions surrounding the beginning and the end of life are burning themes in the present cultural debate and can help us in our reflections on the reconfiguration, the birth and the possible death of some of our provinces.
3. Facilitators and paths of reconfiguration

Facilitators of the path of reconfiguration

- An intense and active participation of each Province in its regional conference.
- A greater awareness of the vocation and regional mission of the Congregation of the Mission on its own continent and then in light of this to make said mission concrete in the Province. We are dealing here with a global way of thinking (regionally and continentally) in order to act in a better way on the local level (provincially).
- Inspiration and movement that comes from Regional Conferences of Provinces and from its different zones... they can serve as “teachers of reconfiguration.”
- A pro-active rather a passive attitude in confronting this reality. The community (the Congregation of the Mission, Provinces, local communities) ought to confront the present reality and ought to anticipate the future by making intelligent decisions instead of passively allowing the reality to impose decisions on us, decisions that can mortally suffocate us. My feeling is that today in some provinces there are various situations that are choking us in our community and apostolic dimensions and we are not being pro-active nor acting boldly.
- Dialogical interaction between diverse provincial cultures (values, history and tradition, lifestyle) in the context of charismatic fidelity and fraternity. The theme of culture or provincial culture seems to be of special and enormous importance. We can say that each province has its own Vincentian culture. Any reconfiguration will be blocked if a provincial culture is not able to respect, open itself to, dialogue and integrate itself with other provincial cultures.
- Adhering to a Vincentian utopia as the inspiring and transforming principle of our structures. It is most important that there be clarity with regard to the goals that we hope to obtain in order to ascertain the right paths that we must travel and thus achieve the final goal.

Paths toward reconfiguration

In the process of reconfiguration, where does one begin? What does this process lead to? What paths must be travelled? What stages are involved? What are the timeframes? Here are various responses.
• Interprovincial collaboration and all that it involves: exchange of missionaries, mutual assistance, etc....
• Interprovincial unity on the level of initial and on-going formation of incorporated members and priests: interprovincial seminaries, interprovincial programs of on-going formation; interprovincial meetings of young priests....
• Interprovincial unity of some interprovincial ministries and the establishment of interprovincial communities.
• A progressive interprovincial consensus on the legislative and executive level: provincial norms “quasi” interprovincial, Provincial Assemblies in common, interprovincial meetings of Visitors and their councils....
• The progressive cessation of some of the autonomous provincial competencies and the consequent increase of the interprovincial competencies of an entity/unit which is greater than the province. As a result, the institution and the figure of the Province and the Visitor will have to undergo some changes.

4. Difficulties and resistance in reconfiguration

• Fear of change and loss of identity. Change implies risk which in turn implies difficulties that generate fear. More profound changes imply greater difficulties and fears. On the other hand we can overcome these resistances if we place our provincial identity in the perspective of belonging to one single Congregation rather than belonging to one particular province.
• Prejudice toward others, those who are different, our brothers in other provinces.
• A provincial attitude that is incapable of seeing beyond our own horizons. This mentality thinks: the tower of the Church of my people is the best tower in the world.
• A provincial and centralized conception of the Congregation of the Mission and its provinces. Such a conception might be justified at times (a suffocating centralization, a uniformity for the sake of uniformity) but most often such an attitude is based on unjustifiable reasons (provincial individualism, excessive exaltation of what is mine, forgetfulness of the common good).

5. The hidden grace in reconfiguration

What is the grace that the Lord wants to give to us through reconfiguration? Why is it worth the effort to seek and to desire reconfiguration? How does reconfiguration affect and better our
living out of the charism, better our community life, our formation and evangelizing mission? It is most important to seek a personal, community and provincial response to these questions, a search and a response that desires to perceive the grace that the Lord is offering us in this transforming process. A casual encounter with this grace will immediately help us justify the meaning of our journey and help us bear with the fatigue that is inherent in the journey. Without the desire, the search and the encounter with the Lord’s grace, it is impossible to engage in the adventure of the journey: reconfiguration can only come about if it begins in our own heart. What treasures and values are hidden in reconfiguration?

IV. FINAL REFLECTION

1. Reconfiguration (intra-provincial and interprovincial), is a reality that has occurred and will continue to occur in history and in the present era of the Congregation of the Mission. It would be good to confront this reality with the conviction that only the Lord, Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and always and that only the Church is indefectible. The Congregation of the Mission and, even more, its provinces are not indefectible; even though they have existed until now, one or another can cease to exist.

2. Reconfiguration is an important theme, a theme for the present and the future of the Congregation, a place in which we form our fidelity to our vocation, community and mission.

3. For the next six years the theme of reconfiguration can be one of the specific commitments of the whole Congregation (cf. Directory).

4. The path of interprovincial reconfiguration requires a clear analysis of the financial situation of the Congregation and also implies a profound international reconfiguration of finances.

5. Reconfiguration through expansion is lived with a more positive and euphoric spirit than reconfiguration through retrenchment. Hope is based on new birth and expansion, while established habits and fear raise barriers in the way of the path of reconfiguration through retrenchment. But reconfiguration through expansion is not free from difficulties and dangers (cf. Vice Province of Saint Cyril and Methodius) and reconfiguration through retrenchment need not be lived as mere resignation to the fact or from the perspective of loss of identity (cf. New Province of the United States, West).

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
The year 2016 will mark the 200th anniversary of the first Vincentian missionaries to set foot in the United States in Baltimore, Maryland. They came in response to the invitation of American missionary bishops in the territory of upper Louisiana. After a short stay in Baltimore they eventually reached the heartland of America by wagon, flatboat and horseback.

The increasing number of Vincentians arriving from Europe led to the founding of an American Province in 1835. The growth in vocations to the congregation and the challenges of administering the sprawling territory of the province eventually led to the split of the province in 1881. The Eastern Province, headquartered at Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, assumed, in general, the states east of the Mississippi River, while the Western Province, headquartered in Perryville, Missouri, had the western states.

Then in 1958 the Western Province once again divided to address the rapid growth of the mission and to more effectively administer the mission. In this division the Western Province was subdivided into one province and two vice-provinces. The province was now called the Midwest Province and was headquartered in St. Louis. The two vice-provinces were the South and West, headquartered in Dallas, Texas and Los Angeles, California. Then in 1975 the two vice-provinces became full provinces. In that same year the vice-province of the province of Poland that was established in 1920 was also made a full province, the New England Province. So in 1975 there were five provinces of Vincentians serving in the United States.

On January 25, 2010 the Congregation of the Mission in the United States once again was reorganized or reconfigured to address the reality that was facing it in the United States. Because of steady decline of vocations to the Congregation the three Western Provinces (the Midwest, West and South) of the United States chose to reorganize themselves as the Western Province. This decision was made because of the declining numbers of Vincentians, but also because it was believed that this new configuration might help us continue the mission of the congregation in the States.
The decision to reconfigure the three Western Province did not happen overnight. I am aware that this topic has been in discussion for at least 20 years. In the late 1980's the Southern Province and the Western Province had established a joint committee to explore the possibility of the merger of the two provinces. I served on that committee. However the work of the committee came to an end with the change of provincial leadership of one of the provinces before any type of reconfiguration could occur. In the early 1990 another effort to move the issue forward to reconfigure came from the Superior General. With this initiative all five provinces were asked to consider the topic. This effort also failed when the committee asked to shepherd the project was unable to achieve a consensus among all the confreres of the five provinces on what shape the reconfiguration should take. Even though this process did not result in a consensus on reconfiguration, it did help identify that there was a strong interest among many of the confreres for some type of reconfiguration. In the end the Superior General recommended that those provinces who were interested in reconfiguration pursue the topic among themselves.

In the later years of the 1990's the Provinces of the South and West, at the strong urging of their provincial assemblies, began to discuss the prospects of reconfiguration. The provincials of the two provinces organized joint meetings of the two provincial councils to discuss the topic. As a result of these meeting a commitment was made to work more collaboratively and to continue the discussion on reconfiguration. The collaboration included: where possible establish single committees (formation, vocation, ongoing formation, etc.) composed of confreres from both provinces to serve both provinces. One confrere served as treasurer and vocation director for both provinces. We also began drafting new policies that both provinces could adopt (formation, vocation, sabbatical). We began sharing personnel across provincial lines more easily and developed protocols to facilitate these increased sharing.

The South and the West began merging before the final decision to merge came about. While the South and West were well on their way to merging the provincial of the Midwest Province, at the strong urging of his provincial assembly, asked to be included in the discussion. In fact the Midwest Provincial did more than ask to be included in the discussion, he proposed that the three provincials, after receiving a resolution from their provincial assemblies, commit to a timeframe for reconfiguration. In 2007 the three provincials decided on a date in January of 2010 for the reconfiguration of the province to happen. The three years leading up to the reconfi-
guration date would be used to make all necessary preparation to turn over to the new provincial a fully functioning province in January 2010.

**Summary thoughts of Reconfiguration of the Western Province**

1. It would not have happened if the confreres of the province did not want it to happen. Confreres need a forum to openly discuss the pros and cons of this issue. They need to be able to freely say what they want about this issue and listen to each other. In the end if the confreres do not want it, I do not think it should happened.

2. Provincial leadership is critical. Provincials cannot force confreres to ask for reconfiguration, but they can allow and encourage the discussion to occur. They can stop it from happening. In our experience when one provincial did not want it to happen the process ended.

3. I think it is easier for the confreres to accept reconfiguration with another province when they have already had some earlier (good) experiences of collaboration and working with the other provinces — when there have already been opportunities to establish or (in the case of our three provinces) re-establish relationships.

4. I believe there needs to be a compelling reason for reconfiguration. Our reason was we thought this was the best way for us to continue the mission of the Congregation in the United States in the future. Our reason was the mission. The mission must determine the best configuration we need for the 21st century.
First of all, it is possible to insist on the importance of remembering the history of our two provinces in France; but this should not lead us to some form of sterile nostalgia but rather should allow us to live the present challenges of the contemporary world. At the end of the XVIII century France had seven provinces but it is also important to remember that a province was created in France to counteract the influence of foreign countries. This is part of our history that we ought to accept calmly.

How are we going to live the process of reconfiguration so that we move forward and open new perspectives that are mindful of the present context? The configuration of the two French Provinces returns us to 1953 and represents an important stage in our awareness of the Vincentian charism. In place of the French word re-configuración we prefer the Italian word riconfigurazione which seems to us to communicate greater joy and dynamism than the very technical French word. It is in this spirit that we wish to present you with some elements of our reflection.

1. Situation¹

**Toulouse**

At the present time we are 61 missionaries. In 1953 we numbered 183 and that number does not include confreres serving on the missions ad gentes. The decades of 1970 and 1980 represent a difficult period during which time we had to leave the apostolic schools and diocesan seminaries that we administered and were responsible for. Our Provincial Plan has been revised.

We are still present in Iran and another notable reality that has occurred during recent years has been an opening to the Interna-

¹ Sources: 2010 Catalogue.
tional Community, helping different provinces throughout the world and accepting student-confreres and later priest-confreres. Today, because of the presence of 9 different nationalities, we rejoice in a rich international experience within our province.

Paris

The Province is officially composed of 166 missionaries and they live in very different realities in distinct countries:

- In Turkey, where the Congregation has been present since 1793, there are no French missionaries. The direction of the San Benoit School (with some 800 students) has been assumed by the laity who accompanied us.
- In Greece, in the whole northern part, there are two Greek missionaries and three Polish missionaries. We hope to have an even greater international presence that will take into consideration the missionary requests that we have received from the different immigrant groups that have settled in this country.
- Quebec: one year ago two missionaries renewed our presence in this Canadian Province where we work in collaboration with some married deacons and the Vincentian Family. In the coming years we hope to continue this insertion in union with the local Church where we continue to develop our charism.

The Province accompanies the missionaries of two regions that are especially dynamic because they mobilize so many different elements:

- Vietnam where there are now 54 missionaries. Very soon this region will become a Vice-Province and certainly this is a source of dynamic missionary activity.
- The region of Cameroon which has 33 missionaries has developed both within the country itself and has been able to send three missionaries to Bangui in the Republic of Central Africa. At the present time this area is being organized around a regional superior.

Algeria should also be mentioned here because in that area there is an interprovincial community (Paris and Toulouse) of three missionaries and this community needs to be reinforced.
2. A collaboration that has been lived for many years...

It is clear that our numbers in France have declined very noticeably: in the area of provincial administration a number of missionaries were involved. At the present time the Visitors and Provincial Economes are practically alone. If there have been backward movements, it is important however to take new initiatives and today it is important to point out the importance of the presence of missionaries from throughout the world. The international and intercultural dimensions of our Province have allowed us to confront and live new challenges.

In reality, on the level of the French state there is only one autonomous province in France. Very quickly our common formation represented a point of convergence for the two provinces. Many years ago the occasions for collaboration multiplied. We can point out the following specifics:

- The Interprovincial Council meets three times a year;
- Collaboration between the two economes in order to address financial questions and secure investments;
- Attention to vocations has led us to take on new initiatives with the Daughters of Charity (Belgium, Switzerland and France);
- Initial and on-going formation of the missionaries (in particular the regular meetings of young confreres);
- Services which are social in nature;
- Interprovincial communities;
- Yearly programmed retreats;
- Publications (GRAV – Group of Vincentian Investigation and Encouragement).

3. What is in play for us today?

In this process of reconfiguration we are dealing with priorities and are not focused on administration or carrying out a strategy of concerted retrenchment. Thus we see this movement as a way to enter into a process of deeper reflection and take new initiatives on the pastoral and missionary level: to better the ways in which our charism can shine forth in the world today. In this environment it will be possible to encourage and stir up reflection on the itinerant Mission where we attempt to organize periods of time for a more powerful and more explicit proclamation of the Good News. Such reflection allows us to undertake and engage in new
initiatives: for example, encouraging faith development in the various Vincentian institutions that are presently directed by laymen and laywomen.

Any consideration of reconfiguration implies an openness to the questions and the opportunities of our contemporary world: this is not a process of closing in upon ourselves but one of confronting, with other individuals and/or groups, the challenges of our present era. In this sense it would be good to recall two aspects:

- Collaboration with the Vincentian Family and with committed lay people in service of those persons who are most poor, the heritage that has been given to the branches of the Vincentian Family, branches that are autonomous and well organized. At this time the new context invites us to invent new responses that perhaps had been considered previously: the Jubilee Year was particularly enriching as a result of a small coordinating committee that was constituted for this purpose and we hope that this committee will continue to function.

- The second aspect that appears to us to be very enriching is the international and intercultural openness: both of these realities represent an opportunity since we see this not as some form of impoverishing foreign countries for our own benefit but rather a way of living these exchanges.

4. Recent initiatives

As we look at the reality of reconfiguration we see that this offers us the opportunity to adapt the organization to the reality in which we are living. This is not a question of dreaming but rather a question of understanding how we can invent new responses as we become more and more mindful of our itinerant character and the need to insert ourselves into the local reality. In the present situation of our provinces we are able to engage in:

- A process of interprovincial reflection on the itinerant mission which leads to a new missionary endeavor that can be undertaken with the collaboration of the Vincentian Family and is an occasion to invent new forms of presence. We are able to extend ourselves further in the elaboration of innovative community plans.

- A deeper process of reflection among the two Councils (decision to prepare some common times during our Provincial Assemblies).
5. The present process

1. Our Provincial Assemblies (August 30 - September 4, 2009): Each province formed a preparatory commission and followed through on the decision of the Interprovincial Council. These commissions were formed in order to organize the Assemblies which met in the same place and during which there was ample time for common searching, listening and participation.

2. During the time of preparation we chose as a basis for our reflection the letter of the Superior General to the missionaries and the members of the Assembly (June 23, 2009). In this letter the question of reconfiguration was explicitly addressed in terms of "allowing us to make a greater commitment to our mission of evangelizing the poor and making better use of all our personal and institutional resources."

3. This has permitted us to respond in a formal way to these questions and also enabled us to take a step forward. The positive response of the members of the Assembly has allowed the Interprovincial Council to establish a Commission of Reconfiguration.

4. Finally, an Interprovincial Assembly will be celebrated in January, 2011. The objective of this gathering is to come to a better awareness of and make more precise the reference points of our journey together, that is, to give witness to our confidence and our hope in the proclamation of the Good News rather than to dwell on our fears with regard to the future.

In Conclusion

We are committed to a process that affects each missionary: following the example of Saint Vincent and mind of our present situation and our desire to follow Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, how are we going to invent a response for today?

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE POOR

MANUEL GINETE, C.M.
Delegate of the Superior General
for the Vincentian Family

Introduction

Almost six years ago when Father General offered me to work with him for the Vincentian Family, I hesitated for several reasons. Primarily I did not consider myself sufficiently experienced in these matters. Others I thought would be more credible because they had better knowledge, deeper spirituality and extensive exposure, particularly those from countries where the VF has been active, organized and widely accepted. Despite these misgivings, in faith I agreed to help him in the service of the VF worldwide. Five and a half years later, I feel that what I have offered was far less than what I have received. The lessons I learned and the inspiration they gave me are much more than the little service I rendered. As the end of my mandate approaches, I wish to share with you some of these lessons, realizations and inspiration. I also wish, with your permission, to pose some challenges for the Congregation in light of these lessons. To Father General and his previous Council I remain ever grateful for this privilege of a life-time to work for the poor through the family we call Vincentian.

Global Appeal of the Vincentian charism

One thing I discovered these past six years is the fact that the Vincentian charism has global appeal. This is not some original discovery, you may say, but these past years have shown me that it is one thing to read about more than 260 groups claiming membership in the Vincentian Family, it is altogether another to come face to face with some of them. Allow me to illustrate this point with two stories from concrete experience. Some years back, I was visiting a group of Sisters in South Korea. As I was ushered to their vestibule, one Sister said very plainly, “these are our founders,” pointing to the pictures of
St. Vincent and St. Louise. I smiled, somewhat amused because as far as I knew these Sisters were neither Daughters of Charity nor Ladies or women members of the Confraternities of Charity, least of all Vincentian priests or brothers — these are the only groups I know that St. Vincent himself founded. But, nonetheless, God bless them! God bless their founding Sisters from Paderborn, Germany who, when they started this mission in Korea, gave them not only the pictures of those who inspired their congregation, but also their spirit, their commitment to the service of the poor. These are the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of Suwon, South Korea, proud members of the Strasbourg Federation of the Sisters of Charity.

In 2005 when I visited Ethiopia, a Daughter of Charity requested me to give an inspirational talk to members of her staff who assist her in building bridges and houses for poor communities in Addis Ababa. The first question they asked me — “are we members of the Vincentian Family?” I asked them, why not? “We are Orthodox, Muslims, non-Catholics?” I followed up by asking them, “what do you think of St. Vincent? Does he inspire you to work for the poor?” They answered, “St. Vincent is very special to us, he is our model, he is the best.” With that kind of an answer, I could only respond, “and who am I to say you are not members of the Vincentian Family?”

There are other stories but these two sufficiently point to the extensive appeal of St. Vincent de Paul and his charism of service of the poor, an attraction that crosses national and religious boundaries. Many of these groups consider being Vincentian not simply as a badge of honor or another club membership, but more importantly as a serious summons to act concretely here and now on behalf of and with the millions who continue to live in extreme poverty.

I came away from these visits and contacts wishing to take this inspiration to the international level. Thankfully, we have started to do that. To the annual meeting of the VF International Superiors and Presidents we have invited groups other than those we are familiar with, like:

- Sisters of Charity Federations: Strasbourg, North America
- Sisters of Charity of Jean-Antide Thouret
- De Paul International
- Brothers of Our Lady Mother of Mercy (CMM)
- Sisters of Our Lady Mother of Mercy (SCMM), and the
- Brothers of Charity (FC)
From them I personally have learned that belonging to the Vincentian Family is not so much a matter of historical origin or close links with the original foundations — these are important, mind you — but most especially one of living the charism in the service of the poor as fully, creatively, and unreservedly as possible. From them I learned how even a small team can effect a change in the lives of prisoners in Kenya, how even an aging congregation can pass on the charism to the younger members in countries other than the country of their origin, and how one can have the courage to work for the poorest of the poor in places like Sudan, even without the assurance of security from religious persecution. All these have inspired me and have imparted a deeper appreciation of my sense of belonging to the worldwide Vincentian Family.

Call to Collaboration, Partnership and Networking

The second lesson I learned is connected with the first. It is about collaboration, partnership and networking. Many in the Vincentian Family consider collaboration and partnership as an essential component in Vincentian pastoral methodology. Many want to serve the poor, but they want to do so with others, as a team, in a Family.

The present generation appreciates the importance of partnership and networking, after all it is immersed in it. For many young people, networking is the good news that they are able to connect with, because it resonates with their dreams and their aspirations for themselves as well as for the poor. This was what I heard in 2008 in Sydney when the young people of our Vincentian Family gathered to share their dreams for the undeveloped and the forgotten. This was the same message I heard last May from the young people in the Ukraine, some of whom were African students in Kharkiv recently introduced to the Vincentian charism by our enterprising young confreres there. This was the same enthusiasm and resolve I saw just last month at the National Vincentian Young Adults Convention held at De Paul University, Chicago, some of whom, interestingly enough, find no difficulty in proclaiming themselves Vincentian even though they are Jewish, Muslim, or non-practicing Catholic.

This past decade the Vincentian Family has attempted a number of collaborative projects on the international level, like the Globalization of Charity — Fight Against Hunger in 2001, the more modest

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Fight Against Malaria in 2003, and this year, on the occasion of the 350th anniversaries, the Haiti Micro-Finance Project. The success of this last or the lack of it lies still in the future. But the first two projects have met with mixed results. If for nothing else, the lack of tangible and long-lasting positive effects of these projects point to the inherent difficulty of collaboration on the world-wide level. To ask some 200 groups to adopt a common project remains a formidable task, no matter the high level of enthusiasm for collaboration. But in other areas, the Vincentian Family has been somewhat successful — the area of common formation in the charism, and the area of communication. Still there is much that needs to be done in these fields, but for now we can rest assured that, at the very least, we are going in the right direction.

Young people in the Family are well aware of the difficulties in the area of collaboration. They who have taught me the value of networking have no illusions about what can be realistically achieved on this matter. They understand that there will be snags, some will attempt to prioritize their preferred projects, there will be misunderstanding, tensions, etc. But they think these are not insurmountable obstacles. Confidently they say, if one avenue is closed, look for another. If one network is clogged, find one that is free and more accessible. This is what they have taught me — never to give up, never to think that we have reached a point of no return. It is one lesson we need to learn, those of us who have become so used to our ways, our traditional methods, and the boundaries of our countries and provinces.

For effective collaboration and partnership, certain structures need to be established. On this matter, I wish to acknowledge the example of Latin America. They have formed not only a national coordinating Councils for the Vincentian Family, they also have one on the continental level. Inspired by their efforts and their experience, we are now in the process of forming similar Coordinating Councils, for Africa-Madagascar, Asia-Oceania, and hopefully for US-Canada and Europe. These Councils will not solve all problems relative to collaboration and partnership, but at least we have a framework to use in order to address these problems and move our common agenda together as a Family.

One final thing about partnership. People of this generation are not shy about seeking collaboration with whoever is interested. Partnership with other groups outside of our Vincentian Family is something that has been done in the past and is something worth exploring further. After all, St. Vincent was a pioneer in this and had shown us how helpful it could be. If it will promote a systemic change in the condition of the poor people, why not!
Vincentian Spirituality: Buried Treasure, Pearl of Great Price

A third lesson I learned from the Vincentian Family has to do with what we term "Vincentian spirituality." Like some people I used to think that there was nothing particularly distinctive about Vincent's way when compared to the more famous and dominant Benedictine, Augustinian, Carmelite, Franciscan, and Ignatian spiritualities. But these past years have made me appreciate the scriptural moorings, the depth and breadth of Vincentian spirituality. Grounded on the concrete experience of and with the poor, our spirituality, although deceptively simple, goes right to the very heart of the Incarnation of one who chose to be poor, who throughout his life consistently opted for the poor, and who in his death as a poor person revealed to us the transformative power of poverty.

I have heard many lay people speak about how working for the poor has transformed them, has made them better human beings and more caring for those whom the Lord call "blessed in the kingdom of God." We all heard St. Vincent say that the poor showed him the way to the mission God had intended for him. Time and again Vincent showed us that direct and concrete contact with the poor has a way of solving some seemingly intractable problems, whether those of the Ladies of the court during his time, or even those of confreres with problems. We heard him say "let the poor evangelize us" or "the poor are our lords and masters."

Members of the Vincentian Family made me realize that when we allow the poor to come into our lives, we begin to understand the real meaning of what it means to be human and to be so loved by the Divine. When faced with extreme need, we dig deep down into what is noblest, most precious about being human — that ability to care, to sacrifice, to give of oneself so others may live, that original dignity of human beings who are capable of unrestricted self-gift for the other — that part of ourselves that goes beyond the narcissism, the materialism and consumerism with which human beings are characterized nowadays. And to think, it is the poor that gives us the opportunity to see the best part of ourselves! With St. Vincent, we of the Christian faith call this "seeing the poor with the eyes of Christ" — our Christ experience. I venture to say that the Muslims, the Buddhists, and those of other faiths, who count themselves as Family members because Vincent's charism inspires them, can and do connect also with this spirituality because it touches the most human, the noblest and the best quality in them. This sense of fulfillment, I dare say, is what ultimately keeps those initially drawn by the philanthropy to come back again and again to lend their hand.
in the service of God's poor. It is this sense of well-being, and the prospect of sharing it with many like-minded souls, that urges members of the Vincentian Family not only to remain faithful and creative, but to seek collaboration and partnership. We will do well to share this at times buried treasure, this pearl of great price.

The C.M.'s Role in the Vincentian Family: Some Challenges

Finally, allow me the next few minutes to address an important concern for all of us who belong to the Congregation of the Mission. Father General in his initial report, and you yourselves — members of this General Assembly, have reflected on the many challenges facing our Congregation in light of increasing poverty, aging population and diminishing numbers in some areas, as well as growth, development and promise in newer territories. I speak now about the challenges that we in the C.M. face in relation to the rest of the Vincentian Family, or more succinctly, about the role I perceive the CM can play in the Vincentian Family.

Our invited speakers from some branches of the VF have already spoken on this matter. Here I will add my two cents worth of ideas. I sincerely believe that in generations to come, the C.M. will have an important role in the VF in two areas: leadership and formation.

But before speaking about these two areas, let me be clear about one thing. The perspective we take in regard to the VF is of paramount importance. I see two possible perspectives. One is when the CM views the Family as an assistant in extending help to the poor, much like the view we take in relation to other groups or associations that partner with us. This perspective implies that the CM is at the center. The other perspective is when we see the Vincentian charism of service of the poor as the center, the focus of all the collaborative efforts of the different branches of the Vincentian Family. While it is to be expected that a CM General Assembly puts the Congregation and its needs at the center, and equally understandable that other branches of the VF do not necessarily do so, placing the service of the poor as that to which all of us as Vincentians are being summoned to effective and concrete action may make us perceive better the future relations we will have with each other. The perspective we in the CM take has implications on what we can do concerning leadership or animation and on formation in the Vincentian charism.
Leadership and Animation

Relative to the first, you well know about the esteem, respect and honor that members of the VF give to our Superior General. He is the reference point in matters of projects, activities, and all things "Vincentian." As one often asked to chair the meeting of VF International Leaders, he is in a privileged position to determine the agenda of these meetings. Also, we know that the CM Visitors in many countries hold a similar distinctive place in the VF coordinating groups on the national level, and even the CM local superior is likewise treated with equal dignity.

But it is good for us to know that there are also a number of exemplary leaders in the different branches of the Vincentian Family who may be just as outstanding, if not more so, as our own leaders — outstanding in their commitment to the poor, in their expertise on matters relating to poverty and administration, in their life-witness, in their evangelical spirit, etc. These leaders have one thing in common — a passion for the poor. From my limited lens, future leaders in the Vincentian Family will be judged and recognized not principally by historical pedigree and connection but by the spirit, the passion, the life-testimony, and yes, the expertise in the service of the poor.

Formation

The other area where the CM could play a significant role is in the formation of our Family members. This was the constant clamor I heard — help us deepen our spirituality, assist us in being rooted in Vincent's ways, show us the way to fruitful and effective partnership, encourage us to remain faithful to the charism, etc. Many VF lay leaders of whom I earlier spoke, leaders who distinguish themselves by combining total dedication to the poor and their daily responsibilities of being father, mother, breadwinner, teacher, banker, businesswomen, etc., are one in saying that the Vincentian Family needs the Fathers and Brothers of the Mission, as well as the Daughters of Charity, more than ever, precisely for the matter of formation in Vincent's spirit. God bless them! They have faith in us, they trust that we in the CM can help them in these things.

And truth to tell, their confidence is not ill-placed. Our history throughout has demonstrated the Congregation's capacity to form leaders — whether among the clergy or within the ranks of lay people. I have always thought it a Congregational principle that if and when we are not able to do direct work for the poor, we can always help form those persons who will do direct service of the poor
on our behalf. Nowadays, there are millions who are eager to dirty their hands, to soil their feet, in order to extend a helping hand to the oppressed, the migrants, and those imprisoned by drugs, disease, ignorance and wars. But there are not enough men and women who will "waste their time" to make sure that those who do all that service for the poor do so from the noblest of motivations, from the promptings of the Spirit that moves mountains and hearts, from the authentic depth of one's charism and giftedness. The work of formation transcends aging and the restrictions of space and time. It is a ministry that an 80 year old somewhere in Nijmegen, Toulouse, St. Louis or the Solomons, as well as a young confrere in Karnataka, Kenya, Curitiba and Cracow can perform. But, only if they have the one pre-requisite — that the passion with which they entered the Internal Seminary remains inflamed by the contemplative spirit of missionaries, and the humility to learn from their experience with the poor.

Members of the CM will be leaders and formators in the Vincentian Family when these requisite dispositions are present and remain alive. A tall order, certainly, but one that we do well to heed! And, if for one reason or another, we cannot live up to these expectations, we could at least be gracious and humble enough to pass the torch on to more capable and more worthy hands.

Conclusion

Nelson Mandela once said "there is no shortcut to the country of our dreams."\(^2\) Whatever dreams we may have for the Vincentian Family need to be rooted in the lessons we learn as we welcome one another into Vincent’s family, as we inspire each other in his spirit, and as we seek to work together and to be partners for and with the poor. As I close, allow me to tell another story, this time from the time of St. Vincent.

During the war years of 1640s in Lorraine and ten years later in Picardy, Champagne, and even here in Paris, Vincent mobilized the response to such a situation in an organized and creative way, covering all aspects of the devastation and involving a whole range of the "army of charity" — from a publicity campaign, 'charity warehouse,' soup kitchen, education of poor village girls and even country priests, to tools for various trades, farming implements and grain for sowing, etc. In all this Vincent was not alone. As J.M. Roman puts it:

\(^2\) Quoted in Cohen's article cited above.
"Not just Vincent de Paul but all the religious orders as well, the civil and ecclesiastical bodies, the religious associations, the merchant and craftsmen's guilds, as well as private individuals, all collaborated in the work of relieving the catastrophe. The Company of the Blessed Sacrament and the Jansenists played an important part in this work. The archbishop took over-all command of the movement, but Vincent, because of his experience and his many resources, played a very important part in it, together with his priests, the ladies and the Daughters of Charity. There was bound to be friction and jealousy among such a wide variety of workers, some of whom were deeply divided on religious grounds. There was a misunderstanding between the ladies of Charity and the religious of Port Royal over a donation sent by the queen of Poland. Vincent was quick to clear up the matter. What interested him was that the poor should be helped, not who did the work."

What was important for Vincent was not who did the work, but that the poor were served. Certainly, a formidable challenge to us, members of the Vincentian Family!

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DEAR FRIENDS FROM THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY, PARTICULARLY, FROM THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION,

I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO REPRESENT THE SVdP IN THIS PANEL. AS A MATTER OF INTRODUCTION, I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY FOR 40 YEARS AND WAS INTRODUCED TO A CONFERENCE BY MY FATHER.

I HAVE STARTED IN BRAZIL, AND MET MY WIFE WITHIN THE SOCIETY, WHEN SHE AND I WERE YOUTH COORDINATORS. AFTER 20 YEARS OF MARRIAGE AND 13 MOVES TO DIFFERENT CITIES AND COUNTRIES (PARIS, BOSTON, SAO PAULO, RIO DE JANEIRO, WASHINGTON-DC, PORT-AU-PRINCE IN HAITI, SANTO DOMINGO), WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THE SOCIETY IN MANY Instances AND CULTURES. HOWEVER, WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE MIRACLE OF SIMILARITY: HOW CAN A SOCIETY BE PRESENT IN 140 COUNTRIES, FOR ALMOST 180 YEARS AND KEEP THE SAME SPIRIT: A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY CAN BE RECOGNIZED AT THE FIRST WORDS; A CONFERENCE IS SIMILAR EVERYWHERE. AS IN OZANAM'S TIME, THE CONFERENCE IS A SORT OF SACRED PLACE, WHERE YOU CAN BE WHAT YOU ARE, SHARE YOUR VOCATION, SERVE GENUINELY AND BE VERY COMFORTABLE TO EXPOSE THE LORD, WHO RESIDES IN EACH ONE OF ITS MEMBERS.

I THINK THIS MIRACLE IS WHAT MAKES THE SOCIETY UNIQUE: THE CONFERENCE BECOMES FOR US THE TEMPLE OF COMFORT, WHERE YOU DO NOT NEED TO SHOW THAT YOU ARE CLEVER, OR THAT YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL IN ALL Instances. ON THE CONTRARY, THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO SHARE IS YOUR WILL TO SERVE, TRUSTING PROVIDENCE TO GIVE YOU THE NECESSARY COMPETENCE, AS WELL AS ALL OTHER MEANS.

ANDREA AND I HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR THE LAST 20 YEARS TO MAKE OUR FAMILY, OUR HOME, A PLACE LIKE THIS. IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS, WE HAVE LIVED IN FOUR DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND HAVE LOST ALL OUR BELONGINGS IN THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE. YOU CAN IMAGINE WHAT THIS CAN REPRESENT IN THE MINDS OF A 19 YEAR OLD BOY AND A 16 YEAR OLD GIRL. THE LESSONS WE LEARNED WERE THE SAME WE HAVE LEARNED IN THE CONFERENCE: OUR HOME IS NOT WHAT WE HAVE BOUGHT OR THE WALLS WE HAVE BUILT, BUT THE LORD WE CARRY IN OUR HEARTS AND THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WE CAN FORM NOT ONLY WITHIN OURSELVES, BUT AMONG OURSELVES AS A FAMILY, IN SEARCH OF THE HOLINESS.
I would very much like that the Society and the Vincentian Family as a whole would be such a sacred place and environment and that we could attract more and more leaders, with the same vocation as the ones of the first conference. People who are convinced that in their families, in their professions, in their social life, no matter what the measures of success are, no matter what the difficulties are, they always respond with Grace and not with Human Nature (Imitation of Christ).

I wanted to focus my last 7 minutes of this talk on this specific issue: how can we, as a Vincentian Family, generate the means to recruit and form leaders, who can transform their neighborhood (and, ultimately, the world), through the Vincentian virtues.

Let me say a few words on my experience in Haiti. Living the last three years in Haiti, and, more particularly, the last five months, has been an enormous source of learning and inspiration for me. A couple of months ago, in a TV program, I was asked if I don't feel frustrated and disappointed with the fact that the disaster recovery is so slow in Haiti. I said no, I have no time for that. However, in a more restricted, and, as I mentioned before, more sacred forum, I must say yes, my learning experience starts with frustration and disappointment. Three years ago, my family and I were living in Bethesda, Maryland (a paradise), and I was invited to work in Haiti. My son was the first to say that we should go ahead and accept: "if we are to work for the poor, this should be the right place to live," he said. So, this collective decision was made to enhance our Vincentian vocation by a personal service to the poor. Now, when such a disaster occurs, even being the head of the most respected and impactful development institution in Haiti, I cannot solve the whole problem. I cannot rapidly feed the 1 million homeless population, or build the 250,000 homes needed to shelter them before the hurricane season starts. This feeling led me to reflect on two fundamental questions:

First, what has been really effective to accomplish some important results on disaster relief, over the last five months in Haiti? This question should come together with another more particular one: what difference can we, men and women, with the Vincentian vocation make in such situations?

The second question is, what replenishes our spiritual, mental and physical forces, when disappointment and frustration come every day, every hour, every minute? I am sure this is a common feeling with anyone who works in public service. I am sure this is the same feeling Vincent de Paul had, when he became a pastor in the poor countryside of France, or when he was a slave in Africa.
My reading of what has made a difference in Haiti, over the last three months is leadership. Leadership of genuine public servants, private entrepreneurs and members of the civil society, who have left their comfort zone to make a difference.

I am not talking about the people, who went to Haiti to be on TV. The essence of the leadership I am referring to is the one that is free from the TVs, the need to show-off, to grow in careers, to accomplish political success, to get better salaries through hardship payment.

This leadership is moved by faith. I do not want to teach the teachers here, but ethnologically, faith comes from fidem (from Latin), or the thing or person we can trust. In other words, it is something or a person I can believe. Evidently, my faith is my truth. So, we can accept that faith and truth are the same: faith, at the end, is the truth that I believe.

The Gospel, as well as tradition shows us that the truth gives us freedom, so, the faith is the truth that makes me free. In fact, analyzing the last five months, impact came from leaders, who were in Haiti for their faith, free from the slavery of the need for power, for glory and for money: the ordinary doctors, nurses, food distribution volunteers.

This leads to the reflection about our own value added as Vincentians. I am convinced that our difference is not related to WHAT we do (sometimes, others can do what we do, more effectively). Our difference is related to HOW we do (how we can transform the others' hearts and how we can transform our own hearts). This last point is very important, because, as mentioned earlier, the SVdP has been created to generate holy people, to primarily convert people, and, secondarily, to do it through service to the poor.

Now, the issue which should worry us as educators, policy makers and social entrepreneurs is how to enhance the sense that true leadership should be based on faith and freedom. In other words, how to generate an army of these leaders, who are prepared to change the world, with a vision which is larger than themselves and a genuine vocation to serve and to transform. I firmly believe that this century will be the time for social change makers, as the first half of the last century was the time for technology scientists and the second half was the time of the economists.

I think the answer to this question leads us to the link between history and faith.

History derives from histör, or the one who knows or the one who sees. These two aspects of history are equally important. In fact, history is “the record of past events and times.” But the same
ethnological source presents history as "acts, ideas, or events that can shape the course of the future."

Taking the **past perspective** of History and, with a little bit of exaggeration, my history makes me a slave: "Each person is a hostage of his or her own history" (a quote from Pope John Paul II). If all we learn is a result of the history, our history is our truth, or our history derives our faith. No discussion about it, I think. The consequence, I think is more important than the concept: how difficult it is to transform ourselves, to convert, to make us free! Not an simple task!

Now, taking the **future perspective** of the History definition, or, the "acts, ideas, or events that can shape the course of the future," we can infer that my past history, or my faith allows me to build my own future history, as well as the future history of the ones we should impact. I think this is why Ozanam continuously taught us to fix our eyes in the future, and not waste time with the past!

Putting all this in Catholic terms, the only truth or faith that can make me build my own, as well as others' history is my "**self,"** or the Lord, who is present in me. This is, indeed, what, in the midst of disappointment and frustration, makes me wake up every day and restart again and again. This is what makes us react to the devil with grace, instead of human nature. This feeling for me, comes with a special relief of freedom and joy, I should mention.

I firmly believe that this is what we, members of the Vincentian Family, should focus on today. To generate mechanisms to identify, recruit and enhance leaders and entrepreneurs, who are freely moved by the truth that exists in each one's self, and change the History with innovation and persistence, no matter where they are at the moment: either in an extreme situation such as the Haiti earthquake, or, in the ordinary professional and family environment.

Father Maloney has presented to you the ZAFEN project. This project is all about identifying business and social entrepreneurs in Haiti, and about connecting them with individual and institutional supporters all over the world. We are confident that the partnership between local entrepreneurs and global promoters will put an important stone into the reconstruction of Haiti, generating job opportunities and social infrastructure improvement. This is a good example of innovation, transformation, and service to the poor.

Now, what would be the concrete and practical result of this discussion? I would like to propose that, starting over the year of the 350th anniversary of the death of Vincent and Louise, we join forces to create a common and benchmarking program to recruit and form transformational leaders within the Vincentian Family: people who can dream and realize a different way of doing development, through
the faith that they will transform minds and hearts, sweat into jobs, desperation into self-steam, personal interest into love.

The **Center for Vincentian and Transformational Leadership** should be a think tank, but speak the language of the assisted families; should attract the intellectuals (such as Ozanam), but attract train and touch the simplest; should form future Presidents of companies, but also their most humble server.

I think we have lost a little bit the miracle of the first Conference, in the higher levels of decision at our Society (not speaking about the other branches of the Vincentian Family). How difficult it is to attract intellectuals, change leaders and business leaders to take higher level responsibilities in our Society! Unfortunately, we do not have time to get into the details of how the **Center for Vincentian and Transformational Leadership** should be, but, ultimately, like the first Conference, it should be a sacred place, where either these people, or the very simple members could work together to dream of a future without poverty, to design frameworks to make this happen, to serve and to motivate others for holiness.

I am convinced that the SVdP is more and more opened to work with the Vincentian Family at all levels. We just need to identify concrete common and sustainable programs and the leaders to make them happen.

Thank you!
I want to start by acknowledging that Depaul International would not have grown as it has if it were not for the Congregation of the Mission and the wider Vincentian family, as you will see in the course of the next ten minutes. Thank you for that opportunity and thank you to Fr Gay for the invitation to speak to you today.

Shell Oil has a business plan that looks 100 years ahead. It can predict the tipping point when it will become uneconomic to continue with fossil fuels and will therefore focus its attention on alternative sources of energy in order to continue to trade successfully. Shell, like most successful global companies, thinks both long term and big. We need to do the same. We need to think big! The Vincent de Paul family is arguably a bigger brand than Shell Oil and certainly older than Coca Cola. It faces its challenges like any organization but it has immense riches in its history, its spirituality, its people and its assets.

My plea is for creative fidelity to the poor. How will we as a Vincentian Family respond together to the rising levels of poverty across the world, whether that poverty is absolute or relative? Depaul International has accepted Vincent’s challenge to work with the poorest of the poor — especially with the homeless poor. However, in facing up to this challenge, Depaul International works best in partnership with the Congregation of the Mission and the broader Vincentian Family. We believe that is the future. I think we have uncovered a model of working with the poor which embraces the talents of the different parts of the Vincentian Family but respects their differences. It is a model which puts Vincentian Values to the fore, is transparent in governance, embraces all faiths and none, is not subject to the whims of personalities, is sustainable and, most importantly, it seems to work!

A ten-minute presentation is not a long time to give you a full picture of Depaul International, its work and its aspirations for working with the Vincentian Family. With that in mind I have written this longer background paper giving more detail on our evolution as a group of charities and some contact information.
HISTORY

Partnership of Vincentian Family

The Depaul Group of charities began life in London as a partnership between three Vincentian groups: the Daughters of Charity, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and The Passage Day Centre. These three partners were brought together by Cardinal Basil Hume to tackle the growing problem of youth homelessness across the UK. The aim was to develop services for those in crisis, i.e. sleeping on the streets, but also to find a way to reintegrate these people into society so that they could have a place to call home and a stake in their community.

The reason that Cardinal Hume chose the Vincentians for this work is that they have a long and respected tradition of working with the poorest of the poor and, equally importantly, they could be relied upon to deliver.

I was the first employee of Depaul back in 1989 and I worked alongside a Director appointed by the Daughters of Charity (Sr Sarah King-Turner) to develop a whole series of homeless services working with people who were being turned away by other agencies. These were people with active drug problems, people addicted to alcohol, those with mental illness, prostitutes. We kept the barriers for entry to our services as low as possible. The focus was on the individual rather than any system.

At that time the board of trustees of the charity comprised was of different members of the Vincentian Family and at an operational level many of our staff and volunteers were drawn from the Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, SVP, etc. The Vincentian charism was strong because of the people involved and the history and tradition that they were bringing to bear in the day-to-day life of the charity.

Within five years Depaul had grown into a national homelessness agency in the UK. As it started to develop and find its feet, gradually the religious and lay members of the Vincentian Family began to withdraw, either to focus on other priorities or in response to a decline in their own numbers. Rather than the majority of board members being from the Vincentian Family we now had two out of fifteen. At a management level most Vincentian staff had moved on to new ministries. It was a time when Depaul could easily have lost its way and moved toward more secular values and language. Many charities start in a church crypt but lose all connection within a generation — was Depaul simply one of those, or, was the Vincentian ethos we had taken for granted worth fighting for? Could it survive when the big Vincentian personalities had moved on?
Time to choose – Vincentian or secular?

It was at this point that we decided to consult about our Vincentian origins and ethos, and more importantly, to write things down rather than leave it to oral tradition. All trustees and staff were given a copy of the biography of St Vincent by Jose Maria Roman and invited to reflect on Vincent’s life and mission, and also to reflect on our own experience as a partnership created within the Vincentian Family.

Depaul International’s Vincentian Vision, Mission, Values

What emerged from that consultation was a clear consensus that it was the Vincentian spirit, which gave us life and unity of purpose. Out of that came some powerful benchmarks, which have formed the backbone of our values statement and underpin all of the work that we do to this day.

- Action, not words
- Poorest of the poor
- Non-judgemental
- The poor are our masters
- Innovative unto infinity
- Taking risks

The process also helped us to assert our own Vincentian character. We are not Vincentian because any religious order or lay association has ownership or authority over Depaul. We are Vincentian because we choose to be and because it gives us a sense of purpose, a philosophical and spiritual framework, and a way of working with the poor.

Formation within Depaul International

Over the last twenty years we have worked very hard to make sure that our values statement is not something that we pin to a wall but rather it is something lived at a day-to-day level. Fr Hugh O’Donnell and the Daughters of Charity in America have helped us in the formation of a week-long residential course, part of which is based in Paris, which introduces staff and trustees not only to the history of Vincent, Louise and Frederic but also develops their skills in taking a leadership role in the promotion of Vincentian values wherever they sit in the organisation. This is all the more remarkable because over 90% of our staff and trustees are drawn not just from the Catholic faith, but from all faiths or none and this is reflected in the
attendance at our formation courses. The Vincentian story is a very compelling one and it catches the imagination of all of our staff and clients. We do not evangelise but we also do not apologise for our inspiration and Catholic roots. I am delighted that Fr Gay has invited us to develop other courses with the Congregation of the Mission, and I hope the benefit will be mutual.

WHAT WE DO!

**Depaul International**

Depaul International is the parent company of the Depaul Group of charities. As the Group Chief Executive Officer I have three responsibilities

- To ensure existing subsidiaries work together effectively and efficiently
- To protect and nurture our Vincentian Vision, Mission and Values
- To develop new subsidiaries where invited by the Vincentian Family

**Where we work**

At the moment Depaul International works with the poor and marginalized in five different countries - UK, Ireland, Slovakia, Ukraine and the USA. We have over 400 full time staff and a similar number of volunteers helping over 7000 people a year. There are over 70 projects in direct management and 40 others we collaborate with. This includes accommodation projects for single mothers and babies, homeless families, hospice care for the elderly, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, homeless day centres, outreach for street children, medical centres, and training and employment projects.

**Role of the Vincentian Family**

None of our growth or success to date would have been possible without the direct involvement of the Vincentian Family. For example in the Ukraine, Slovakia and USA the Chair of the respective charities is a member of the Congregation of the Mission — Fr Vitaliy Novak in Ukraine, Fr Augustin Slaninka in Slovakia and Fr Bernie Tracey in the USA. The nursing care we provide in Slovakia and Ukraine is in partnership with the Daughters of Charity. The volunteers who give out the soup to street children in the Ukraine are from the AIC. It is the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland which
provides support to our clients both in the hostels and also as they move on toward independence. Depaul may take the lead in the development and management of projects but it is co-dependent on the involvement of the Vincentian Family. In addition Depaul International and each of its subsidiaries have appointed representatives from across the Vincentian Family onto its trustee boards. This is to ensure that we continue to build our Vincentian connections but also promote good communications and transparency.

To find out more

For more information about our work please visit www.depaulinternational.org which has links to all of our subsidiaries.

WHAT DOES THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION AND THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY OFFER DEPAUL INTERNATIONAL

Ongoing Formation

Most importantly the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family offer Depaul International the prospect of ongoing formation of our trustees, staff, volunteers and clients, based on their own historical tradition. At the same time this has to be formation which is inclusive — accommodating all faiths and none. This requires great sensitivity but we have made great progress. I look forward to working with Fr Hugh O'Donnell and others on new programs, which will complement existing ones.

That is not to say that formation should be passive. Chaplaincy has played an important role in the development of our charities in Ireland, Slovakia and Ukraine and we would like that to grow. We would also like to see a greater involvement in formation of governance bodies with an agreed role description setting out what we expect of a CM who is appointed to respective boards across the Depaul Group.

A solid and safe base from which to build projects for the poor

One of the most difficult problems facing any charity — especially if it is intending to operate in a new country — is where to start! Where can I find a room? Where can I set up an office? Where can I set up my computer? How do I get around? How do things work here? Who do we bank with? What legislation do we need to comply with?
The hospitality of the Vincentian Family in this regard has been tremendous. If you feel welcomed and safe, then the task at hand is so much easier. Your communities in Ukraine and Slovakia excel at this. They made it easy for us to do our job during the start up period and were always available when problems arose.

A global and local understanding of differing poverties and cultural contexts

As an international organization the Congregation of the Mission has an interesting perspective on global geo-politics. However, where you excel is in your country or even regional understanding of differing poverties and cultural contexts. Although we carry out thorough research before we open new projects, I can safely say that without the help of Fr Paul Roche in Ukraine and the rest of his community we would have made some dreadful errors. They showed us charities already working on the ground. They talked from their experience of the poor they were visiting and the homeless they were meeting. They educated us about the complex relationship with the Orthodox Church.

We still made mistakes but not as many as we could have. The information you take for granted is gold dust to a charity like Depaul International. It would take us many years to build up the same database.

People

Fr Vitaliy Novak has grown Depaul in the Ukraine from one project to seven in three years with plans for two more cities in the coming year. He is young, charismatic, passionate, a good communicator and has a heart for the poor.

Br Peter Campbell worked tirelessly on the legal registration, fundraising and ensuring the local communities’ acceptance of our first project in the USA. Quiet, unassuming, modest — totally committed to the disadvantaged — an effective bridge between the rich and the poor in the same way that Vincent was.

I could go on and on! There are some exceptional people in this Congregation and probably more potential to be unleashed as I look upon you. We know that we are only borrowing these great assets because eventually they will be called to do other things. But when it works to our mutual benefit and, more importantly, for the benefit of the poor, these kinds of personnel exchanges are invaluable.
Networks

In addition to great people the Congregation of the Mission has great networks. Sometimes it is at a political or diplomatic level. Sometimes it is through the business community or other voluntary groups or religious orders. Through these networks we have built a partnership with the Orione Sisters to deliver some projects together in Ukraine. Through another we got the President of Ireland to visit our projects in Ireland and highlight particular pressing poverties.

Resources

It would be neglectful not to recognize other resources, which the Vincentian family has given. The numerous empty convents we have turned into housing projects, the gift of free offices in a building owned by the SVP in Ireland, the seed money provided by different provinces in the USA which allowed the Charity to get a foothold there. For all of this we are deeply grateful and our aim is to return the investment tenfold as our own fundraising takes hold.

Encouragement

This is probably the easiest and least costly thing to give but more important than anything. If you want the Vincentian mission to expand you have to encourage a 1000 seeds to grow. It is something you do well, so keep it up!

WHAT DOES DEPAUL INTERNATIONAL OFFER THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION AND THE WIDER VINCENTIAN FAMILY

The opportunity to reach out to more poor people

Depaul International is not a religious order nor is it a lay association. We are a service provider specializing in homelessness and related poverties. We do not get distracted from that fact. We are not about evangelizing or proselytizing, that is the work of others in the Vincentian Family. As a result we can work more easily in parts of the world where there are religious tensions. For example we do not present a threat to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine or Russia as we are not formally connected to the Catholic Church but constituted as an independent charity with Vincentian roots.

In Northern Ireland we work with young people across the sectarian divide — both Catholic and Protestant — because we are independent of church and state.
We have experience of creating the management infrastructure and the capacity to involve other members of the Vincentian Family in our work without them having the overall responsibility. If resources are agreed we can grow a charity quickly.

**Strong project development skills**

Depaul International is good at project planning and delivering on what it promises. We are keen to involve all of our Vincentian Partners in that process but we are clear that we are in charge. Obviously these skills are more developed in the older and larger charities within the Depaul Group but part of our work is to bring local managers up to the same standard. Fr Vitaliy for example has learned a lot from mentoring and training opportunities across the Depaul Group and we aim to build this capacity.

**Professional management team – process rather than personality driven**

Again this is about training and development plans, which will grow the skills of leaders and staff at all levels of the organization. Strong and charismatic personalities are important in any walk of life but especially when you are trying to get things off the ground. However, many charities collapse once their founder leaves so we have to plan at an early stage for process to take over from personalities - graveyards are full of indispensable people!

**Fundraising from a broader audience – government and corporate**

We are used to working with the government and with the corporate sector. We understand how they operate and the contract culture they expect. It means that we have a bigger pool to fundraise from in order to achieve our goals.

**Our own experience of the Vincentian charism**

I hope that as well as learning we have something to give to the Vincentian Family and in particular to the formation of other Vincentians.

**WHAT HAS WORKED SO FAR**

In summary

- We have grown significantly in a very short space of time
- We have a strong sense of shared mission across the Vincentian Family we work with
- We have developed a well respected formation program centering on Vincentian Values
- We have involved those of different faiths and none
- We have learned a lot

WHAT NEEDS MORE WORK

Often Vincentian partnerships can be difficult to manage as nobody wants to write anything down — but we do need to agree who is doing what and where the responsibilities begin and end.

We need to better understand what we have in common as a family but also what makes us different e.g. evangelization is not the role of Depaul International but it clearly is the role of the Congregation of the Mission.

We need to meet and talk more as a family at a global and local level in order to allay fears and suspicions. Sometimes with the best will in the world mistakes will be made. These should not be allowed to fester and in the event of a disagreement there should be some recourse to arbitration.

We should collaborate when we can but recognize that sometimes we may be in competition for resources. That could be money, people, buildings or influence. Competition is not a bad thing if we respect each other.

We need an agreed plan in order not to do too much too quickly but at the same time we need to seize the day.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In my job I get to visit a lot of provinces and the most vibrant it seems to me are those that balance their spiritual and evangelical mission with direct action for the poor. In my view both complete the same circle.

Please take the potential of the Vincentian family seriously. I know that you do, but I also know that it can be hard work at times. We are much more powerful working together than we are separately.

Government, foundation and corporate funders from the Western hemisphere increasingly demand transparency, value for money, sustainability, accountability and a quality of service. In developing services for the poor, if you do not have a partner like Depaul International, then you may have to invent one.
Finally I return to my first remarks. Think big! We have a global perspective and potential but we might need to face up to significant changes over the next 100 years let alone 350. Let's be there for the poor! I hope that Depaul International will be in every province in every part of the world working alongside the Vincentian Family and that we get the best out of the charism we share.
Dear members of the XLI General Assembly.

It is somewhat difficult to address you as you conclude the XLI General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. During these days of the Assembly you have had the opportunity to reflect in depth on the present situation of the Congregation, to pray and discern the new calls of the poor and to make decisions that will help you carry out the Mission with creative fidelity. What more can we add? In light of this challenge I propose something very simple: I want to speak with you from the perspective of my own experience as a young adult, a lay woman, a Vincentian, an international representative who has had the great privilege of sharing with confreres on different levels of concern. Today I want to share with the members of this Assembly some of my experiences of the Congregation, but I want to address each Vincentian Missionary so that you will understand my concerns and my hopes, and with these, the concerns and hopes of thousands of young people.

I will speak with you about three specific things: the task of the Congregation with regard to youth ministry; your mission with the Vincentian Family and the VMY; your vocation as Missionaries, followers of Saint Vincent de Paul.

1. The Congregation of the Mission and youth ministry

You will forgive me I am a young person and I cannot avoid speaking from my youthful heart. If after 350 years the Mission continues, it is because others who came before you and now you, yourselves, have been able to communicate the beauty of the Vincentian charism to others, the majority of whom are young. Through your life and your ministry you tell us that it is worthwhile consuming one's life on behalf of the poor, evangelizing them and building with them the Kingdom of God. I invite each one of you to return to your first encounter with this Family and with Saint Vincent and to recall those persons who created a favorable atmosphere that enabled you to fall in love with this mission; remember those individuals who over the course of many years
formed you and led you to this affirmative stance in the Congregation. Today, many young people await from you the same presence, the same witness, the same invitation to discover Christ as the center of their life, to recognize Christ’s presence in the faces of the most poor and to embrace the cause of the Kingdom with all their soul and body. I am very grateful because in my path I encountered the Vincentians (Priests, Brothers, Sisters and lay men and women) who broadened the horizon of my life to this ideal which today gives meaning to my life.

What is the Congregation of the Mission doing with and for young people? My service as International President of the VMY has allowed me to know up close your work with so many young people on different continents. It is a difficult work that requires perseverance and continual renewal, but it is also a very necessary work. Through youth ministry you are enabling thousands of young people to proclaim the gospel and to commit themselves to the poor as they follow in the footsteps of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

You will forgive me but I believe even more can be done. Today I have not come here to just tell you about the good things you do but also to create in you new dreams so that Christ might be better loved and served by these young woman and men.

Thinking about the multiple activities that you are engaged in on behalf of young people, I realize that few people are aware of the scope of this activity. Do not worry, I am not going to propose some mega publicity campaign about the activities of the Congregation with young people. No, I am simply saying that the Congregation itself, the confreres involved in youth ministry, could create channels or make use of existing structures to share their experience of youth ministry and reflect on their positive experience and the teachings of their failures. From this perspective they could then reflect on what the Congregation is doing with and for young people, they could discover original paths and new methods that respond to the present challenges of youth ministry (not the challenges of some past era). This is the experience we had in Venezuela in 2007 when the International VMY, the Latin American team of the VMY and CLAPVI organized the First Latin American Encounter of Vincentian Youth Ministry. Hopefully this was the first of many similar experiences in different parts of the world and on an international level. In summary I would invite the Congregation to evaluate its action on behalf of youth and with the infinite creativity that is so proper to the Vincentians, to adapt styles suited for young people of the twenty-first century that will allow them to communicate to other young people this heritage which is our responsibility.
2. The mission of the Congregation of the Mission with the Vincentian Family and the Vincentian Marian Youth

In the second place I want to speak to you about your mission with the Vincentian Family in general and then more specifically with regard to the Vincentian Marian Youth. I begin by placing before you a commitment undertaken by the VMY and expressed in the Final Document of the Second General Assembly celebrated in this very city in 2005: *We will suggest that in the initial formation programs of the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Missionaries, the knowledge about the Association and the roles that they will have in it shall be deepened* (Final Document 2.3.5). I would add that this knowledge should include practical and theoretical knowledge. Today it is very difficult for a member of the Congregation not to know the Vincentian Family, its principal components and specific information about each branch. What tremendous strides have been made since the initiation of this dream of the Vincentian Family! Nevertheless, it is sad to point out that some confreres have not taken up this dream and at times see this new reality as a disturbance in their missionary life and ministry.

We can affirm that today there is a greater awareness within the Vincentian Family, so what is the next step? A greater and better collaboration in formation and in service to the less favored in society. This is where the Congregation is called to play a pivotal role: in the spiritual and Vincentian formation of lay leaders who assume the role of co-responsibility in the Church and in society. I dare to say that this responsibility cannot be viewed as one more option among many others, a task that we assume according to circumstances. At this time of the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the death of our Founders it is necessary to return to our origins in order to discover that the first work of Saint Vincent was the Ladies of Charity (a group of lay women that is known today as the AIC). From the beginning Saint Louise collaborated in the formation of these women. In remembering this reality I extend to you a twofold invitation: first, be concerned about the integral formation of the members of the Vincentian Family, a formation that includes knowledge based on the concrete experience of service toward the marginalized, knowledge that enables the members of the Vincentian Family to respond effectively to the new forms of poverty and that stirs up in the heart of everyone this indispensable creativity that is so necessary in the complex world of poverty. Second, this integral formation should be done in close collaboration with the Daughters of Charity, following the example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Concretely, what specific formation, proper to the Congregation,
can be opened to lay Vincentians and thus become part of the process for the formation of lay leaders? Can we dream of specific service projects of the Vincentian Family that will involve all the branches on an equal level? Can we hope that each member of the Congregation, in whatever place, will take seriously the role of accompanying the Vincentian Family? Are we willing to learn from one another, to form one another and be formed by one another?

More specifically, I want to mention here the role of the advisors in the VMY, what we receive from the Congregation and what we hope for. I believe in Providence and I hope you do also. I see that God, in his Providence, saw to it that from the beginning the VMY (at that time, the Daughters of Mary), would be guided by the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Missionaries. Mary said to Saint Catherine: *I want an association of young people,* and Father Aladel was asked to be the director of this Association. The wisdom of a Mother! Thus I summarize the 1830 request of the Virgin Mary: an association of young people accompanied by the sons and daughters of Saint Vincent. In the practical order, I am embarrassed at times when I see that in some places the VMY is a pastoral ministry of the Daughters or the Missionaries, but not both. I have the joy of knowing that when this ministry is undertaken with the collaboration of the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Missionaries, beside giving witness to the reality of unity, there is also better listening, better formation of the young people, service with the poor that is filled with meaning, adequate accompaniment in the process of faith formation that leads to the discovery of the young person’s vocation-mission and a life plan. As President, but above all as a young woman who has been a member of VMY for fifteen years, I feel an urgent need to offer good advisors to the VMY because we are the present and the future of the Church and the Vincentian Family, the present and the future of society, potential agents of systemic change that the poor, our lords and masters, yearn for. This is not a financial burden or a loss of time; it is not a waste of one’s energies. It is an investment in the future; it is to plant with the hope that fruit will be produced, fruit that is not always produced when and how we hope but rather when and how Providence desires, when one ministers with young people, what one does is never lost.

3. **Let us live who we are**

These words are the motto that in 2009 the International Council of the VMY proposed to the Association on an international level and it seems to me to be appropriate for this last part of my presentation, perhaps the most complicated part because it is a call to make expli-
cit who you are and I know that this is risky because it is possible that all the Vincentian periti who are present here could gang up on me, pointing out one or another aspect that I have not mentioned. I will be careful and do not pretend to know better than you what you should be. I will speak about basic things, all of which we need in order to continue to live the mission with creative fidelity.

*Fidelity and creativity in prayer:* Give me a man of prayer, and he well be able to do anything (CCD, XI: 76). These simple words of Saint Vincent will always inspire me. I am convinced that an intense life of true prayer, the daily encounter with the gospel and reflection on life before God are the ways to remain faithful to evangelization and service to the poor. The people whom you serve as priests and Missionaries need you to be men of prayer, profoundly in love with Jesus Christ, capable of seeing and explaining everything with the eyes of faith. One of you said: *I cannot begin the day without my personal encounter with Jesus in the morning.* Hopefully this thirst for the encounter with God will be a reality for everyone because then I am sure that this Little Company will live their vocation with conviction and will know how to remain faithful to the Gospel and attentive to the acute cries of the poor.

*Faithful and creative in community life.* If the encounter with God is essential to live the Mission, it is also important to be able to rely on a community that accompanies and supports. I believe that unity is the best reflection of the image of God and I want to see the communities of the Congregation of the Mission be a reflection of the Trinity places where individuals love one another as dear brothers. I believe that it is especially necessary to support the vocation of each confrere, value their qualities and pastoral initiatives. Above all I believe that it is urgent to become aware of the task and the mission that ought to be accomplished in common; the Vincentian charism is not for lone-rangers and in our society that is so individualistic, this becomes more difficult to accomplish.

*Faithful and creative in the mission.* Always honor your name, Missionaries. Allow me to remind you about the beginnings of this Little Company. Everything began with one question: what should be done? And everything began with an initiative: a popular mission. Thus the Congregation of the Mission was born. And today? I want the urgency of integral evangelization of the poor to continue to be your concern and the popular mission to continue to be your priority even though it must be adapted to the present reality. May the missions *ad gentes* be the natural desire of every member of the Congregation! May no Vincentian missionary feel satisfied with what they have done or what they are doing but rather may they be
willing to leave behind their usual pastoral ministry in order to respond with originality and effectiveness to the needs of the most poor. May the Congregation, as a whole, go to those places where no one else is willing to go, to those places where the poorest of the poor are found.

4. By way of conclusion

When the Superior General asked me to participate in this forum, he wanted me to speak from the perspective of a young lay woman (because the vision of one person can enlighten the life of another) and from the perspective of my experience (Vincentians are not good theorists). I have done what he asked, but I do not want to go without speaking some words of gratitude on behalf of many other young people whose lives, like mine, have been touched by God as members of this Vincentian Family. Despite the shadows that might have created anxiety during this Assembly, the mission continues. We, Vincentian lay men and lay women, continue to rely on you, as our older brothers, to walk together toward this new world where the last will be first and where we will truly be in the midst of the poor as people whom we serve and who allow themselves to be served by the poor.

Translation: Charles T. Plock, C.M.
The next step is to review the estimated budget and allocate funds to cover the costs of the project. We recommend removing any elements that are not critical to the success of the project and focusing on those that will provide the greatest value. By doing so, we can ensure that the project is completed successfully and within the established budget.
V - CONCLUDING DOCUMENTS

SYNTHESIS
“CREATIVE FIDELITY FOR THE MISSION”

1. The 41st General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission is being held in Paris during the year that marks the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Sts. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. The choice of the city where the two inaugurated new ways of mission and charity is an added challenge to us to achieve the theme we have set for ourselves: Creative Fidelity to the Mission (Constitutions 2).

2. Gathered from all parts of the world, we acknowledge ourselves to be holders of a legacy that seeks to reinvigorate itself in new forms in a constantly changing world. A new methodology seems to be called for that favors dialogue and exchange of experiences of service and evangelization of the poor. For our part, we are urged to break down fear, nostalgia for the past, apathy and disillusion, and put greater trust in the Holy Spirit who continues to act in each of us. The liturgical celebrations and prayers, rich with international color, language and rhythms, not only enrich our coming together but invoke the Lord to guide our reflections, steady us through our mistakes, and prompt us to respond to the future with courage, enthusiasm and generosity.

THE LORD CALLS US IN THE CRY OF THE POOR

3. Fidelity to our charism means to follow Christ’s love and service of the poor. The poor come alive to us through the videos that punctuate every session. The poor are not mere categories; they are real people with real needs and suffering. They speak to us because they trust that we will listen to them, hear their stories, and not turn our backs on them. Our response will go beyond the minute of interiorisation, the personal prayers and
liturgical celebrations. Like St. Vincent who saw the face of Christ in the poor of his time and went about remedying their suffering, we will be courageous enough to share their poverty. Moved by love, we will go where the poor call us, even where others have not dared to go, and find ever creative ways of meeting their needs.

4. Who are we who try to respond to the needs of the poor? We are “wounded healers.” We see a diminishing number of members in some provinces, hopeful increase in others. In some communities, confreres experience disenchantment, while others search for fulfillment in ministry outside of the community. All this demands of us to reassess the meaning of our being a community for the mission: brothers who are dear friends (*Common Rules* 8.2), solicitous for the well-being of one another, recognizing the dignity of Brothers and promoting their full participation in community life and the apostolate as Vincentian missionaries, caring for those who are sick and in difficult situations, sharing faith and strengthening each other mutually in prayer. The Lord calls us to live and form each other in community. Grateful for what the Lord continues to accomplish through us, we are encouraged to offer our way of life as worthwhile for others to adopt and follow.

5. The Lord blesses our efforts to be faithful to our mission. With our limitations yet with generous efforts, we see examples of creative ministries of our confreres in:

a) Attention to the poor in extreme situations of poverty;
b) Moving from crisis intervention to processes of rehabilitation;
c) Responses to the challenge of new evangelization: e.g. to the unchurched, to the youth;
d) Renewed means of popular mission: itinerant mission and missions to indigenous peoples;
e) Offers of holistic education as a way of liberation;
f) Formation of the clergy and laity for the service of the Church; ministry to the clergy beyond the seminary apostolate;
g) Dialogue with culture in the world today, engagement in ecumenism, and work for justice and peace.

6. We acknowledge the diminished presence or, in some cases, the absence of our confreres in traditional ministries like popular missions and seminary work. On the one hand, this may be due to demographic, cultural and religious changes. On the other, they are challenges for us to discover or re-examine pastoral
responses to the new forms of poverty. Seeing what the Lord has done and is doing through us, we, in the manner of St. Vincent, would like to do and be “more” for the poor. The call to creativity is, for us, at the service of fidelity to the mission.

RESPONDING IN GREATER CREATIVITY TO MISSION AND CHARITY

7. All our persons and our possessions belong to the poor if we truly believe, beyond simply saying, that they are our lords and masters. Ongoing formation looks into disposing the best of our resources, the confreres, toward evangelization and service of the poor. This disposition explains the passion with which we continuously configure ourselves with Christ, the evangelizer of the poor, a process that involves transformation of the whole person. We see the community as the place where we appreciate our gifts, encourage initiatives and develop our abilities for community life and ministry. In this endeavor, the normative texts serve as guides for action and we avail of all the opportunities offered in the local communities, within the provinces, and in the whole Congregation.

8. The material resources of the community are the patrimony of the poor, St Vincent reminds us. The wise management of resources, on the one hand, must conform to the basic rules of justice within the community and, on the other, assure the viability of the work of mission and charity. Ancillary structures within the Congregation, like the Vincentian Solidarity Office, support the projects of the community by entering into partnership with donors/funding organizations and ensuring an equitable and effective distribution of resources. As in the time of St. Vincent we bring a larger group of people into the circle of mission and charity.

9. A more effective service of the poor wherever they are found demands that we strengthen the collaboration in the worldwide congregation. This is expressed in several ways:

a) At the level of Conferences of Provinces there are shared programs of initial formation, ongoing formation of strategic personnel (superiors, economes, formators, spiritual directors, young confreres, etc.), promotion of Vincentian spirituality, collaboration in missions ad gentes, stabilization of internal structures of Conferences, and greater communication between Provinces.
b) Common concerns are also taken up in particular Conferences: secularization and re-evangelization, religious fundamentalisms, flight from the Church to evangelical groups, ethnic tribalism and inter-cultural intolerance, and localizing the "face" of Vincentian charism and formation, the Word of God as key element in evangelization and formation.

c) Initiatives within the provinces or conferences that benefit the whole congregation also abound: exchange of personnel, support of formation of confreres in other provinces, advancement of Vincentian studies.

10. To achieve creative fidelity to the mission is the underlying reason for reconfiguration in the community. In the highest level, the internal reorganization of the General Curia, with specific responsibilities for each Assistant General, is a response to the need of more effective coordination of the concerns of the whole Congregation. The revision of Statutes is a normative response to the shifting landscape of personnel distribution and pastoral commitment that occurs in the Congregation. Reconfiguration is a creative response when it directs personnel and resources for more effective mission and charity rather than mere maintenance or consolidation of structures and programs that may have seen their usefulness. It finds justification in resources that are not only better utilized but even strengthened, in a revitalized sense of belonging to the community and a renewed sense of fulfillment among confreres of even diminished number.

11. Systemic Change subscribes to the view that there are not only poor persons but that in societies, there are structures that keep the poor oppressed and impoverished. As a pastoral practise it focuses on breaking the cycle of poverty in its causes and empowers the poor to take responsibility and direction for their destiny.

St. Vincent told the confreres, If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others (Conference of December 6, 1658). Systemic change is a framework for organized and effective charity. It involves the interrelationship between proclaiming God's word, pastoral activities and engagement with systems that affect the poor. Projects of systemic change put us in collaboration with persons, agencies and institutions outside of the community. We must, therefore, constantly discern on the
implications of such collaboration on our community life and on the extent of our engagement with these agencies and institutions.

12. **The Vincentian Family** is formed by laypersons and communities of consecrated life that are inspired by the life and charism of Vincent and share the *ethos* of loving service of the poor. What unites all the members of the family is the passionate love for the poor after the manner of Sts. Vincent and Louise. In serving the poor we experience that we have a lot to learn from each other, not least our being evangelized by the very poor that we serve. Collaboration is built on respect for the distinctness of mission of each branch and the competence of its leaders. At the same time we hear the expressed need of animation of leaders and their formation in Vincentian spirituality. Collaboration is to be sought at all levels in order to guarantee the essential: that the poor are served as a revelation of the love of the compassionate God.
The XLI General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, held in Paris, on the 350th anniversary of the fullness of life of St. Vincent de Paul and of St. Louise de Marillac (1660-2010), with the motto “Creative Fidelity for the Mission”

- recognizes its responsibility for a great heritage, from St. Vincent and the first missionaries up to our day
- docile to the Holy Spirit, wishes to make more dynamic its fidelity in creativity to the Mission
- commits itself to recreate the charism, attentive to the signs of our times

Followers of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor, we let ourselves be formed by: the voice of the Word, creation and history; the face of the Word, Jesus Christ and the poor; the house of the Word, the church and the community; and the paths of the Word, the Mission (cf. XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Word of God in the life and in the mission of the Church,” Final message, Rome 2008).

I. FIDELITY

“...I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.... Let us, with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course” (Phil 3:13-16).

“While we are on the way” (Lk 24:13-14) like the disciples of Emmaus on Easter day we discovered Jesus, the Lord, the one who gives meaning to all we have lived in these last years:

1. At the social level

- the increase of poverty and misery
- the increase of vulnerability among the poor, children, women, young people and the aged
- the economic, ecological and human impact of the present day world wide financial crisis
- the influence of socio-cultural changes on the commitment to stability, the life of prayer and the community life of the missionaries
- the new awareness with regard to the Millennium Goals
- the search for peace with social justice

2. At the level of the Church

- the search for God outside the Church and outside the traditional religious experiences
- the hunger for the Word of God

3. At the level of the Congregation

- the revision of our life in the light of the Constitutions in the 2004 Assembly and the revision of the Statutes of the Congregation in the 2010 Assembly
- the compassion with and for confreres in difficulty
- the movement towards interprovincial formation experiences
- the interchange of missionaries, our greatest resource and economic resources among provinces
- the reflection on reconfiguration for the vitality of our Provinces
- the strengthening of the Conferences of Visitors
- the consolidation of economic resources for formation, the mission and the poor

II. CREATIVITY

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8).

While listening to Jesus, the Lord, who has come to "evangelize the poor" (Lk 4:18) and thus "make all things new" (Rev 21:5), we renew our CONVICTION: "The Congregation of the Mission, always attentive to the gospel, the signs of the times, and the more urgent needs of the Church, will do its best to open new paths and apply means adapted to the circumstances of time and place, will also strive to evaluate and order its works and ministries, remaining always in a state of continual conversion" (C. 2).
The suffering faces of the poor are the suffering faces of Christ (cf. Mt 25:40). They question how we live the Vincentian charism, since whatever has to do with Christ passes through the evangelical option for the poor, and everything related to the poor calls for Jesus Christ.

Based on these CONVICTIONS, we dream about the future of the Congregation and the Congregation of the future: more deeply rooted in the experience of God; more committed to the lot of the poor and to the formation of priests and the laity; more identified with the unity and diversity in the Trinity (C. 20); more mystical and prophetic; more daring and inventive; smaller, but with a life style that gives greater witness and greater hope with the aim of constructing the Kingdom of God among the poor.

III. FOR THE MISSION

"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit... and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day.... He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...’” (Lk 4:14-18).

"In this vocation, we are very much in conformity with our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to have made his principal aim, in coming into the world, to assist poor people and to take care of them. And if we ask our Lord, 'what did you come to do on earth?' 'to assist the poor....' Would it not be it be a great honor for a missioner to be able to say with our Lord, 'Misit me evangelizare pauperi-bus? I am here to catechize, instruct, hear confessions and assist persons who are poor'” (SV XI, pp. 98-99).

As missionaries, “disciples of the Lord” (cf. V General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Aparecida 2007) who have come “that all may have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10), the members of the Congregation of the Mission resolve to develop in the next six years, the following LINES OF ACTION:

1. Formation: (initial and ongoing)

- To place the Word of God and Jesus Christ, the Word, the Rule of the Mission, at the center of our life and mission as the axis of our formation, spirituality and evangelizing action (cf. CR II).
To strengthen in our spirituality and in our commitment the mystical-prophetic and communal dimensions.
To create formation programs that strengthen our fidelity to the vocation and our response to the needs of the 21st century.
To assume our ongoing formation as our daily commitment, embracing our prayer, our reflection on our experiences, our living out of our ministry.
To foster openness to the opportunity offered by the new languages and the techniques of the digital world with a critical sense, and in view of the Communion and the Mission.
To foster the interchange of formational experiences at the level of the Conferences of Visitors and of the whole Congregation.
To reflect on, at the level of our local communities, Provinces and Conferences new ministerial spaces for the Brothers' vocation.

2. Reconfiguration

To explore in our local communities, provincial government teams, provincial assemblies and Conferences the idea of reconfiguration in its “intra”-provincial and “inter”-provincial senses, and its importance for the future of the Congregation.
To cultivate a vital and concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the sense of belonging to a local and Provincial community.
To create spaces for inter-provincial collaboration at the administrative level.
To share human and financial resources.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family

a) With the Poor

- To listen to the poor in every one of our ministries and make an effort to participate in their lives, sufferings and hopes.
- To make an effort to share with the poor the dynamics that can enable them to become subjects of their own history, protagonists of their destiny and agents of their own freedom.

b) With the Vincentian Family as Vincentian Family

- To foster theological reflection on the challenges and the good that arise from sharing the charism with the laity.
- To intensify the collaboration with the Vincentian Family in the area of formation, especially in relation to Vincentian spirituality, the social doctrine of the church and lay leadership so as to assure their transforming presence on behalf of the poor.
- To commit ourselves to work in the evangelization of the poor together with the members of the Vincentian Family and other ecclesial groups, and also participate with social organisms in the defense and promotion of the poor.

4. Creativity in our Ministries

- To review our ministries and the structures of our community life to enhance their missionary dimension.
- To foster personal availability and mobility to participate in new and challenging missionary projects.
- To undertake new forms of service to the clergy, from welcoming them, to pastoral and spiritual support, mutual collaboration and missionary formation.
- To support at the provincial level challenging works.
- To support pastoral practices centered on the Word of God, attention to the signs of the times and a central role for the laity.
- To undertake new works of evangelization in the area of new emerging cultures, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.
- To go to the most distant (missions ad gentes) and to draw near to the most withdrawn (missions inter gentes).
- To participate at the Provincial and Conference levels in commissions for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

5. The Methodology of Systemic Change

- To favor works that promote systemic change in society, develop local self-government, formation of self-help groups and indigenous micro-credit programs.
- To be attentive to the signs of the times in the present global context so that social realities may be pervaded by an evangelical orientation so that the civic participation is centered on the cry of the poor in fidelity to the style Vincent de Paul used during his lifetime.
- To favor team work and networking.
- To form missionaries with a methodology and a spirituality that favor personal conversion and pastoral and structural change.
- To provide legal assistance for the defense of the poor and the promotion of justice.
- To create programs that counteract human trafficking and assure the promotion of life, access to universal health care, care for the environment, the dignity of women and children, the rights of migrants and participation in civil society.

During the Assembly we have met in Continental groups, and after having considered these Lines of Action, we have proposed the following COMMITMENTS:

**APVC**

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing Formation
   a) To continue the formation of formators deepening it with immersion experiences and themes relevant to the Asia-Pacific context.
   b) To put up an APVC website to help in the continuing formation of confreres and to foster dialogue among our communities.

2. Reconfiguration
   a) To explore possibilities of common initial formation among our candidates in different levels wherever and whenever possible.
   b) To explore possibilities of sharing our professional and human resources among our provinces.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family
   a) To create structures that can really make us listen to the concrete stories of the poor and to share effective programs already practiced in our individual Provinces.
   b) To organize common formation activities among members of the Vincentian family facilitated by the CM continental representative to the Vincentian Family in the region.

4. Creativity in our Ministries
   To explore new forms of popular mission relevant to the needs of our times and our differing contexts.

5. The Methodology of Systemic Change
   To explore possibilities of a common ministry among displaced peoples and migrant workers in Asia-Pacific countries.
CEVIM

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing Formation
   To continue our present sessions of ongoing formation especially for confreres working in Pastoral Ministry. Next session will be for confreres in Pastoral Work with Young People.

2. Reconfiguration
   To explore the possibility of setting up an Interprovincial Theologate at a European level or at least for the Mediterranean Countries using a single language base.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family
   In Europe there is a great diversity of groups and experiences with their origin in the Vincentian charism. We intend to:
   - assess the extent of this diversity
   - take time to know them and their lives
   - listen and dialogue and develop further links
   - develop a follow up program.
   It means organizing a European Meeting and inviting representatives of these groups sharing in our charism.

4. Creativity in our Ministries
   Explore the possibility of setting up an Interprovincial Community at the level of CEVIM, to take on a 'Cutting Edge' ministry or ministries especially in our existing Vincentian Missions in Europe.

5. The Methodology of Systemic Change
   To have 3 sessions in different languages (English, Spanish and Italian) on the Methodology of Systemic Change involving all the Vincentian Family living in the above language areas in Europe.

CLAPVI

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing Formation:
   To support and participate in the different opportunities of formation already existing in CLAPVI.
2. Reconfiguration
   a) To revise our works in order to be more available in supporting our essential ministries.
   b) To support projects of interprovincial collaboration already existing.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family
   a) To promote direct relations with the poor to listen to them and to share in some way their destiny.
   b) To create in each province a school of formation for lay people open to the Vincentian Family.

4. Creativity in our Ministries
   To create a web page to share the different ministries of the province.

5. The Methodology of Systemic Change
   a) To review our social works in the light of the criteria of Systemic Change.
   b) Create a team at the interprovincial level that can help us find and spread the contents and the dynamics of Systemic Change.

COVIAM

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing Formation
   a) To continue the program of formation for formators and also opening it to include formation for other ministries.
   b) To deepen Vincentian spirituality in Africa/Madagascar through ongoing formation and encouraging confreres to be more involved in Vincentian studies.

2. Reconfiguration
   To promote the already existing common interprovincial formation.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family
   To continue to collaborate with the Vincentian Family in the fight against malaria, HIV-AIDS and hunger.

4. Creativity in our Ministries
   To deepen in our pastoral activities the reconciliation between tribes or different groups that fight each other and as far as
possible create ministries that promote peace according to the Second Synod of Africa.

5. The Methodology of Systemic Change
To work with the confreres in the UN and Vincentian family in finding possible ways to reduce the problem of women trafficking in Africa/Madagascar.

NCV

We commit ourselves to:

1. Ongoing Formation
   Under the guidance of the NCV and their Councils:
   a) To offer regional presentations to the confreres on the topics and fruits of the General Assembly.
   b) To plan bi-annual ongoing formation sessions for members who are vowed/ordained from one to five years.

2. Reconfiguration
   a) To continue planning the National (Initial) Formation Program.
   b) To continue the Reconfiguration Process:
      - In USA West the creation of a new provincial culture and a wider understanding of reconfiguration.
      - In USA East, New England, and West continue dialogue on collaboration and future reconfiguration.

3. Dialogue with the Poor and with the Vincentian Family
   On a provincial level, to reestablish regular communication with the leaders of the Vincentian Family in America.

4. Creativity in our Ministries
   a) To schedule gatherings of confreres in like ministries to evaluate their apostolates using the Lines of Action #4.
   b) Under the guidance of the NCV, to sponsor a new creative ministry based on Lines of Action #4.

5. Methodology of Systemic Change
   a) Using the “ZAFEN” Haiti micro-lending project, to encourage confreres to participate and learn more about Systemic Change.
   b) NCV will explore other Haiti Initiatives.
Lord God almighty, Father of the poor, help us to be a sign of hope for many, as were St. Vincent and St. Louise, simple companions on the journey through the sea of life. And may our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, "who understood more deeply than any believers the teachings of the gospel and made them a reality in her life" (C. 49) in whose house we have held our Assembly, encourage us on our way to creative fidelity to the Mission.
DECREES OF THE G.A. 2010

Decree 1

The General Assembly declares that the present Constitutions, Statutes, and Decrees constitute the total proper law of the Congregation now in effect. If, as a matter of fact, any lacuna is discovered, provision can be made in accord with the norm of universal law, or, if the situation warrants, of our own previous law.

Decree 2

The Mission Distribution Fund for the foreign missions and poorer provinces should be continued. The growth of this fund is left to the judgment of the Superior General.

Decree 3

The limits for extraordinary expenses that can be contracted by the Superior General:

a) On his own authority the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US $25,000.

b) Having heard his council the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US $200,000.

c) With the consent of his council the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses up to US $2,000,000.

d) With the consent of his council, all members being present, the Superior General can contract extraordinary expenses over US $2,000,000.

THE COMMISSION FOR THE REVISED STATUTES

Editor's note

The 41st General Assembly revised the Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission, according to the mandate of the previous General Assembly. The Superior General, in the Tempo Forte circular of 4-11 October 2010 said: "A Commission for the Revised Statutes was formed composed of Father Alberto Vernaschi, coordinator, Javier Álvarez and Nicola Albanesi" (Circular of 19-10-2010).
Emendation of VINCENTIANA

VINCENTIANA, 54th Year, N. 1, January-March 2010, in an article signed by Julio Suescun Olcoz, on page 95, 8th Stage, § 1.3. reads: “The editorial board of the magazine continues to be made up of three missionaries from the Curia: the Director, P. Amyot D’Inville; the Secretary General, Fr. Ignacio Fernandez H. de Mendoza and Fr. Thomas Davitt, the Curial Archivist. About Fr. Davitt it is said that ‘he gives the magazine its orientation, decides which articles should be asked for, or the publication of those which arrive to the Curia directly and those which are to be translated.’ He is the de facto executive director”.

VINCENTIANA knows that the words in italics cited in § 1. of page 94, refer not to Father Davitt, but to all the Editorial Board; therefore the title of executive director is not correctly attributed to Father Davitt.

J.S.O.
New Assistants General; left to right: Stanislav Zontak; Zeracristos Yosief; F. Javier Álvarez, Vicar General; G. Gregory Gay, Superior General; Varghese Thottamkara; Eli Chaves dos Santos
Participants in the 41st G.A.: Superior General and Assistants General, Visitors, Delegates and Collaborators
In the assembly hall in the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity

Re-election of the Superior General
Eucharist in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, Mother House of the Daughters of Charity

Eucharist in the Chapel of St. Vincent de Paul, Mother House of the C.M.