

Mother House, 30<sup>th</sup> December 2003

## **Greetings to Mother Évelyne Franc and the Sister Councillors**

Dear Mother and dear Sisters of the General Council,

On behalf of all the Sisters in this house I am very happy to offer you our best wishes, together with our gratitude for the devotion you show in the service of the Company. The Mother House makes its humble contribution to this service by welcoming Sisters from all over the world: and this year in particular, we have welcomed a great many! Of course, welcoming people makes certain demands: it calls for continual adaptation, constant availability. But it also brings openness and is a source of mutual enrichment if we can accept each other's cultures. And, in this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to the Sisters from different countries who have agreed to leave their mission and to work for three years, and often longer, in the Mother House. We know that accepting this form of service requires a good deal of generosity.

Thanks to them, the Mother House is a place where we live as an international community. Many Sisters come here, too, for retreats or sessions. It is also part of the Mother House's mission to provide Vincentian formation for Sisters.

Then again, all the Sisters in the house are engaged directly or indirectly in passing on Our Lady's message. Some are in daily contact with pilgrims, listening, encouraging and helping the poorest of these in many different ways. We can thank God for all these things! At the close of this year, we can also give thanks for the events that have been so wonderful for the Company: the General Assembly and the beatification of Sister Rosalie Rendu. Like Mary, we ponder all this year's experiences in our heart.

And now we turn our eyes to the Future... With the New Year we have the dawning of a new day. The old world has passed away and a new world has already come into being! We can be sure of this, God is always at work in the world. God, who makes all things new, is coming again to work this wonder in our day. "I do not like new things," says God, "as much as the interior renewal of what already exists."...God is calling us to be renewed as we give ourselves to him! *"I will help you, " says God, "but first of all, give me what you have...I will help you to make it fruitful: your gentleness, your charity I will help you to make these fruitful! Remember, didn't I one day multiply the loaves and fishes that were offered to me?"* During this year may we be for one another, sparks of Christ's love...If we could do this, all of us together would be like a thousand rays of light and mirrors of God, the transparent reflection of Love, and we would draw the whole world into a great stirring of hope. This is my wish! May this New Year be a happy one for each of you.

Sister Denise Leroy  
*Sister Servant of the Mother House*

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## INFORMATION

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### The Echoes of the Company

In February 1976, the Echoes, which first appeared in January 1926 under the title “Echoes from the Mother House”, were renamed, “Echoes of the Company.” This was a very wide remit and it could only be attained with the collaboration of the Provinces.

In view of our present need for formation, the expansion of the Company and of the Vincentian Family, as well as the need for in-depth study of our traditions, it seems important to set out these four points in the Company’s publication which will therefore be organised around four main sections: Spiritual Life, News from the Provinces, Vincentian Family News and History of the Company. This classification will help to reinforce:

- the deepening of our spiritual life, so that we can face the challenges of the XXIst century;
- the international character of the Echoes which will take more account of the pluri-cultural situations we find in the Company;
- our links with the Vincentian Family, by promoting greater awareness of what is happening in each of its branches;
- our appreciation of the great traditions of our Company.

The Echoes will be organised around four main sections.

#### First section: “Spiritual Life”

This section is meant to be a response to the Church’s urgent call for the spiritual life of consecrated persons to be developed at a deeper level. Even if it cannot cover every aspect of formation, it will bring us material that can give us a deeper understanding of our vocation and mission in the Church and in the world today. This section will have three headings that can be the basis for community, apostolic and personal reflection.

1 *“Circulars and talks given by Superiors.”*

It is good to remind ourselves that even though the letters from Superiors have already been sent to each community, having them in the Echoes prevents them from getting lost and it also means that the Sisters can find them easily when they want to read them again.

2 *“Articles that are reflections”* on the charism and the specific nature of the Company...

3 *“Important events in the life of the Company”*, such as a General Assembly, or the in-depth treatment of a particular topic.

Since the Echoes have an international circulation, it might be necessary to have a community sharing on some articles, in order to see, together, how we can implement

their contents in practical ways and at local level.

### **Second section: “News from the Provinces.”**

This second section reflects community life in the Provinces and its aim is to help us to share in what is happening in different places. The information is presented under these five headings:

- 1 Official documents: Nominations...
- 2 Visits made to the Provinces by Superiors General
- 3 Testimonies given by *Sisters from the Provinces*: different types of service of the poor, various meetings, sessions, new implantations, vocations ministry.....
- 4 What the *Poor* are saying to us
- 5 Newsbriefs (*events*). This facilitates a brief sharing (no more than 10 lines), about a more specific event in the life of a Province, something that the whole Company can rejoice in, or it could be a way of telling others about an experience that has caused us suffering. These newsbriefs encourage us to feel solidarity with our Sisters’ experiences.

The new heading, “*Letting the Poor speak to us*”, is meant to be a way of marvelling together at God’s action in the hearts and lives of the Poor, and also, thanks to them and in union with them, of hearing God’s call to build a more fraternal world. And it will be a way, too, of seeing what the poor think about life and about the world, so that we can make a more appropriate response to their appeals or to their unvoiced hopes and come closer to them on a deeper level by letting ourselves be converted by God. It is a way of allowing ourselves to be evangelised by them so that we can live in a way that is mutually beneficial and which develops a feeling of fraternity so that the poor truly become our brothers and sisters. Since this is a new heading, each community is invited to send to the Echoes correspondent in its Province, an account of situations that allow the poor to speak to us, either “directly” through our relationships with them, or “indirectly” by reporting the actions or the words of the Poor that led the community to give thanks, to feel challenged, or to be persuaded to act in a different way.....

This section calls for special commitment on the part of each Province. We need to make sure that this section is not simply a means of passing on information; it is also a platform for the sharing of ideas. In this way it is an aid to formation and to our sense of vocation. So the Echoes Correspondents named by the Visitatrices, have a very important task, one that will benefit the whole Company. These Sisters will be responsible for collecting the different reports, testimonies and articles.....for updating information about what is happening in certain communities of the Province, writing articles about events that are important in the life of the Church and the Company in their Province. This means that certain ways of writing, agreed by the Echoes Editing Commission, need to be adhered to. We know, of course, that it is not possible to write about everything in the “Echoes” because there are limits to the amount of information we can disclose, particularly with regard to matters affecting individuals or the Province.

### **Third section: Vincentian Family**

This section tries to keep us in tune with the Vincentian Family and has two headings:

- 1 *“Life of the Vincentian Family”*
2. *“Vincentian Family Witnesses”*

#### **Fourth section: “History of the Company”**

The aim of this section is to help us to continue to explore the Company’s rich heritage and to foster a sense of unity. It has two headings:

1. *“Sources and news”*: Founders, first Sisters, Superiors, Sisters who have had a particular influence on the life of the Company, news
2. *“Readings for our times”*: new Vincentian publications....

The Echoes will be published every two months, with special issues containing the texts of conferences given at particular international sessions.

Before ending this article, it is good to recognise the work done by many people who collaborate in producing the Echoes. A co-ordinating team meets on a regular basis to consider or revise the different articles envisaged or those ready to be published. The members of this Commission are; the Director General of the Daughters of Charity, one of the Councillors General, a representative of the Superioress General and her Council, those in charge of publishing the Echoes, and a representative from the Translation Centre. When articles arrive at the Echoes Secretariat, if they are not written in French they are passed to a team of Sister Translators who try to reproduce as faithfully as possible what the original writers wanted to convey. When the articles are in French, they are reviewed and possibly corrected by editing Sisters who read them carefully again before everything is sent to the printer. Then comes the time for sending the publication out. Copies of the “Echoes of the Company” are then sent to a team of Sister translators to be translated into eight languages: German, English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovenian, Slovakian. Each Sister translator is responsible for sending the copies she has translated to the relevant Provinces. As well as the translation work done at the Mother House, several Provinces translate part, or all of the “Echoes”, into the language of their country so that all the Sisters can profit by reading them.

So this publication, which gives both information and formation, is a collective and a spiritual work. It tries to help every Sister to open her heart to every aspect of the Company in general and to practise more genuine solidarity with the Sisters of Provinces all over the world.

## Spiritual Life

FR R. MALONEY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

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### Five Snapshots of lesser known Vincentian Saints

In 1918 the historian, Lytton Strachey, noted that, when writing history, “less” is often “more”. In other words, true selectivity is much more important than volume. He wrote, *“It is not by the direct method of scrupulous translation that the explorer of the past can hope to depict a single epoch (or person). If he is wise, he will adopt a more subtle strategy.....He will row out over the great ocean of material and lower into it, here and there, a little bucket which will bring to the light of day some characteristic specimen....to be examined with careful curiosity.”*<sup>1</sup>

Surely, few events say more about a person than his death. Death not only closes life, it defines it. Christians have always regarded martyrdom as the supreme way of following Christ. From the earliest times, martyrs have captured the Christian imagination and inspired in others incredible heroism in living the gospels even to death.

Some, of course, renounce their faith rather than die a martyr’s death. But for others, even sometimes for people who have not lived a good life, death is their finest hour. Speaking of one such character in the play “Macbeth,” Shakespeare says, *“Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. He died as one that had been studied in his death to throw away the dearest thing he owned as ‘twere a careless trifle.”*<sup>2</sup>

In this short conference, I offer a snapshot of the death of five lesser-known martyrs in our Vincentian Family. As the author of the second letter of Peter puts it, each of them, in times of persecution, was like *“a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”*<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. Thaddeus Lee

We know very little about Thady Lee, and some of what we do know is uncertain. In the writings of Saint Vincent he appears only once, in a postscript to a letter that Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, the superior in Poland, on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1652,

*“Poor Brother Lye, who was in his native place, fell into enemy hands. They crushed his skull and cut off his feet and hands in the presence of his mother.”*<sup>4</sup>

Thaddeus Lee was born in 1623 in Tuogh, Ireland, (near Adare, in County Limerick). He entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1643. While still a student, (that is why St. Vincent calls him “Brother”) he was sent to Ireland. He was probably one of the eight missionaries St Vincent mentions in his letter of 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1656, to Edmund Dwyer, bishop of Limerick<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, the list of those who comprised this group is incomplete, though St. Vincent mentions that five of these were Irish. What is certain is that Thady Lee was in Ireland in 1651 when one of

Cromwell's generals, Henry Ireton, laid siege to, and captured Limerick. At first, St. Vincent thought that most of the confreres were among those "*whom the English put to death at the capture of Limerick*"<sup>6</sup> but afterwards he received news that several had escaped. It was in this context that he announced to Lambert aux Couteaux the martyrdom of "poor Brother Lye."

In 1747, Pierre Collet wrote this about Lee's death: "*Of the three missionaries who had remained in Ireland, only two returned to Paris, after passing at Limerick, through all the terrors of pestilence and war. The third finished his course there; the others disguised themselves and escaped as best they could. One of them retired to his own country with the Vicar-General of Cashel. The other found in the mountains, a pious woman who hid him for two months. A brother (Thady Lye) who was waiting for them, was less fortunate, or rather he was more so. The heretics, having discovered his retreat, massacred him before the eyes of his mother. They smashed his head in, after cutting off his hands and his feet, an inhuman and barbarous punishment that was meant to show priests what they might expect if they were captured.*"<sup>7</sup>

At a Provincial Council meeting held in St. Joseph's, Blackrock, on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1917, this terse decision was made: that the case of Brother Lee, martyred near Limerick, be taken up, and that further investigations be made in order to promote his beatification. But Thaddeus Lee will probably never be beatified since we know too little about him.

So the first martyr in our Vincentian Family was a seminarian whom St. Vincent had known personally in Paris. He died, isolated from his companions, and tortured as his mother looked on.

## **2. Jean Le Vacher**

Many people also doubt whether Jean Le Vacher will ever be beatified, even though, in 1885, the Superior General, Antoine Fiat, wrote, "*Father Jean Le Vacher was a true saint and a glorious martyr. How I would like to introduce his cause for beatification! Among the sons of St. Vincent, it seems to me that no one is more worthy of this honour than he is.*"

Jean was born in Val-d'Oise, France, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1619, and entered the Congregation of the Mission with his brother, Philippe, on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1643. He was ordained priest in 1647 and almost immediately went to Tunis. Within a year of his arrival, the superior of that mission died, as did the French Consul. So, at the age of 29, Jean became head of the mission and French Consul.

Two years later, he also became Vicar Apostolic. In 1666 he returned to France but two years later was sent to Algiers as Vicar Apostolic of Algiers and Tunis. In 1673 he became the French Consul in Algiers. That is the root of the problems concerning his beatification. Jean was a zealous missionary who worked particularly among the slaves in the capital and whom he estimated to number about 15,000. But he was also the Consul, a difficult political position at a time when relations between France and Algeria were steadily deteriorating.

In late June 1683, fighting broke out as the French fleet began to bombard Algiers. At the same time plague was rampant in the city. The Turkish forces sent Le Vacher to mediate peace. He, together with two Turkish diplomats and an interpreter,



arrived, under a white flag, at the Admiral's ship. Admiral Duquesne was inflexible in negotiations and scornfully yelled at Le Vacher, "*You're more of a Turk than a Christian!*" The French were deceived by one of the Turkish diplomats, called Mezzomorto, who promised to work with them so that they could gain control in Algeria, but once he was back on land, he himself seized power and began to fire at the fleet again. When the French retaliated, he arrested Le Vacher and the few other French citizens who remained in the capital.

Le Vacher's martyrdom took place on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1683, about sunset, on a small pier in the port. He was then asked to renounce his faith and declare himself a Muslim. Instead, he bade farewell to the Christian slaves in a loud, clear voice, exhorting them to remain firm in their faith. He was tied to a wooden frame which was then attached to the mouth of a cannon.

Then there was a touching moment which I find encouraging to recall in the midst of all the strife in the Middle East and North Africa today. Witnesses state that none of the Muslims present was willing to light the fuse. A group of Jews were there, too, but none of them would do it. Finally, a renegade Christian did the job. Le Vacher was blown to pieces. Ten other Frenchmen followed him to the same sort of death. Ultimately, the French Campaign was unsuccessful because Admiral Duquesne had to return to France due to a lack of supplies.

The cause of Jean Le Vacher's beatification did actually begin in 1923 but little progress has been made. Some people question whether his political role meant that he is not a true martyr. On reading the accounts of his death, I myself, have little doubt that he was. He died professing his faith courageously and encouraging others to profess it, too.

### **3. Sister Marguerite Rutan**

Marguerite Rutan was born in Metz in 1736. At the age of 20 she began her postulancy as a Daughter of Charity, in one of their hospitals. A year later, on her birthday, she entered the Seminary in Paris and just five months later was sent to serve in a hospital in Pau. She had the happiness of seeing her two Sisters enter the Company shortly after she did, and the sadness of seeing them both die at a young age. From Pau she moved to various other hospitals, finally coming to Dax where she became Sister Servant in 1779.

Ten years later, with the outbreak of the Revolution, life became increasingly difficult for the Sisters. Resources for running the hospital were scarce. The government provided less and less funding. After 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1793, all Sisters employed in hospitals and schools had to choose between taking the oath or leaving the institutions where they served. Sister Marguerite and her companions refused to take the oath.

From then on they were under constant surveillance but their services in the hospital were so necessary that they were allowed to continue their work. Finally, however, Sister Marguerite was arrested on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1793 on charges of "corrupting and weakening the revolutionary and republican spirit of soldiers who were sent to that hospital." What had in fact happened, was that a group of soldiers who wanted to express their gratitude for the care given them at the hospital, came back to sing some songs for the Sisters. Sister Marguerite stopped to listen to them, gave them some refreshments and also some money. That was her crime. She was taken to the Carmelite prison.

At the beginning of March 1974, a guillotine was set up in the Place Poyanne in Dax. Most prisoners were transferred straightaway to Pau and made the journey on foot, but Sister Rutan was left in the Carmelite prison, a sign that her fate had already been decided.

After a brief trial, her name was added to the list of those to be guillotined. An Extraordinary Commission arrived in Dax to review the cases of those facing capital punishment. On 9<sup>th</sup> April, after a short hearing in which the same charges were repeated, Marguerite was condemned to death. The sentence was to be carried out immediately.

She and the parish priest of Gaube, who was also condemned, were tied back to back, placed on a cart, and, surrounded by soldiers, rushed to the place of execution to the sound of drums. After seeing the priest die, she asked the executioner to refrain from touching her, and she herself removed the shawl from round her shoulders. She then placed her head on the guillotine and was executed.

What I find most remarkable, as I read the accounts of Marguerite's death, was her dignity. She seems to have been undaunted, treating others gently, and speaking her mind clearly and unflinchingly right to the end.

#### **4. Sister Martina Vazquez Gordo**

Sister Martina was born in Segovia, Spain, on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1865. She entered the Daughters of Charity in February 1896. Martina was highly respected by her peers. As a young Sister, she was named superior of the Colegio de la Milagrosa in Zamora. Afterwards, she was superior of the hospital in Melilla. She returned to Madrid as a member of the Provincial Council and Assistant at the Provincial House. On various occasions the Queen sought her advice. Finally, she became superior at the hospital in Segorbe, where she initiated many works.

Those who lived with her testify that she was very intelligent and utterly absorbed in her works with the poor. They say that she was quite outspoken, even with those in authority. Her relatives wrote admiringly of her human qualities.

After the Civil War broke out in Spain, the Sisters remained in the hospital in Segorbe, where Sister Martina, now 71 years of age, continued to serve. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1936, some militiamen stormed the hospital with their guns drawn and expelled all the Sisters, leaving them on the street. They sought refuge with a former student from one of their schools, staying there in seclusion until October.

Then one night, militiamen suddenly entered the house and went straight to Sister Martina's room where she lay in bed. Ironically, she had cared for one of the group's leaders called "Marchen" in hospital a short time before. They shouted. *"Get up. Get dressed and come with us to make a declaration."* She replied, *"Did you come to get me to make a declaration, or to kill me?"* Martina's farewell to the Sisters was simple, *"Goodbye. See you in heaven."* She was pushed into a car.

When they reached the main highway outside the town, Martina said to her escort, *"Are you going to kill me? If so, there's no need to go any further. Do it right here."* They stopped and tied her to a tree. They wanted her to turn away from them so that they could shoot her in the back, but she refused. She said, *"I would rather see the faces of those who kill me because these are the faces of the very people I have fed so many times"*

*to kill their hunger.”* After blessing herself, she said, *“You can shoot me now.”* They shot her. It was 28<sup>th</sup> October 1936.

What struck me most as I read the accounts of Sister Martina’s death? It was utterly senseless. She was killed by fanatics whose relentless pursuit of their own ideals led them to fight against, and even to hate, those whose ideals were different. As a Daughter of Charity serving the poor each day, Martina was very clear about her ideals. She was ready to die for them.

## **5. Joseph Chow Tsi-Che**

Did you ever want to be Pope? I have heard Catholics say, usually with some frustration and in a humorous way, “If I were Pope for a week, this is what I would do...!” Of course, none of us get that opportunity!

But in fact, one of our Vincentians was actually asked to be Pope.

Joseph Chow was born in 1891 in Shijiazhuang. He made his vows in the Congregation of the Mission in 1915 and was ordained to the priesthood four years later. After serving as a professor in the minor seminary in Shijiazhuang, and then as a professor of philosophy in the major seminary of Chala, Beijing, he was consecrated bishop in 1931 and initially served as Vicar Apostolic in Baoding, not far from where he was born. In 1946 he was appointed Archbishop of Nanchang, much further South, a city I stopped in some years ago.

In 1950, soon after the establishment of the revolutionary government in China, Joseph Chow received his invitation to become Pope. A delegation from Beijing came to visit him. A writer of the time describes their conversation like this:

- *“You are so very talented that people are already thinking of you as the leader of the “Chinese progressive wing.” Wouldn’t you like to be the Pope of China?*
- *Do you really think I am qualified for that?*
- *Absolutely.*
- *In that case, I would rather be Pope of the whole world.”*

The delegation left, furious at his refusal. From that time onwards, he was under constant surveillance. In May 1951, he was arrested, tried, found guilty and thrown into prison. The charges against him were that he had listened to *The Voice of America*, opposed the reform of the Church, and had recruited members for the Legion of Mary. He remained in prison, condemned to 22 years of forced labour. Just before his death he was released (so that he would not die in prison) and carried to the home of a Christian in Nanchang. There he died.

What strikes me about Joseph Chow is this. He declined the offer of a very prestigious position: he could have been the Pope of China. Consequently, he died a long, drawn-out and difficult death. In the end, the government released him from prison because they wanted to deprive him of the title of martyr, but today we recognise that this is what he was.

Tertullian tells us that “*the blood of Christians is seed.*”<sup>8</sup> The martyrs encourage us. Their strength germinates in our hearts. They show that some things are worth dying for. By their witness they proclaim that fidelity to one’s commitments is more important than life itself. In the darkness of persecutions or oppressive regimes, martyrs are like lightning flashes that light up the night sky. They are like an electric spark that energises those of us who are still living. Our Vincentian Family has been blessed by many such martyrs, from the time of St. Vincent right up to the present day. Today I pray that this “great cloud of witnesses”<sup>9</sup> will strengthen all of us to be faithful, no matter what the cost, even to the end.

Motherhouse, Paris France  
1 January 2004

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (1918), as cited in Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers* (New York: Vintage 2000) IX.

<sup>2</sup> Macbeth, Act I, Scene IV (Forres. The Palace).

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:19

<sup>4</sup> SV, IV, 343

<sup>5</sup> SV III, 79-80

<sup>6</sup> SV, IV, 341

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Collet, *La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Nancy 1748, II, 471-472

<sup>8</sup> Apologia, 50, 13

<sup>6</sup> Heb 12,1

## MOTHER E FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

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To all Daughters of Charity,  
Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004

### **Circular of Mother Évelyne Franc**

My dear Sisters,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us!

At this beginning of a new year, it gives me great joy to send you, for the first time, my best wishes for a good and holy year. We began it by celebrating the feast of the Virgin Mary and by asking God, through her intercession, for;

*“The grace to live in a spirit of openness to his will”*

*“to be witnesses to his charity”*

*“to be filled with the fire and strength of his Spirit.”*

(Act of Consecration, January 1<sup>st</sup>)

This is a challenging programme for 2004 and I can think of no better way to express my affectionate wishes for each one of you! I would like to add my most sincere thanks for all your Christmas messages, which reflect your lives and the lives of those who are close to you. I was very moved by your letters describing your service of our brothers and sisters, the poor, and the testimonies of how you worked together. In this way I am able to share, at a distance, your joy in serving and, at times, your sadness at not being able to relieve so much suffering. I also share in the richness of your community life and your desire to deepen this. Thank you, too, for the promise of your prayers; they are a source of many graces for me.

As I look back over last year, I pause, of course, at the General Assembly and the beatification of Sister Rosalie. These two events have this in common, that they have touched the very heart of the Company and I may add that both events were prepared for very carefully, and in a spirit of faith, by Mother Elizondo and the previous General Council to whom I would like to send my cordial and grateful greetings.

The Assembly brought its task to a successful conclusion. Indeed, the revision of the Constitutions and Statutes is for the Company, and for each one of us, a new time of grace. The updated texts will be available some time during 2004. The Commission whose task it was to prepare the documents that would be sent to Rome, have worked very hard. So let us all pray that the approbation and the translation will not be delayed! In a few days' time I will be sending to the Visitatrices the Action Lines from this Assembly that mark out the direction we are to take until 2009. These Action Lines will allow us to make this time of grace, this revitalising influence, a concrete reality in our lives. They were prepared by the General Council and they take up the principal themes discussed during the Assembly. They indicate how these can be applied at Provincial and

local level, as well as in our personal lives.

The beatification of Sister Rosalie, too, gives a new impetus to the Company. I would even go so far as to compare this beatification to a family reunion that has taken place on several occasions and in many different places. First, there was the prayerful and joyous gathering of a large number of Daughters of Charity, Vincentian Priests and Brothers, and members of the Vincentian Family in Rome and then in Paris. The beatification was also celebrated in a fervent and creative way in many parts of the world. Family reunions are important milestones in life; they are special times for meeting and for renewal, for sharing joys and renewing our strength for the days ahead. I think that Sister Rosalie, who would probably have found it hard to understand all the fuss being made about her, would have come to see, in humble simplicity, that her beatification would become leaven in our lives as Daughters of Charity in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium.

Finally, I would like to use this letter to share with you some events of the last six months. The Councillors and I have come to know one another and have learned how to live and work together in respect and friendship. Sister Rita Ferri, Treasurer General, arrived in Paris in mid-December and was joyfully welcomed by the Sisters of the Economat General and everyone in the Mother House.

In order to fulfil in a better way our mission of service to the Company, we have decided to meet as a group every six weeks for a “special Council session” in order to study general questions. This fits in well with the normal cycle of Wednesday morning sessions and the special intensive planning sessions that are held three times a year.

The Councillors and I, myself, have already made some journeys. These visits bring human faces and life to the matters studied at Council and they strengthen the bonds that unite us. I, personally, have had the joy of visiting the Provinces of Hungary, Emmitsburg, Slovakia, France-South and Romania. These days were well prepared for and the memory of them remains in my heart and in my prayers. This year, 2004, already has a good number of visits scheduled, and I rejoice at the thought of meeting more of you, listening to you, sharing your life, and discussing with you the matters that cause you special concern.

The recent earthquakes in Iran and Panama, the other tragic events of 2003, the violence that is endemic in some places and the hardness our world shows to the poorest people among us, are sufferings that we feel in a very personal way and at the same time they are a call to us to be more generous of heart and to increase our prayer.

May I end this letter with some words of Saint Louise to a Sister Servant in 1653: *“Go then, courageously, advancing moment by moment, along the path on which God has placed you in order to reach him.”* (Letter 360b, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1653). Every day of this new year, let us find and support one another in that journey with *“Mary, the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps.”* (NMI, 58).

With my sincere affection and assuring you of my prayers,

Sister Évelyne Franc,  
*Superioress General*

## **Criteria underlying the changes that the Assembly has introduced into the Constitutions and Statutes**

### **Introduction**

The book of Constitutions and Statutes revised during the last General Assembly, has already been presented to the Holy See for approval. The Company is waiting for the results. Many and important changes were proposed. It is to be hoped that the approbation we have asked for will be granted soon because although the 1983 Constitutions remain in force, it is not a good thing for this period of waiting to be prolonged because this could lead to people settling for the provisional. I am writing this article, therefore, so that the expectations aroused in the whole Company by that General Assembly may not be dimmed as the Company waits for Rome's pronouncement.

The Visitatrices and delegates who took part in the Assembly will have given a full report to their respective Provinces about the events and experiences there. This is what Father General asked them to do but he advised them not to distribute the approved texts until these had the approval of the Holy See. The contents of this article, and the way that I present the material, are in accordance with this recommendation and advice.

I will be trying to share with you some very personal experiences: what I observed during the Assembly, the criteria and the sensitivities which, it seemed to me, motivated the participants when they proposed various changes, and the reasons they gave to the Assembly for discarding, adding to, or modifying the texts of the Constitutions and Statutes. Since these are very personal impressions they may, or may not, coincide with what other participants felt. In my opinion, the criteria for the changes in the Constitutions and Statutes were as follows:

### **The global principle of inculturation**

The 1997 General Assembly approved the proposal that the Constitutions be revised during the Assembly of 2004, and that this be done in the light of inculturation. The reasons put forward for this revision included the need for decentralisation, the new and important role of women in society and in the Church, and the introduction of inclusive language, as well as the inclusion of suggestions approved by previous Assemblies. It was Father General who, in a conference to the Visitatrices during their Encounter in Rome (May 2000), gave a wider interpretation of the word "inculturation." He told them that they should revise the Constitutions after rereading them with new eyes, relating them to values and sensitivities that belong to our present day culture and then proposing the changes, (omissions, additions, modifications, etc.) that they considered a more appropriate way of expressing the Company's charism in our own times. It was with this wider understanding of the word "inculturation" in view, that

Local and Provincial Assemblies were held. Proof of this is seen in the many and varied postulates that were approved in these Assemblies and the fact that nearly two thousand postulates came to the General Assembly.

It follows, then, that it was the criterion of inculturation that inspired most of the changes introduced. Not only was the word itself used in connection with different topics (organisation of the various stages of formation, drawing up the Community Plan, ways of expressing our faith, evangelisation of the poor, the mission “ad gentes”, etc.), but it was the concept of inculturation that moved the Company to accept that each Province could draw up its own “Provincial Norms” and make decisions about the habit and the procedure to be followed for designating the Visitatrice and her Councillors. And since today’s cultural sensitivities reject anything that smacks of imposition, authority or power, some words such as “submit”, “dominative powers”, “direct” and “guide” have been replaced by others that are more in keeping with our present culture and perhaps more in line with the gospel; words such as “obey”, “accompany”, “orientate.”

The criteria listed below are different aspects of the overall principle of inculturation.

### **Decentralisation**

One of the reasons put forward at the 1997 Assembly, for approving the postulate asking for a revision of the Constitutions and Statutes, was a desire for decentralisation. This topic had been under discussion in the Company for some time.

The connection between the principle of decentralisation and that of inculturation lies in the fact that when it comes to decision making, the people who are most knowledgeable about a situation are those who live closest to that reality, be this social, cultural or political in nature. The power given to competent authority to make decisions at each level without having to have recourse to a higher level or to central authority constitutes subsidiarity. Decentralisation and subsidiarity have been incorporated into the revised Constitutions and Statutes where various powers formerly attributed to the Superior General have been transferred to the Superioress General; powers that were reserved to her have now been given to the Visitatrice and some of her powers have been given to the Sister Servant, together with their respective Councils.

### **The new and more important role of women**

Throughout the world, and within the Church, and in some countries and continents more than in others, there has been a growing recognition of equality of rights and obligations for men and women. This has led people to recognise that women should have access to everything that is in keeping with their state. This new sensitivity finds concrete expression in the revised Constitutions and Statutes where certain powers that the 1983 Constitutions vested in the Father General and Directors General have now been transferred to respective levels of government. The Assembly, faithful to the original orientations of the Company, was not in any way trying to break away from the authority of the Superior General or to devalue the importance of Directors and the help that the Congregation of the Mission has given, and continues to give, to the Daughters of Charity. In fact, the opposite is true, and they continue to ask for this help. But the



emphasis now is on help and collaboration in maintaining fidelity to the spirit and aims of the Company. In other words, their role is more one of animating the charism than exercising other juridical aspects of authority.

This new sensitivity to feminism is also reflected in the use of inclusive language (men and women, brothers and sisters) and by including in the text various sayings of Saint Louise.

### **Unity in diversity**

Part of the general criterion of inculturation is yet another commonly accepted conviction. Unity does not preclude diversity. The unity of the Company which is so very necessary, will be forged by all Daughters of Charity living by the same essential values that are specific to the charism of the Company, and having the same spirit and the same aims, but expressing these values in different ways in accordance with the diverse cultures in which the Sisters live and work. This will bring about unity that is not based on uniformity but on diversity.

By accepting these cultural differences and the diverse paths followed by the different Provinces, the Assembly tried to avoid confrontation with regard to matters that are not an essential part of the Company's charism. So, instead of asking people to decide for or against these questions, the Assembly preferred to accept both options. For example, with regard to the vow formula, should we keep to the one we have at present or one that gives first place to the service of the poor? It was agreed that both formulas are valid and that each Sister would be free to choose the one she preferred. Another example was whether the Visitatrice and the Provincial Council should be appointed by direct elections or designated by the Superioress General and her Council after consultation with the Sisters of the Province. Both methods were deemed acceptable and each Province could decide which one to use.

### **Identity**

Nobody questions the fact that the Company already has good Constitutions but the period of study and reflection that preceded the Assembly showed that these Constitutions could be improved on. The revised Constitutions and Statutes have tried to present with greater clarity the Company's identity within the Church. That was the intention behind the historical introduction, placing the various chapters in a particular order, replacing or discarding some terms that were more appropriate for religious life, rewording some paragraphs on the four vows, the explanation of the three virtues, making the new Constitutions start with the present C. 1.4, dealing with formation and membership in different chapters, etc.

All the criteria I have mentioned were not decided on prior to the Assembly, nor were they suggested to the Sisters taking part. I repeat, these are my own personal opinions and I am sure that other people at the Assembly may well think differently.

I would like to share with you a further impression I had of the Assembly. I would hesitate to describe it as another criterion but it is something that is very evident in the texts. Anyone reading them would come to the conclusion that this revision was

made at the beginning of the 21st century. As well as incorporating the sensitivities and some of the values of today's culture, the revised Constitutions and Statutes, in accordance with the criteria mentioned earlier, contain many phrases that reflect the major challenges facing the world and the Church these days: the fair distribution of the world's resources, an option for justice and peace, the responsible use of new communication techniques, being interested in the Church's social teaching, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, collaboration with the Vincentian Family, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The Assembly has worked hard to comply with its mandate to revise the Constitutions and Statutes. But it was convoked to have as its slogan, "Revise in order to revitalise." When its texts are approved by the Holy See there will be a time for studying and reflecting on them, and during this period the Company will try, not only to assimilate and put into practical effect the changes that have been made, but also to live according to the criteria that inspired these changes. It is not a matter of adopting these changes simply because this is what the Assembly decided, but because the changes came about for the reasons given and because we believe that they express what God and the poor are asking of the Company today. Over the coming years, the formation plans of each Province will have to be directed to this end.

When the Superiors General presented the final document of the 1997 Assembly, they said something that can equally be applied to the revised book of Constitutions and Statutes: *"We ask every Daughter of Charity and every Province, to take them, savour them and digest them well. The world is full of undigested documents. The challenge facing us is to move on from the written word to deep convictions and specific commitments"* When we reach this point the Assembly will have achieved its aim: "to revise in order to revitalise." And if this can be achieved, all the effort that has gone into the revision process will have been worthwhile.

We must rejoice and thank God for what has been for the Company a time of grace. But at the same time, we should bear in mind the exhortation and conviction that John Paul II addressed to the whole Church of the third millennium when it draws up any pastoral programme: it is not a formula (a book or a project) that will save us, but a Person, (Christ).

Father Fernando Quintano, CM,  
*Director General*

## FR R. MALONEY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

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To the Visitatrices of the Daughters of Charity  
Rome, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004

### **Circular of Father Robert Maloney**

My very dear Sisters,

May the grace of Our Lord be with you always!

I am writing today to inform you that, after a wide process of consultation, and with the consent of the members of the General Council, I have named **Father Javier Alvarez** Director General of the Daughters of Charity.

**Father Francisco Javier Alvarez Munguía**, of the Province of Madrid, was born in Pedrosa de Muño (Burgos), Spain, on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1954. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1973. On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1982 he was ordained priest by Pope John Paul II in Valencia (Spain).

During the first two years after his ordination, he served at the Apostolic College of Tardajos (Burgos). In 1984 he was appointed professor of spiritual theology. He was awarded a degree in Philosophy at the Pontifical University of Salamanca and in 1997 he defended his doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Burgos, obtaining his doctorate in theology.

From 1986 onwards, he was Director of students of the Madrid Province in Burgos, and from 1991-1997 was a Provincial Councillor: between 1987 and 1997 he worked in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology in Burgos, giving courses in the “Religious Life” department.

From 1990 onwards, he was a member of the Commission that organised the programme of Vincentian Studies that takes place every year in Avila for the confreres and the Sisters. He taught various subjects in this programme.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1997, he began his service as Director of the Daughters of Charity of the Saint Louise Province, Madrid. When Father Javier takes up the ministry of Director General, I know that I can assure him of your prayers and mine, asking the Lord to pour out his Spirit on him and to give him abundant wisdom and deep pastoral charity.

On this occasion I would also like to express my deepest thanks to Father Fernando Quintano whom I have had the pleasure of working with over the last ten years. During the General Assembly last year, I was struck by the number of positive comments that were made about the dedicated and creative service that Father Quintano has rendered to the Company as Director General. These are my sentiments, too. Not only have I found it easy to work closely with Father Quintano, but I have also consistently

enjoyed his company and his good humour. I ask the Lord to bless him as he begins to prepare for a new form of service in the Congregation of the Mission.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, CM  
*Superior General*

## News from the Provinces

### VISITS BY SUPERIORS

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Mother Évelyne Franc  
and Sister Christa Bauer, General Councillor

#### **Visit to the Province of Hungary**

On **20<sup>th</sup> August 2003**, Mother Évelyne arrived in Budapest, accompanied by Sister Christa Bauer, General Councillor. After welcoming our visitors we did a tour of the capital. Preparations had begun for our national patronal feast. On 20<sup>th</sup> August, the Church in Hungary carries the relics of Saint Stephen, King of Hungary, through the streets of Budapest.

On arriving at the Provincial House, Mother Évelyne met in turn, the Sister Servants, the elderly Sisters, the Sisters of the House and the young Sisters. Each group had the opportunity to express the joys and the sorrows they experience in their service. Mother's meeting with the Sisters in the Infirmary was an occasion of great joy and mutual encouragement.

Afterwards, Mother Évelyne discussed with the Council some important matters concerning the future of the Province: these included the importance of inter-Provincial encounters and the formation of our young Sisters. Thank you, Mother Évelyne for this first meeting with you! The whole Province is grateful for it and we cannot wait for your next visit!

Sister Marianna Sebestyen  
*Echoes correspondent*

## VISITS BY SUPERIORS

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Mother Évelyne Franc  
And Sister Zofia Daniscakova, General Councillor

### Visit to the Province of Slovakia

To mark the **150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Daughters of Charity at Brno** in the Czech Republic, Mother Évelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Zofia Daniscakova, General Councillor, paid a visit to the Province of Slovakia (formerly Czechoslovakia) from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2003.

#### **A little bit of history**

On **23<sup>rd</sup> November 1853**, four Daughters of Charity from the Province of Graz (Austria) and their Visitatrice, Sister Leopoldina Brandis, arrived in Brno. The Sisters began to work in an orphanage, visit the sick, provide 700-800 meals for the unemployed, and to care for the wounded soldiers. The Sisters were able to go on working in the orphanage until 1949. Then the communist government forbade them to continue. In the 1950s, the Czech and the Slovak Sisters were sent to forced labour in the fields and in the factories. It was only later on that they were allowed to work in institutions for the mentally handicapped and for old people. In spite of the persecution, the Sisters always remained faithful to the spirit of Saint Vincent. After the “velvet revolution” in 1989, the situation changed. At present, several countries comprise the Province of Slovakia. In the Czech Republic there are 133 Sisters who live in 6 communities at Brno, Mendrika, Prepychy, Hradec, Kralové, Kolin and Stara Boleslav. The Sisters work in parishes, in a hospital, a school for girls and a nursery, as well as in a home for aged priests and two houses for old Sisters. In Slovakia there are 344 Sisters living in 18 houses; in Ukraine 6 Sisters are in 2 houses, and in Siberia there are 4 Sisters living together in one house.

#### **21<sup>st</sup> November 2003 at Brno**

After visiting the former Brno orphanage which is now a military establishment, Mother Évelyne, Sister Zofia and all the Sisters went to the church of Our Lady of Good Help, for Mass which was celebrated by the Provincial Director, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, several Vincentian priests, some Salesians (administrators of that church) and some diocesan priests. Many parishioners joined us there.

In the afternoon, after the young Sisters presented a “flashback” to the arrival of the first Daughters of Charity, Mother Évelyne shared with us some of her convictions, and spoke particularly about the importance of dialogue in our community life. Then, after praying together, we went to the graves of our first Sisters as a token of our gratitude to them.

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> November at Nitra**

More than 200 Sisters had the happiness of meeting Mother at the Provincial House in Nitra. The memory of her enthusiasm and the witness of her life will remain forever in our hearts. We all thank God for her visit and her kindly presence.

Sister Anna Blehova  
*Echoes correspondent*

## VISITS BY SUPERIORS

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Sister Marlene Rosa, General Councillor

### **Visit to the Province of Portugal**

After spending a little time getting used to her new mission, Sister Marlene Teresinha Rosa, General Councillor, began her work by visiting the Province of Portugal from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October 2003. She spoke to us about the Action Plans from the 2003 General Assembly and the graces bestowed by Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal chapel.

At each of her meetings, Sister Marlene stressed the importance of formation, interiorisation and the Community Plan, which should be simple and concrete. She told the Sister Servants, *“The Sister Servants are responsible for dynamising a Province; each one communicates her zeal to the Sisters of her community so that together we can live out our charism in the best possible way, serving Christ in the poor people he has entrusted to us.”*

Sister Marlene’s visit made us realise even more our need to renew ourselves in the particular spirit of the Company. *“Anything that is not renewed is doomed to disappear,”* she said. We were strongly urged to walk the pathways of the world, begging the Lord to give us his spirit of humility, simplicity and charity, and the ability to put these into practice, in concrete ways, in our day-to-day lives. Thank you, Sister Marlene, for your simplicity, your enthusiasm, and your strong convictions.

Sister Isabel da Silva Alves  
*Echoes correspondent*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Bogota

### The 4<sup>th</sup> CIEVI

*International Vincentian Studies Centre  
for the Daughters of Charity of Latin America and the Caribbean*

Mindful of Saint Louise's words, "*Renew yourselves, my dear Sisters, in your first fervour*," a recommendation that is still very relevant today, the Visitatrices of Latin America and the Caribbean organised this 4<sup>th</sup> CIEVI encounter. Twenty-six Sisters took part and they represented all the Provinces in this continent with the exception, sadly, of Haiti and Venezuela. However, we should add that two Sisters represented Brazil, one was from Belo Horizonte and the other from Rio de Janeiro. It was a grace to have them with us at the session for the first time.

The Sisters from the different communities of the host Province, Bogota, gave us a warm welcome and the liturgy they prepared was of a very high standard. At the beginning of the session, Sister Hilda Aponte, Visitatrice of the Province and Directress of CIEVI, said a few words of welcome and stressed the importance of formation based on the Gospel and on the spirit of the Founders, for meeting the challenges that face the continent.

We have just listened to the words of the prophet, Jeremiah, who reminds us that God does not abandon his people. "*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel* (Jr 31, 31-34), and he promises that things will be different, as Isaiah foretells. (Is 55, 3).

We find this in our everyday lives and we thank God for founding the Company. We know that God never forgets his promises when it is a matter of liberating the poor. Our holy Founders experienced this. God's covenant with humankind prefigured by people in the Bible and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, is a strong call to conversion in order to nourish the people's hope. God took the initiative in delivering them from Egypt, in order to make with them an everlasting covenant. In our own day, God has taken the initiative in setting up, through the Visitatrices, the CIEVI, so that as a vibrant community of people living at this specific time in history, we may participate, in his name, in the Redemptive Plan for our continent.

CIEVI is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and as such has been able to read the signs of the times. One of these signs is the growth of interpersonal relationships and also internationalisation. This makes us realise that we cannot remain isolated in the work of Evangelisation; the power of the Holy Spirit is strongly prompting us to seek integration beneath the same sun, Jesus Christ. This means that the CIEVI must be like a rainbow in the sky and become a great sign of hope which calls all the Sisters from all the Provinces, to a renewed sense of vocation in Jesus Christ.



CIEVI must play a decisive and prophetic role in this, pointing out the path of unity which takes account of diversity, and it must be able to dream of things that are yet to be.

Our presence here at this fourth CIEVI is an enrichment for the Church, the Company, and the world of the poor. Our many-hued cultures, expectations and dreams are an enormous potential which can influence the course of history and the desires that the people of our continent hold in common.

CIEVI also aims at being a life-giving place where we promote communication between the Provinces while remaining one single family, following out the guidelines of our Superiors General.

This new covenant will make us into a new people, but even now we can have the happiness of knowing that God is at work in each one of us: we can make a reality of these words, *“I will be your God and you will be my people.”*

Within the vast horizon of this Latin American and Caribbean continent with its magnificent range of colours, we must work together to release the dynamic power of the Gospel, and during our time here at CIEVI, our hearts will be set on welcoming the Spirit who dwells in us.

A Mexican activist remarked, *“The world is no longer just a dream, a prophecy or a project. It has become a reality.”* Applying some of these words to ourselves we could say, *“That is also true of the CIEVI.”* It is already a reality. We are now beginning the fourth session. Today, the Lord is calling us as consecrated women, the invisible half of history, and uniting us in the name of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent, so that through every aspect of our living together, we may recreate the civilisation of love.

Just as in a rainbow we find a variety and symphony of colours, we desire that the Holy Spirit may make a special covenant with each one of us. We know that every cloud is grace-tinged and that each day, even when it is raining, has its own particular brightness: in other words, each day can be a beautiful rainbow.

- The colour red: colour of love, of feelings, roses, and life-giving blood: this will increase our love for Christ and the desire to further his Kingdom.
- The colour orange: colour signifying abundance, delicious fruits and harvest time: this will help us to live at a deep level, the spirituality that is special to our charism.
- The colour yellow: colour of happiness, of the sun and the flowers. This will help us to live our consecration in all its fullness and in the light of the Beatitudes.
- The colour green: colour of nature, of grass, of trees and of hope. We will be prophetic witnesses among the poor.
- The colour blue: colour of life, of the sky, the air we breathe, of crystal clear water. We are to have a new life-style.
- The colour indigo: colour of night-time and of dreams. We are to give witness by our sisterly union.
- The colour violet: colour of peace and tranquillity reflecting the depths of the sea. We are to love and imitate more, Mary of Nazareth, so that she may

always shine like a rainbow in our hearts.

We realise that there are huge challenges ahead but we believe that with CIEVI we can humbly and earnestly work at “revising in order to revitalise”, so that one day we may see the dawn of a new Easter. I will end with these words from the Book of Proverbs, “*For want of guidance, a people fails.*” (Prov, 11, 14).

After this opening talk, a group of children gave a display of folk dancing, which summed up very well the spirit of joy and celebration that were to characterise these three months of session.

Before starting our work of reinterpreting our charism for today’s world, we wanted to begin by doing this on a personal level. So we went to Chinauta, near Bogota, to visit our elderly Sisters and to share with them our happiness at being able to have this time of formation. Then we visited Sibaté where our Sisters care for more than 500 people who are physically and mentally handicapped. We were very moved by their warm welcome and their devoted service.

From there, we left for Pinares, where the CIEVI is held. This new group of 26 Sisters is following in the footsteps of the 73 who have taken part in the session in previous years. Mary collaborated in God’s redemptive plan for humanity and so we count on her motherly presence at this time of formation. We believe that with the CIEVI we are working to build for our present times and we thank the Lord for the support given us by our Superiors General.

Sister Lucia Gomez Oviedo  
*CIEVI co-ordinator*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Recife

### **150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presence of Daughters of Charity in Bahia**

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Daughters of Charity in Bahia gave us the opportunity to share our joy with the whole Company and to present some flashbacks to that historic event in the life of our Province.

The first Daughters of Charity arrived in Bahia in 1853. They were sent there by Father Etienne, Superior General of the Daughters of Charity, at the request of Bishop Romualdo Seixas who was encouraged by the experience of Bishop Luxuriant of Mariana who had also asked for Daughters of Charity to be sent to his diocese to work for the education and evangelisation of children, young people and adults, and to combat illiteracy and lack of religious instruction.

With the strong conviction that charity knows no frontiers, the Daughters of Charity responded to that appeal and with great generosity left from the port of Le Havre on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1853 in the ship “Mineiro” which reached the shores of Bahia in August of that year. They were welcomed at the dockside by several dignitaries and by the people, and then went straight to the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of the Sands, to sing a solemn “Te Deum” in thanksgiving.

They settled in Salvador and began to found several works in the Bahian capital. With great courage and determination they began the work of evangelisation which played such an important part in the education of young people, orphans and poor people in the society of those days. They were very forward-looking for their times, and confronted by a very different culture from our own, they had to adapt to this in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God and witness to his love for the poor.

As we reflect on this long journey of 150 years, we joyfully relive all that has happened: the difficulties that were overcome and the great spirit of faith and love shown by those first Sisters and the ones who came after them.

United in the love of Christ, the Sisters from all the houses in Salvador and in Bahia, together with some Sisters representing the houses of the Province, the Visitatrice, Sister Maria José Dantas Coutinho, Father Director, José Cunha Reboucas Junior, the Councillors and Sisters from the Province of Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro, all came to Salvador for this event and to give thanks for all that the Province has achieved.

During a programme of festive activities organised by Our Lady of Salette School, Salvador, which was commemorating the 145 years it has been in existence, we were able to attend a beautiful performance that had been prepared by the teachers and pupils. With the skilful use of lighting and choreography they depicted the apparitions of Our Lady of Salette and the arrival of the first eleven Sisters.

The crowning point was the Eucharistic celebration in the church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. The singing of the “Te Deum” was a reminder of that day when the Sisters arrived on the shores of Bahia. Bishop Geraldo Magella celebrated the Mass, together with Cardinal Agnelo and seven priests. The presence there of pupils, teachers, religious from other Congregations, and friends, was a lovely expression of gratitude to the Sisters.

Welcoming the congregation, Bishop Geraldo stressed that the mission of the Daughters of Charity is to witness to the faith. In his homily he reminded us that we are called to be fertile soil so that the Word of God can flourish, for this is what the apostles, the early Christians and the missionaries did. At the offertory procession, members of the Vincentian Family brought to the altar symbols of faith, hope and charity, the virtues that directed the life and the mission of those first Daughters of Charity. The Visitatrice, Sister Maria José, thanked everyone who had contributed to making this such a joyful occasion.

*These unforgettable days have been for us a very special time, reminding us of the response we are called on to make to God by living in greater fidelity to the spirit of our vocation. For all this, we give thanks to the Lord!*

Sister Lilete Sa Barreto  
*Echoes correspondent*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Belo Horizonte

### **Two things that we recognised as signs!**

Signs are outside time and space and they appear in our lives like stars. If we do not heed them they disappear over the horizon. Here are two things that we recognised as signs and as a special grace from God.

One day last year, our Visitatrice, Sister Therezinha Madureira Goncalves, said to us, *“My dream is to have a big meeting of young people from all over the Province, whether they have a vocation or not.”* Straightaway suggestions were sent in and a meeting was scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> September 2003. The Provincial Director, the Vincentian Fathers, the local communities of the Province, and members of other branches of the Vincentian Family (JMV, SSVP) together with a lot of other people rallied round to organise the project. The Province experienced a great upsurge of enthusiasm: *“How can we help every person to deepen their baptismal and vocational commitment and present our Vincentian charism?”* On 21<sup>st</sup> September everything was ready. More than 150 young people (50 JMV, 60 young people from the vocations ministry and 45 others who accepted the invitation) were welcomed by Sister Madureira Goncalves. Then the celebration began. Shortly afterwards there was a time of prayer, led by the JMV, who acted out the Gospel incident of the miraculous catch of fish and the canticle of creation. Then their chaplain explained, in a very dynamic way, the meaning of those words, *“Launch out into the deep, cast your nets into the deep waters,”* and he stressed the importance of our baptismal vocation. Then there was group work on the gospel of the sower and a modern presentation of Saint Vincent de Paul transforming today’s society. At the end of this the young people came to know something about Saint Louise and Saint Vincent who were a light for the people of their time as they came to the aid of their brothers and sisters in distress. They all left, and their evaluations showed that they were very happy about this day of meeting people and sharing ideas.

The second event seemed to follow on from the first. The following Sunday, the different branches of the Vincentian Family from the Minas Gerais region, gathered in the “Mineirinho” stadium to celebrate the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, as it was the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. More than 5000 people were there. After the opening prayer, the National President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society invited those present to think of Sister Lucie Cunha, who had worked hard for them. Then he spoke about Sister Rosalie Rendu’s role as counsellor to Blessed Frederick Ozanam and his companions, leading them to God through the service of the poor. Many young people were there and several of them spoke about their experiences in the Globalisation of Charity project. The seven branches of the Vincentian Family were there. “Seven”, the perfect number! It was a way of telling us that *“love is infinitely inventive”* and that together we can build, in the sweat of our brow, a world of justice, love and peace. The day ended with Mass celebrated by Bishop Serafim

Fernandes de Araujo who was happy to tell us once again that he had spent eight years in the Vincentian Seminary at Diamantina.

These two signs were for us seeds of hope, encouraging us to live out ever more generously the charity of Jesus Christ the Servant.

Sister Eponina da Conceicao Pereira

*Echoes correspondent*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Japan

### **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the Daughters of Charity**

The mission in Japan began in 1933, at the invitation of Mother Mayer, a Sacred Heart nun, and in the year that marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Company. Four Daughters of Charity were sent from the Mother House and were joined by two other Sisters from Shanghai, China. After a sea voyage that lasted for a month and a half, they arrived at Nagasaki on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1933. Three Sisters, Sister Angela Costa, Sister Josephine Zupancic and Sister Catherine Blames, began work with poor children in Fukuoka. The three others, Sister Genevieve Termier, Sister Jeanne Catin and Sister Angela Guterres arrived in Osaka. With the help of the Sacred Heart nuns, they established the Sacred Heart Institute and opened a free dispensary and a day nursery for the poor people of the neighbourhood. Later on, more Sisters arrived from France, and in 1939 a hospital for poor sick people was opened. During the Second World War the Sisters took in and cared for many sick and wounded people.

The first work, the Sacred Heart Institute, was completely burnt out during the war. The following year, Sister Termier, the Sister Servant, caught typhus and died. During these sad times the Sisters founded the Holy Family Home for abandoned children and for those who had lost their parents and their homes during the war. This work is still continuing today. There are about 150 children from 0 to 18 years old who cannot be brought up by their families. The hospital has been reorganised as a hospital for the handicapped and is now run by other people.

The Seminary was opened in Kobe in 1950 and with this the formation of Japanese Sisters began. Foreign Daughters of Charity who had been expelled from China, came to Japan, one after another, and they numbered about thirty Sisters. The Province of Japan was established in 1954 and the last Sister to leave China, Sister Laporte, was appointed Visitatrice. The Provincial House was in Kobe.

In 1954 the Sisters from the American Province of Saint Louis arrived in Japan. They built a hospital for handicapped children in Wakayama, visited the poor and taught young children in parish nursery schools. They responded to the calls of Providence, the Church and other towns, caring for the needs of the poor.

Although today Japan is not regarded as an economically poor country, in spite of its material prosperity there are many unemployed people, broken families and people with various social problems, so the poor crowd into the towns and cities. As we reflect on our service of the poor today, we pray for the grace to be able to imitate the devotion shown by our first Sisters and to live as true Daughters of Charity.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2003, Mass was concelebrated by Archbishop Ikenaga and eight priests in the parish church of our first Sisters in the diocese of Osaka. About 170

people were there to commemorate the arrival of the Daughters of Charity in Japan 70 years earlier. In his homily the Archbishop said, “Up to the 1950s people thought of social work as ‘doing things for people’ and ‘giving’ but later on it took on a new meaning and we are beginning to ask ”What are people’s needs? What can we do to help handicapped people live a normal life?” This is known here as “normalisation.” This is what we should be thinking about. The Church is making an effort but it is still not enough.”

After the beautiful liturgy, Sister Madeline Hara, Visitatrice, gave thanks for the blessings granted to the Province during these 70 years. The celebration ended with a meeting in the parish hall where people shared memories, had refreshments and enjoyed a short programme of musical items performed by a group of children from the Holy Family Home.

Sister Sharon Tenbarge  
*Echoes correspondent*



## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Southern India

### **Opening of a Seminary in the Province of Southern India**

**October 7<sup>th</sup> 2003** was a memorable day for the Province of Southern India, which is just three years old. It marked the opening of the Seminary and there were eleven young postulants asking for admission. The occasion was honoured by the presence of Sister Julma Neo, General Councillor, who had come to make the first Regular Visitation of the Province. Among the guests were several Sisters from the Province of Northern India, Sister Grace Moolan, Visitatrice, Sister Enedina Costilla, Provincial Assistant, and Sister Pauline Inchanal, the former Visitatrice. Sister Mary Kunnappally and her Council, as well as all the Sister Servants and their Sister companions from several communities in Southern India, were also present. On the day before the opening, the eleven postulants made a short retreat led by Sister Rose Chirayil, the Seminary Directress.

Father Raju Karickal, Provincial Director, presided at the Eucharist, which was celebrated in a creative and culturally appropriate way in the chapel of the Provincial House in Bangalore. In his homily, Father Director stressed to the Seminary Sisters the demands that service would make of them in the future and the need to prepare for this as they started their Seminary. A Daughter of Charity is not called to the tranquillity and security of convent life, but to an apostolic life that is full of challenge.

After the homily, each of the young women from different States in Southern India came forward and expressed their desire to be admitted to the Company. The Visitatrice welcomed them and gave them the Constitutions as a sign of their belonging to the Company.

Sister Julma Neo then read out a short message in which she strongly emphasised the responsibility that all the Sisters of the Province have for the formation of young Sisters, even though that work is entrusted mainly to a few formators. She stressed the fact that opening a Seminary in a Province demands of that Province a commitment to formation which regards quality as more important than quantity. It was also an invitation to all the Sisters of the Province to work at their personal and ongoing formation.

While waiting for a Seminary to be built at some future date, the present group of young Sisters will be living in Mysore, a couple of hours' drive from Bangalore and a place where there are facilities for formation. At the present time, the Province is engaged in the formation of fifteen postulants and a great number of aspirants in several local communities.

Sister Magdaline Nimmarajulu  
*Echoes correspondent*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Region of Albania

### Opening of a Seminary in the Region of Albania

**8<sup>th</sup> December 2003!** The whole Province of Slovenia and the Region of Albania are rejoicing. This is the day when the Seminary is opening at Durres for three Postulants and their new formator, Sister Elizabeta Saliquhaj. The time before the Seminary opened was an “advent” in Advent for everyone. Now we are praying to God that the “seed” put into earth watered by the blood of many martyrs, will grow and become strong for the good of the Company and all the poor.

**Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> December:** visit of the General Councillor, Sister Zofia Daniscakova and the Visitatrice, Sister Barbara Selih. In spite of a power cut, we had candles to make this a day of “light.” In Albania it often happens that the electricity is cut off for 12 hours a day. It is the same with the water supply; there is running water only for about 3 hours a day and that is why the houses are “decorated” with many water tanks.

**Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> December:** blessing of the Seminary buildings by Father Jose Zupancic, Director General, and three young Sisters receive the habit. Then Sister Sofia read out a message from Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General, who wrote on behalf of the Superioress General who was away at the time. Then after listening to the expectations that the young Sisters had with regard to the Seminary, Sister Sofia, enthusiastically reminded them that this was a wonderful formation stage in their lives as Daughters of Charity.

**Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> December:** feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Sisters from the five communities in Albania arrived for the Eucharist at which Father Director presided. He concelebrated with Priests of the Mission from Albania, Rome and Naples. The liturgy was led by the aspirants, postulants and young Sisters from Shkodra and Rreshen. In his homily the celebrant said, *“This is the day that the Lord has made. You sang these words three years ago in this same chapel when Albania became a Region. You are singing them again today. From now on, you young Sisters will be given formation in your own language. May Mary be your model and accompany you on your vocation journey. May the Holy Spirit dwell so much in your hearts that the poor will be able to see the joy you feel in serving them. Saint Vincent recalled the last words spoken by Sister Andree before she died, ‘I have no anxiety...unless it is that I took too much pleasure in serving the poor.’”* (Conference of 25<sup>th</sup> May 1654)

Then Sister Zofia looked back over some of the important events in 2003: the General Assembly, the 370<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Company, the Beatification of Mother Theresa, something that is very important for the people of Albania, the Beatification of Sister Rosalie Rendu and the opening of the Seminary in our Region. She went on to say, *“All these special graces come from God. Seminary*

*signifies “life”; it is not simply joy and hope but it is also being responsible before God and before the whole Company. The whole Company rejoices that we are now a Region. As the first 30 conferences of Saint Vincent have been translated into Albanian, it is now easier for us to appreciate our origins. Vincent de Paul had good psychology, he liked to dialogue with the Sisters. It is by loving one another and dialoguing that we will overcome our selfishness and a certain negativism....”* After this sharing, Sister Zofia met the postulants and aspirants. We thanked our Visitatrice for arranging the translation. It is now up to us to continue to learn more about our specific virtues so that we can live more in accordance with them.

**Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> December:** Sister Zofia and Sister Barbara left us to go to Slovenia with Sister Cecilija, Seminary Directress in Slovenia, who had come to help us. We would like to thank them for their visit, and for being so simple and approachable. We say thank you to Sister Mira Berisha, Regional Superior, for organising these days. And we thank God to whom we belong, and who chose us to live as Daughters of Charity.

Sister Donata Bardhaj  
*Echoes correspondent*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Madrid

### **Formation session for the Sisters of Latin America**

Early in May 2003, the Sisters from different countries in Latin America came to Madrid for a four months' Vincentian session which would help them, in their turn, to provide formation within their Provinces and in the sessions organised at CIEVI (International Vincentian Studies Centre for the Daughters of Charity in Latin America and the Caribbean).

The opening ceremony of the session took place in the Seminary Chapel of Saint Vincent's Provincial House in Madrid. Father Antonio Orcajo presided. He has wide experience of formation and he urged us to see this session as a time of special grace. After invoking the Holy Spirit, the participants introduced themselves: first of all the two Sisters on the co-ordination team, Sister Maria-Teresa Barbero and Sister Maria Angeles Infante, and then the other Sisters, who gave a brief account of their vocational journey, their expectations and some fears they might have.

An atmosphere of mutual trust and esteem was soon created in spite of cultural differences and different lifestyles. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise must have been rejoicing in heaven at seeing their enthusiasm for wanting to know each other better.

Sister Maria-Teresa began by explaining what has been done, over more than a quarter of a century, and at inter-Provincial level, to deepen in Sisters their sense of vocation... On the subject of mutual communication, Sister Maria Angeles spoke about the XVIIth century with its network of social, political and religious relationships. During the first week of the session we studied this period in history and learned about the places where our Founders lived and where the Company began its role in the Church. Audio-visual aids, posters and group work helped us to do this. In the morning a particular theme would be presented and then the Sisters would use a work-sheet as the basis of personal study and later put their findings in common.

Father Benito Martinez and Father Jaime Corera talked to us about specific aspects of the life of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Then Father Benito and Father Antonio Orcajo plunged us into "the spirituality of the Founders." Sister Leonor Larios spoke about the history of the Company at the time of the Founders, and Father Pedro Castillo reminded us of the rich heritage of the Vincentian Family. Sister Maria Angeles used the Conferences of Saint Vincent to present the spirituality of the Company; giving a reflection on the Poor, the Sacrament of Christ, and another on the prophetic dimension of the charism in our times. Father Fernando de Castillo took as his theme, "Important points in the Gospel that are the source of our Charism." Finally, Father Orcajo and

Father Delgado spoke about ecclesiology in the days of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. In July the group was able to take part in an inter-Provincial Vincentian Reflection course in Avila and meet Father Quintano.

Both the community life and the prayer life of those taking part were enriched by all this formation. Community recreations, pilgrimages and weekend cultural visits were a great help in creating a cordial and festive atmosphere. After three months of formation, this group of future formators joined the inter-Provincial study course at Salamanca to learn more about the history of the Company, under the direction of Sister Carmen Urrizburu. At Salamanca they lived in a wider and more varied milieu. The carefully prepared liturgy, the lectures and literature, speaking about their experiences, personal study and sisterly sharing, all helped the group to savour the richness of our Vincentian life. They were also able to visit an exhibition of religious art entitled “The Tree of Life” in Segovia cathedral. This all helped us to drink from the fountain of charity.

Next, the group left for San Sebastian where they were helped by Sister Maria-Teresa to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics of vocation. During her stay at the Provincial House, Mother Elizondo shared with them some reflections on the General Assembly. Later, the group went on pilgrimage to the Berceau at Dax and to Notre-Dame de Buglose. At the church of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Sisters renewed their baptismal promises. At Ranquines, they took time to reflect on the conference on the virtues of good village girls. In these surroundings, the echo of our Founders’ words became a call to live in humility, simplicity, sobriety and obedience. The whole text was a call to revision of life and to conversion. Then the group had the joy of spending a day in Lourdes.

At the end of August we were able to start drawing up a possible Vincentian Formation Plan at Provincial level, a new programme for CIEVI, leaflets which communities can use for reflection on Vincentian themes. We also discussed how we could use information technology for Vincentian formation, the possibility of consulting Vincentian archives in Spanish and the setting up of a Provincial Library. Finally, there was an evaluation of the session.

On 30<sup>th</sup> August, the Provincial House organised a little celebration for the Sisters who were leaving: the programme included songs, poems, and a “visit from the Founders.” Then the Sisters in the group presented, in symbolic form, what the session was about. At the end of the celebration, the Visitatrice, Sister Margarita Morantes, presented each Sister with a diploma, signed by herself, a diploma in “Vincentian subjects”. During the closing Mass, Father Antonio asked us all to set off with our eyes fixed on Christ and the poor, to be available to others, and to share with our Sisters the wonderful things we have received. In the words of the farewell song:

You have discovered strange diamonds  
fashioned in very fine crystal; a history of charity,  
with treasures of transparent, polished crystal.  
This is our history, one that is full of hidden treasures...  
Your heart has been touched by this simple treasure store:  
children, the poor, the aged, the persecuted...  
These crystals have a thousand faces, they need to be brightened and polished.  
You will do this lovingly and without counting the cost,  
because in them, you see Christ....

You leave with our gratitude and our affection.  
Bear aloft, throughout the world, this hidden treasure.

Sister Maria Angeles Infante  
*Group co-ordinator.*

## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of France-South

### **A Catholic Action team in an industrial city**

After celebrating 50 years of Catholic Workers' Action (AOC), currently defined in France as "Ministry to people in outlying areas and in urban cities", two families we had invited from the town asked us, "When can we start an ACE club (Children's Catholic Action)"? And another mother, Beatrice, who has four children, asked, "When can we start up an ACO team?" This appeal found an echo in our hearts because as Daughters of Charity we heard their desire to live their faith in their difficult circumstances.

*"Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, he gave them this answer, 'The coming of the kingdom does not admit of observation and there will be no one to say, 'Look here! Look there!' For you must know, the kingdom of God is among you.'" (Lk 17, 20-23).*

Beatrice then invited some people from the town to come and meet us. There was Jo, a cleaning woman, who had been "of no fixed abode" and had three teenage children; and Marie Noelle, a domestic worker with old people, and mother of three children. We had also invited Jean-Marie and Juliette, who were members of ACO and who had opted to live in an apartment in our city. My community of three Sisters have been living there for 14 years in order to be genuinely close to the people there and to build authentic relationships with them. These people often say to us, "Oh, you live here...that is good."

#### **The meetings**

Through meetings, sharing experiences and talking about our daily lives, we were able to put our finger on the human misery and the destructive forces that brought such deep suffering to others.

These women who were often left to bring up the children on their own, found themselves almost constantly involved in conflict with their families and their neighbours: they had financial problems, were threatened with eviction, regarded with suspicion, were even rejected by their children, and were very isolated. But we were struck, too, by the way they showed solidarity with one another, inviting one another to talk about their lives and on occasion, lending one another money...In spite of their difficulties, each was worried by other sad situations in their neighbourhood. "It was so sad that I felt I had to pray about it", said Juliette.

*"The sons of Israel, groaning in their slavery, cried out for help and from the depths of their slavery their cry came up to God. God heard their groaning and he called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and*

*Jacob. God looked down upon the sons of Israel, and he knew...*"(Ex 2,23-25)

At the end of the year, the AOC Movement organised a Christmas celebration. Beatrice had invited Marie Noelle and Sigrid; Jo wasn't able to come. During the celebration we could see by people's faces that they were beginning to relax and be more at ease. Later on, when we were having a meal together, the conversation turned to the relationships we had built up as a team. Beatrice said, "*We really do help one another.*"

At another meeting, as we recalled together our experiences during the year, we realised even more how much we had gained from living among our neighbours and how the people of that area had transformed our outlook, our way of judging things, and our commitments.

### **With the passage of time**

These meetings helped many of us to share our sufferings, but over time the continuity of the group was put to the test; some didn't turn up for meetings but reappeared later on – this created a certain instability for a time but we persevered. We tried to put other women who had problems in contact with the Association of Single Parents which is part of the Families Confederation, in order to set up a group of representatives for the neighbourhood. So Jo, with the help of Jean-Marie, an ACO activist, went to speak to the bailiff to try and stop people being evicted and to procure the necessary resources from the social services. She told Jean-Marie, "*When you are with us we feel that people listen to us and show us more respect.*" Jean-Marie helped both sides to enter into dialogue and see each other in a different light.

Attending these meetings helped some people to come closer to Christ. Beatrice sent her children to catechism classes and to the ACE club. Marie-Noelle had her five-year old son, Florian, baptised.

Living in this industrial town gives us the opportunity to become more humane, thanks to all the Catholic Action Group activists with whom we collaborate, and the people with problems whom we help and who evangelise us in so many ways!

*"You serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.....a Sister will go and visit the poor ten times a day, and ten times a day she will find God there."*

Sister Anne Gonzalo  
*Daughter of Charity*



## TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

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Province of Turin

### **Many gifts, one same spirit!**

The feast of our holy Founder was celebrated at the Provincial House as a day of sisterly union with Sisters from the Piedmont region whose Congregations were inspired by Saint Vincent.

Twelve religious families were represented:

- The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul
- The Sisters of Charity of Saint Jeanne Antide
- The Nazareth Sisters
- The Sisters of Charity under the auspices of Saint Vincent de Paul
- The Sisters of the Christian "Famulato"
- The Sisters of Saint Joseph Cottolengo
- The Poor Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- The Vincentian Sisters of Mary Immaculate
- The Daughters of Charity of the Most Holy Annunciation
- The Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary
- The Ministering Sisters of Charity
- The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception

The Sisters of Mercy from Verona were not able to accept our invitation because they were holding their General Chapter.

*"This is an historic occasion,"* observed the Visitatrice as she welcomed everyone, *"a secret dream, which today has come true. In the past the time was not right and maybe we needed something to encourage us to come together. Our meeting has come about after we reflected on three important events, which, by special coincidence, took place in 2003:*

*-the commemoration of the 380<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saint Louise's "Enlightenment" at Pentecost 1623*

*-the commemoration of the 370<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Foundation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1633*

*-the commemoration of the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the first Province of the Daughters of Charity in Italy, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1833"*

Then the Visitatrice invited each Sister delegated by her Congregation to come forward and give an outline of the special charism of her religious family and its links with the charism of the Daughters of Charity.

In an atmosphere of charity, truth and respectful listening to one another, the Sisters gave some moving testimonies. There were many similarities between these: the

way that they expressed the charism, their option for the poor, and the inspiration that led to their being founded.

The reasons for these similarities are as follows: the fact that these Congregations were founded by a Daughter of Charity (Sisters of Saint Jeanne Antide, Sister Clarat's Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary), or by a Vincentian Priest (Nazareth Sisters), or else they were inspired by the same Rules (Sisters of the Christian "Famulato", Sisters of Mercy) or again, those Congregations that prepared the way for the Community of the Daughters of Charity in Italy, even if they broke away from them later (Daughters of the Most Holy Annunciation of Montanaro, Mother Verna's Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception).

It is to be hoped that this initiative will not come to nothing. *"We have an important and life-giving heritage to preserve."*

*"We are called – as Father Director said in his homily during Mass – to look to the future together with a view to working more efficaciously and at a deeper level, with the creativity and holiness of Saint Vincent."*

After a convivial meal, the Sisters gathered together again to share some propositions they would make to their respective Councils, with a view to future collaboration.

The Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity, with its **"Heritage Room"** and **library** (soon to be a multimedia facility), could become a Centre for consultation and for the guidance of all who are affected by the Vincentian charism and wish to learn more about it.

**Annual retreats** given by our confreres could be a special time for discovering and assimilating the thinking and the spirituality of the Saint of Charity who has not said his final word about the help and the solidarity we can offer to people who do not have the opportunity or the means to improve their situation.

The aim of future **meetings** will be to present propositions and possibly a way of working together, which today is not such a Utopian idea as it was in the past, thanks to the prophetic vision of some people and the goodwill of those who, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, are not afraid of being open to grace and putting in common their resources and talents so that the Kingdom of God can come to all people, and especially the poor.

Sister Raphaelle Trapani  
*Echoes Correspondent*

## LESSONS FROM THE POOR

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Province of France-South

### **The prison environment**

#### **Testimony given by a woman who for six years came to the reception centre for families of prisoners at Roqueclaire.**

First of all, I want to thank you for the warm welcome you gave me every weekend...and for the lovely way your house was decorated; the flowers and the pictures were balm to my soul, not to mention your prayers.. Only we, women, know what prison is like. Only we know the feeling of someone being in prison every day while everyone else is happy. That indescribable sadness you feel deep down inside, knowing that someone you love is deprived of his freedom. All the time acting as though everything is all right so as not to upset the children and talking to them about everything so that they don't imagine even worse scenarios. I think I would need pages and pages to be able to explain our sad situation.

When we women go to the prison visiting rooms it is like being in a protective cocoon; over the years we fall into a certain routine. Body and mind are conditioned to spending just a few hours with the one we love. We learn how to make the best use of our visiting time so that we can discuss things, have a little cuddle, comfort one another and even squabble. Our life becomes like a railway track, it goes on in one direction: weekdays are for our children and for housework, weekends are for prison visits.

And then, one fine day, our dream comes true; the parole leave that we have so long been waiting for is granted. It is like a new "birth". But afterwards we have to go back to that "death" which is seeing the one we love so much being taken back to prison. It is very disturbing psychologically. This regression is not easy to handle because after spending some time together outside prison, everything is now turned upside down: we are torn by very powerful emotions. Speaking for myself, all those parole leaves must have brought me a lot of happiness, but at the same time, they destroyed part of me. That might sound paradoxical but that is how it is. I could only say that parole breaks are "devastating" for fragile people, because after these periods of parole, even the toughest people need medical treatment; anti-depressants, treatment for anxiety state, or other forms of help. I think psychologists should be available to help women after their prison visits or that there should be support groups, with people who have the necessary skills to help us, so that we do not feel so alone in this struggle, in this fight to survive every day. Once again, a big thank you....

Note: This prisoner has now been released. Everything seems to be working out well. Let us keep him and his wife in our prayers.

#### **Letter sent by a prisoner to the chaplain of a detention centre**

I was supposed to come and say goodbye to you on Sunday morning. A warm

handshake and a candid gaze say more than a thousand words ever could. Unfortunately, I didn't wake up till after midday, having fallen into a deep sleep in the early hours of the morning. My nights are very disturbed, very troubled. And my internal clock has to obey my subconscious. I must admit, too, that I feel very uneasy at Mass, and at any large gathering.

My parents (my family) had given up all spirituality in favour of some vaguely Marxist ideology, so I was brought up to be suspicious of the Church and even hostile towards it. I am not even baptised. When I was at school the French teacher asked us to write a commentary on a passage from "La Legende des siecles" so I set myself to read the Old Testament. Who was this person Job? And why did the Eternal Being torment his faithful servant in such a cruel way? I will always remember my mother's shock at finding a Bible on my bedside table, and my father's rage as he tore up the Old and the New Testament, accusing the friend who had lent me the Bible, of being part of a thousand evils from the Inquisition to rendering the working masses mindless...the opium of the people. They didn't react in the same way when, some years later, my mother discovered a syringe and a little spoon hidden under my mattress. However, I don't want to condemn my parents, poor souls!

Thank you, Father, for the help you gave me as well as for what I learned from you. Oh, I would be a fool to say that from now onward I will lead a blameless life. I do not believe in God. Even though my mind and my heart cannot be satisfied by atheistic theories, I still cannot wipe out the memory of those years when I was brought up in fierce opposition to any form of spirituality. But at least I know that if everyone tried to live according to the teaching of Christ, then the world would be a much better place. Thanks to you, Father, I have faith in the Other, and I am deeply grateful. I have rediscovered Hope and I am rid, I am cleansed, of all thoughts of vengeance. I will always remember that when I was in great trouble, someone stretched out a hand to me. I hope that one day I, too, will be able to stretch out a hand to a man or woman in need, and this will show that my life has not been completely meaningless. Many, many thanks, Father, for that indescribable treasure you gave me.

Extract from the Bulletin of France-South Province  
October 2003

## Vincentian Family

### FR B ROMO, THE SUPERIOR GENERAL'S DELEGATE FOR THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

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Presentation to the Vincentian Family

## **“Go and do the same yourself”<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Father Robert Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity, closed the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1998 with these words: *“Go and confidently tell the confreres that, in union with the members of our family, we can be a tremendous force in the service of the poor”*.<sup>2</sup>

In 1994, when Father Maloney was taking part in a Vincentian Family Encounter, he found that if the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the many Vincentian associations in 130 countries of the world, united their potential and the riches of their charism, they could constitute a powerful force in the service of the poor. This was his “prophetic vision” that he shared with all the members of the Vincentian Family. And this led to many countries becoming better acquainted with the other branches of the Vincentian Family and cooperating closely with them in the formation of their members and the evangelisation of the poor. The Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Fathers had done this before, but not on the same scale as during these last six years when they made big efforts to establish or consolidate groups and associations within the Vincentian Family. They worked particularly for the expansion of such groups as the Vincentian Marian Youth Movement (JMV), the Miraculous Medal Association (AMM) and the Association of Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI).

It isn't possible in these few pages to speak about all the events, the formation programmes and the projects for service and evangelisation that the Vincentian Family has drawn up over these last few years. For now, we will limit ourselves to sharing with you some of the significant happenings that we, as a Family, have experienced, and which have marked the beginning of a “new era” in the history of the Vincentian charism.

### **1 - A Family that has its roots in the person of Vincent de Paul in France in 1617**

Saint Vincent de Paul was gifted with the charism which we now know as “the Vincentian charism.” This crystallised mainly after two experiences he had in 1617 and which made him discover his vocation and his mission: the first was his experience at Folleville, and the second took place that same year in Chatillon des Dombes. Everyone knows about these experiences through which he discovered God's call to serve and to evangelise the poor. This charism (spirituality and mission), is something that he very soon shared with lay people, a group of Christian women. These ladies from Chatillon

were the first to start up, under the guidance of Vincent who animated them. They formed the Confraternities of Charity, the objectives of which were clearly set out in the first Rule that Vincent gave them at the end of 1617: to honour Our Lord and his holy Mother as their model and to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually.

In 1625 he founded the Congregation of the Mission to evangelise by word and by action the poor people, especially those in the country regions...Later on, in 1633, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise founded the Company of the Daughters of Charity whose members would be servants of the poor, that is, servants of Jesus Christ.

Three facts emerge from what has just been said:

1. The charism is a gift the Holy Spirit gave to the Church through the person of Saint Vincent, a charism that leads those who receive it, **to live a life of service and evangelisation of the poor because Jesus Christ is in these people.**<sup>3</sup>
2. The charism started with Saint Vincent and the first group to receive it and live according to it were women in Chatillon: **lay people**
3. We can say that from the very beginning, the Vincentian charism was a shared charism. Over a period of 15 years, Saint Vincent put the charism into the hands of lay people, Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

We are all very familiar with the vast works that Vincent organised during his lifetime, after starting off the men and women, young people and adults, rich and poor of his time. These constituted a whole army of people who were willing to serve Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. The direct service and evangelisation of the poor is at the very heart of Saint Vincent de Paul's charism.

From 1617 until the time of his death, the saint of charity sent many priests, lay people, men and women, to serve the poor because Christ is found in them, and serving them is loving God in an effective way; it also gives credibility to the Gospel and to the Church.

With regard to collaboration, we see in Saint Vincent, a person who:

- believed in the power of lay people.
- created ways for lay people to live their faith in the midst of the world.
- shared with lay people his vision of Christ in the poor.
- shared his evangelical way of life with all types of lay people.
- was always ready to listen to lay people and the poor; and to learn from them how to let God transform him.

The charism of Saint Vincent has lasted over the years and many millions of men and women have lived out their faith and their mission in the Church in a specifically Vincentian way.

Throughout history, many Congregations, and associations and lay groups have found, in the Vincentian charism, inspiration for their faith and for their mission in the Church and in the world. Today we reckon there are more than 170 Congregations or Associations throughout the world, that drink from the same Vincentian sources in order to nourish their Christian spirituality and motivate their apostolic commitment.<sup>4</sup>

We are speaking here of some of the Associations founded by Saint Vincent or which have sprung up within the Vincentian Family, and which while maintaining their own specific identity, share the same spirituality and a common mission in the Church and in the world.

## **2 - The branches that are nourished by the same sap**

In this article we are referring to the interaction that has been in force over recent years and the networks of collaboration that have been established in the different branches of the Vincentian Family on a national scale and with many other associations in each country. The Associations listed below are those that have the closest links with the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission.

- The International Association of Charities (AIC)
- Vincentian Priests (CM)
- Daughters of Charity (DC)
- Saint Vincent de Paul Society (SSVP)
- Vincentian Marian Youth Movement (JMV)
- Miraculous Medal Association (AMM)
- Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI)
- Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (RSVP)

Some elements that are common to these branches:

- They recognise Saint Vincent as their founder or their inspiration.
- They have the same mission: the evangelising service of the poor.
- They have, in some way, the same manner of serving the poor, which is based on simplicity, humility and practical, concrete charity.
- They all share a common incarnational spirituality: Christ is incarnated in the poor.
- They are all secular in character.

## **3 - Autonomy and collaboration in the Vincentian Family**

When we speak of the Vincentian Family we do not understand this to be a collection of people who come together to serve and evangelise the poor, and who have the name “Vincentian Family.” The Vincentian Family could not exist and would not have meaning, if it were not composed of specific associations that have their individual identity. People cannot belong to the wider Vincentian Family at the expense of losing their specific identity as members of their particular association. When we speak of the Vincentian Family, we understand that these associations have their own identity, autonomy, structures, organisation, and formation processes and materials, and this is something we wish to defend: these associations join with others who have the same objective (service of the poor) so that by uniting forces they may serve the poor more effectively, but they respect their own identity because this autonomy and identity is a source of enrichment for the Family. We cannot speak of the family (a meeting of various associations) without speaking of, and upholding the autonomy of each association.

#### **4 - The path followed by the Vincentian Family over these last 10 years**

The branches mentioned earlier set off on a common path in 1995, when, after being convoked by Fr. Robert Maloney, they decided to meet up with each other every year, in order to get to know one another better and establish ways in which they could collaborate. May I present to you some aspects of these meetings.

##### **Encounter I**

Venue and date: Paris, 2 June 1995

Participants: AIC, CM, DC and SSVP.

The process of getting to know people and associations was begun, and people shared their experiences of living the charism.

Some experiences of collaboration between the different branches were shared and people reflected on how this collaboration might be increased.

They touched on the topic of initial and ongoing formation of the members of the different branches.

One commitment made at this Encounter was that they would draw up and publish a dossier about the four branches of the Vincentian Family that took part.

##### **Encounter II**

Venue and date: Rome, 2-3 February 1996

Participants: AIC, CM, DC, and SSVP

At this meeting the following points were dealt with:

It was proposed that there should be a common form of Vincentian formation, with particular attention being given to youth. Reflections on the guidance and accompaniment of lay people.

The topics of autonomy and identity of the associations was touched on, as a basis for collaboration.

The participants decided to declare 27<sup>th</sup> September, the feast of Saint Vincent, a Vincentian Family day of prayer in common.

With reference to collaboration in service, the commitment was made to provide mutual support in emergency situations and when catastrophes occurred.

The proposal was made that a common project to help the poor should be drawn up as a way of celebrating the Jubilee Year 2000.

##### **Encounter III**

Venue and date: Paris, 18-19 January 1997.

Participants: AIC, CM, DC, SSVP and JMV.

Exchange of relevant information from each branch and common projects for the current year.

Various projects for serving the poor showing how the different branches of the Vincentian Family were collaborating, were discussed. Nine of these were selected for publication as experiences that could stimulate further projects.

As in previous years, they returned to the topic of formation, especially Vincentian formation.

There was a positive evaluation of the Vincentian Family's "Day of Prayer in Common." The date for the next General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission was announced. This will take place in Rome in July 1998 and its theme will be "*The Vincentian Family in the world and the challenges of Mission in the Third Millennium.*"

##### **Encounter IV**



Venue and date: Paris, 19-20 January 1998.

Participants: AIC, CM, DC, SSVP, JMV, AMM, RSVP.

Three objectives of this meeting:

To deepen understanding between the participants and their associations.

To study ways of collaborating in initial and ongoing formation.

To find ways of working together for the poor and with the poor.

Each continent would try to set up at least one project in common for the service of the poor, a commitment inspired and motivated by the Apostolic Exhortation, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*.

The Congregation of the Mission will invite representatives of some of the branches to participate during the first week of their General Assembly in July this year.

### **Encounter V**

Venue and date: Rome, 14-16 January 1999

Participants: AIC, CM, DC, SSVP, JMV, AMM, RSVP.

Father General and his Council named a confrere to be their delegate to animate and direct the International Vincentian Family. His mission will be to offer formation and to animate and foster collaboration within the different branches of the Vincentian Family, in the area of formation of the members and the service of the poor.

The main topics reflected on during this encounter:

- The future of young people in the Vincentian Family,
- The inculturation of the Vincentian charism,
- Successes and problem areas in collaboration for the service and evangelisation of the poor.
- The Vincentian Family website. The possibilities this offers for formation and communication.
- Preparing the Vincentian Family to celebrate the Jubilee Year.

A three day spiritual retreat was organised for some of the general leaders of the Vincentian Family. This will take place at the end of October and its theme will be "*Vincentian spirituality as lived by lay people.*" The topics dealt with during this retreat and the reflections of those taking part, will serve as the basis for compiling a book on Lay Vincentian Spirituality.

During the Jubilee Year the Vincentian Family will make its voice heard by publishing a declaration entitled, "*In the name of the Poor.*"

### **Encounter VI**

Date and venue: Rome, 3-5 February, 2000

Participants: AIC, CM, DC, JMV, RSVP and SSVP, MISEVI.

Members shared their most important experiences of the past year and their projects for 2000.

They spoke of the importance and necessity of forming men and women advisors for the lay groups and with this in mind organised a formation session for July 2002.

All young members of the Vincentian Family were invited to take part in the Vincentian Youth Encounter in Rome in August, for World Youth Day with the Holy Father.

### **Encounter VII**

Date and venue: Paris, 9-11 February, 2001

Participants: AIC, AMM, CM, DC, JMV, MISEVI, RSVP, SSVP.

Previous topics were taken up again.

Presentation of the Vincentian Family website.

It was proposed that all the forces and resources of the Vincentian Family should be focused on a common venture for the poor. Start of the campaign: Fight against hunger. Preparations began for the Vincentian Month offering Vincentian formation to the Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, and lay animators of Vincentian lay groups.

### **Encounter VIII**

Date and venue: 1-3 February 2002

Participants: AIC, AMM, CM, DC, JMV, MISEVI, RSVP, SSVF

People shared their experiences of the previous year and their plans for the current year.

An evaluation was made of the project 'Globalisation of Charity: the Fight against Hunger'.

The results are very positive.

A new project to provide computers for poor countries was proposed and accepted: 'Training the trainers'.

The text of the prayer of the Vincentian Family was finalised.

### **Encounter IX**

Date and venue: Rome, 7-9 February 2003

Participants: AIC, AMM, CM, DCs JMV, MISEVI, RSVP, SSVF.

People shared their experiences of the previous year and their plans for the current year.

An evaluation was made of the project Globalisation of Charity; the Fight against Hunger. As the results of these were so positive it was decided to continue this campaign for another year. Time was made for the participants to have formation in common.

Members reflected on new forms of poverty and launched a new project by the International Family: Political Action against Malaria.

At each yearly Encounter an evaluation has been made of the Vincentian Family Day of Prayer. Every year there has been an increase in the number of people taking part and the number of activities organised for this celebration.

### **Encounter X**

This is scheduled to take place in Paris from 20-22 February, 2004.

## **5 - The Vincentian charism and young people.**

If we focus our attention on the path followed by the Vincentian Family over these last 10 years, I think that it is only right to say a word about youth, since special emphasis has been put on this section of membership.

In his closing talk to the Assembly in 1998, Father General encouraged the participants to work with young people: "*Young people are the future servants of the poor. They are the evangelisers of the third millennium. It is they who will be visiting the poor in their homes, who will be implementing our specific and practical projects for the integral and human promotion of the dispossessed. It is they who will be teaching people to read and write. They are the ones who will be fighting against the causes of poverty.*"<sup>5</sup> The importance of young people in the activities of the Vincentian Family is reflected in the events that have taken place in recent years.

## **6. The most important international events over the last ten years.**

**1999:** Setting up of the International Secretariat of the Vincentian Marian Youth Movement in Spain. This secretariat was established in Madrid and it comprised office space and a residence for JMV volunteers from different countries who would commit themselves to working for three years to animate the Association. A provisional International Council was established and the members worked very hard to animate different countries so that these could create or organise their own Marian Vincentian Youth groups. During this year and half of the following year, many countries managed to draw up their own National Statutes.

**2000:** First General Assembly of the JMV and the Vincentian Youth Encounter. In the early months of the year much effort was put into organising the first General Assembly of the Association and the Vincentian Youth Groups Encounter which took place at the time that World Youth Day was being celebrated during the Jubilee Year. These activities were held in Rome during the first fortnight of August. This General Assembly established the first International Council of the JMV Association and produced a Final Document, which set out the action lines for national associations to follow over the next five years. The Vincentian Youth Groups Encounter brought together 1800 people from the different Vincentian Associations representing 52 countries. The atmosphere was one of celebration and these young people were given some Vincentian formation and together they proclaimed their faith in Christ who calls them to serve him in the poor in the way that Saint Vincent did.

**2001:** First International Encounter of those in charge of the Miraculous Medal Association. Convoled by the Superior General through the intermediary of the Visitors and Visitatrices, and taking as their slogan, “AMM: a New Image for a New Millennium”, 72 people (Vincentian Fathers, Daughters of Charity and lay members of the Association) gathered in Rome for a week of reflection on topics that concern the Association: Reinterpretation of the message of the Apparitions and devotion to Mary, formation, apostolate, expansion of the Association, financial matters. At the end of the Encounter the participants drew up a Final Document which set out the guidelines to be followed in consolidating and spreading the Association in the various countries.

**2002:** Vincentian Month in Paris for advisors to the Vincentian Family. In the month of July, a total of 110 Vincentian Missionaries and Daughters of Charity from 28 countries, came to the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity to spend three weeks at a formation session in order to be able to offer a better service of accompaniment and guidance to lay groups in the Vincentian Family. The publication “Vincentiana” issued a special edition which contained all the reflections of the session and offered this important resource to all Missionaries, Daughters of Charity and lay people who accompany Vincentian Groups and help in their formation. World Youth Day coincided with the closing of the Vincentian Youth Groups Encounter in Toronto (Canada).

**2003:** International Encounter of Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI). The two main objectives were:

- to find ways of spreading and encouraging the establishment of MISEVI groups in other countries
- to organise a meeting of lay people, Daughters of Charity and members of the Congregation of the Mission who are taking steps to set up the MISEVI Association in their countries, with the aim of sharing experiences and finding viable ways of setting up this Association.

## **7. The formation of the members of the Associations.**

Lay Vincentian groups are begging us to give them formation. This is clearly what they are asking for most often and with greatest urgency. Many positive steps have been taken with regard to this.

- Organisation of Vincentian formation seminars where specific topics focus on Vincentian spirituality and action. Vincentian formation schools, seminars on the Church's social teaching, etc.:
- Joint initiatives in Vincentian formation, for example: Study Weeks in Salamanca, formation meetings at CLAPVI level, formation courses for leaders;
- More formation materials for a particular association that can be shared with other branches;
- The Vincentian Family website has become a vehicle of information and formation for the confreres and also a meeting place for the formation of members of the Vincentian Family. The tireless work of Fr. John Freund and his team is truly admirable;
- A Document was drawn up for AIC advisors and this is proving very useful as it clarifies the function of the priest or the Daughter of Charity with regard to lay people;
- A further Document is being prepared along the same lines and has the title, "The role and tasks of the JMV advisor"

Many documents, books, pamphlets, magazines and articles have been written to promote the formation of members of the Associations; today we can say that each Association has good materials for setting up groups and for offering Vincentian spiritual formation that will stimulate their particular apostolate among the poor.

## **8 - Congregation of the Mission Office for the Vincentian Family. Visits to various countries.**

Since 1999 the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission has supported a Vincentian Family office which deals with the huge amount of correspondence that comes from different countries. The communication this establishes creates networks, and gives information, guidance and leadership to Vincentian persons and groups.

This office also organises and carries out visits to different countries by the Superior General's delegate for the Vincentian Family. This is an important enterprise; it has served to promote the growth and coordination of the different branches of the Family. These visits provide opportunities for formation, prayer and guidance on how to start up specific projects, either for formation or for the service and the evangelisation of the poor. Over the last five years visits have been made to 30 countries in four continents.

## **9 - What has been done by way of collaboration?**

The different branches of the Vincentian Family have a strong desire to work with one another. There are many indications of this, I will just mention a few, for example:

- They have organised opportunities for groups to get to know one another better;
- They have provided many opportunities for reflection and study on themes related to the different forms of poverty in the various countries, in order to seek together practical and effective solutions to the problems;
- They have organised times of prayer, reflection and living together, especially as a way of celebrating the feast of Saint Vincent or other feasts that are of particular importance for the Vincentian Family. These gatherings have fostered mutual understanding, unity, formation and mutual support in the service of the poor;
- Coordination of the Vincentian Family on a national scale has been established in the different countries;
- The project “Globalisation of charity; the fight against hunger” has resulted in hundreds of projects being set up jointly by the different branches and solidarity being shown among the countries.

## **10 - What still remains to be done?**

As we look to the future we would have to say that we have not covered the whole distance. If you will allow me, I will mention some of the steps that I think we need to take in order to continue consolidating within the Vincentian Family, an adult and mature laity following the path of sanctity through service of the poor.

Each Association should intensify its specific identity. Vincentian persons, whether they belong to the laity or to consecrated life, have a definite Christian identity as well as their own charism which has its roots in the founders and which finds expression in the here and now of our history. It is vitally important to discover our identity or deepen our awareness of it so that we will know our special place in the world, in the Church, and within the Vincentian Family.

The spirituality of lay Vincentians needs to be classified. Our Vincentian laity has for the most part grown up in the shadow of a Vincentian spirituality that was developed for consecrated persons living the Vincentian charism. When we speak about lay people today, we need to promote systematic reflection on Vincentian lay spirituality. This will help these lay people to live that spirituality as lay people living in the world and striving to be leaven for others. Lay people living in the world and embodying the Vincentian charism can bring from their experience a tremendous enrichment, making this charism relevant for our times and no longer a “hidden treasure.”

We have to learn to work in a more organised way, collaborating in specific and effective projects. Today it is urgently necessary for Christians, and so for the Vincentian Family, to be committed to justice and charity. But this work needs to be organised and we cannot go about things just anyhow. Saint Vincent said that the poor suffer more through want of organisation than they do through lack of resources.

We need to offer good leadership support. Lay people today are asking us for a different form of accompaniment. Basing our ideas on the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which asks for union and participation, we are invited to promote responsibility and leadership among lay people so that these will be the leaven of the Kingdom in the Church and in the world. We need to stimulate a liberating form of guidance which will open up opportunities for people to live their faith through service of the poor and in community, so that this service will be their way of experiencing God.

There is an urgent need for the Vincentian charism in today's world. We have it in our hands to live this charism in a radical way and to share it with others so that God's salvation will reach the poor who will discover his love through our specific and effective action. Today's world urgently needs Vincentian solidarity. Jesus Christ, whom Saint Vincent de Paul imitated so faithfully, continues to send us out into the world to be the good Samaritans of the gospel. Jesus continues to offer us, the Vincentian men and women of the XXIst century, the same invitation: "Go and do the same yourselves. Go and experience God through your service of the poor".

Benjamin Romo, CM  
The Superior General's Delegate for the Vincentian Family

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lk 10, 37

<sup>2</sup> In *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 401

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mt 25, 31-45

<sup>4</sup> A recent study which is being updated mentions 267 such communities that sprung up after St. Vincent's time, 167 of which are functioning in the world today. Cf. Betty Ann McNeil, DC, "*The Vincentian Family Tree*", Vincentian Studies Institute, 1996

<sup>5</sup> *Vincentiana*, no. 4/5, July-October 1998.p. 401.

## History of the Company

### SOURCE MATERIAL AND NEWS

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Quasi-Province

### **Blessing of the Archives of the Mother House**

**27<sup>th</sup> November 2003:** today it is a feast day on earth, a feast day in the realms of the angels, and a feast here at the Mother House. On this anniversary of Mary's visit to us, the Sisters were invited to take part in the solemn blessing of the Company's archives, which were transferred from the Sainte Marie Centre to the Seminary

#### **What memories does this place hold for us?**

It is a very fine room. The "Little Sisters", in the fervour of their early days, allow themselves to be formed in a way that will make them able to respond to the demands of their vocation as Servants of the Poor, totally given to God. Whether kneeling down, or sitting on the benches that had no back to them, they listened in silence to the instructions, reflecting on their meaning, and being docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. It was also the place where the Sisters received the Habit and where they read the "cachet bleu." Later on, the Seminary Sister would become a "Habit Sister", she would recite the Vow Catechism, and listen once again to the Seminary instructions.

#### **The centrepiece of the spiritual patrimony of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.**

As well as being the boundary marking the Seminary area, this place can be described as the **centrepiece** of the spiritual heritage of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Could there be any better place in which to learn about the teaching of our holy Founders and the lives of those members of the Company who, through the action of the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Holiness, have had deeply spiritual experiences.

Alterations have been made to the Seminary in order to house this precious treasure but these have not spoiled the original room. The tiers of seats have disappeared and Sisters will sit in a different place. Today, Mary is still Queen here, and her statue is enhanced by modern lighting. Beneath the altar, the hands of Saint Catherine still testify to that memorable night of 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1830. The space round the altar, with its chairs, is now called the auditorium and recollection area: auditorium for sitting and listening to explanations about the visit, and recollection area for retreat times. Framing the altar are the two original pictures by Le Cerf.

The second part of the Seminary contains the archives dealing with the general administration of the Company, development and formation. Six rows of shelving each holding 90 boxes, house the archives of the Provinces and those of the International Seminary from 1965-1968. Six stained glass windows display items or documents of historical interest; Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, the first Sisters, Directors General who

had an important influence on the Company at certain times in history: Father Cayla de la Garde, Father Etienne and Father Fiat. Two windows depict the life of the Company. The precious objects are archived somewhere else and are kept in a strong room and three metal safes. This doesn't mean that they are locked away, but rather that they are being kept safe.

The tribune has become a **sacred area**. Important relics of our Founders lie next to the candlesticks that were on the altar on the night of 18<sup>th</sup> July, with the prie-Dieu of Sister Apolline Andriveau and others....Saint Joseph, watches over everything from his place in the corner. Was he not the guardian of the Seminary? The crucifix, which can be seen as soon as you come in, is surrounded by different portraits of Saint Vincent. Two striking portraits, one of Saint Vincent and one of Saint Francis de Sales, are at the end of the Portrait Gallery.

### **The blessing**

Father Quintano, Director General, kindly agreed to preside at the ceremony. The members of the General Council and some guests were there round the altar. The small international choir helped those present to pray, and our elderly Sisters took their place in the tribune surrounded by their Sisters. After the opening hymn Sister Claire introduced the celebration with a short poem and then went on to say:

From the time it was founded, the Company practised the art of **“conserving its memories.”** In what way? Saint Vincent, in his anxiety to safeguard accuracy and uniformity in the transmission of documents, wrote to Superiors in 1660: *“In future, please keep letters written to you and to the members of your house, no matter from whom they may come, whenever they contain any noteworthy details that may be important or may be instructive for the future. Simply make different files of them, according to subject matter or the year you received them. When you have arranged them in these bundles, keep them in a place set apart for this purpose, where those who come after you can have recourse to them in their need. If there are any such letters in the house from the past, please sort them according to the aforesaid order.”*<sup>1</sup>

We also have a very explicit note in Saint Louise's handwriting *“on matters to be dealt with in conferences”* and these topics were indeed dealt with, as she noted. As soon as the conference was over, it was written up in full from notes taken during the meeting and from the memorandum used by Monsieur Vincent, as we read in Saint Louise's letter of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1643: *“I hope, Monsieur, that our Sisters will make good use of the instruction that your charity gave us today...This leads me to ask you very humbly, to send us the **little memorandum** on the different points that you made.”*

It is with the help of this **“little memorandum about the points”** and the notes taken by Saint Louise and some of her daughters, that the conference in all its fresh intensity was reproduced and preserved, an indication of their veneration for this man of God and his teaching. One of the Sisters wrote, *“She loved these poor manuscripts so dearly that she would not hear of them being rewritten, as a kind priest at Saint Lazare had offered*



*to do, in case he might alter the meaning of our blessed Father's words, for she preferred their simple, natural style to that of more polished discourses."*

These writings have been preserved in all their freshness and original spontaneity, because everything was written down straightaway and on the spot, so it still bears the imprint of truth and vibrancy.

### **What interest do the archives have for us today?**

It is obvious that the archives were not collected by our forbears in order to become museum pieces today. There is a reason why these documents exist, they constitute our collective memory and are at the service of the Church and of the Company: they preserve the spiritual experiences of the past, they stimulate theological reflection and nourish our spiritual life today.

Must all this come to an end? I think not. Life goes on. The Church is following Saint Vincent's example and uses practically the same words but in modern language, when she says, *"as a place of collective memory, the archives must gather together, in a systematic way, all the information that has served to write the articulated history of the Community, so as to give people the opportunity to make a just evaluation of what has been done."*

In concluding this article, it is only right to mention the Sisters who have gone before us in the work of collecting this vast harvest of documents and archiving them. Among the Secretaries General to the Mother General, we might single out Sister Marie de Geoffre de Chabrignac. She was Secretary for seventeen years and she studied and transcribed the letters of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, preparing the necessary documentation for the beatification of our holy Mother.

Sister Juana Elizondo was appointed archivist by Mother Chiron, and while doing this work she set up the first Souvenirs Room. Sister Lelandais started the Vincentian Library. In 1980, work had to be done on the chapel, in preparation for the Holy Father's visit. Some archives were at that time kept in the basements. Mother Roge discussed this with Sister Chevaucherie, Treasurer General, and Sister Kergroas, Sister Servant of the Mother House. The architect made some suggestions. What we call today the Saint Marie Archives became the **storage area**.

When Sister Elizondo was made a Councillor she could no longer be archivist, so Mother Roge appointed Sister Dolort as the archivist of the Company. After twenty years of intensive labour she was replaced by Sister Magamans, who initiated some projects for having the treasures valued. Part of her dreams was to use the Seminary, which was no longer in use. That dream has come true today. We have come here today to ask the Lord to bless the harvest and to make it bear fruit in our lives and in the lives of those confided to our care.

After the reading of a passage from the Gospel of Saint John, our prayer of praise ended with Psalm 8.

Father Quintano made some important observations to those present:

Sister Claire has given us a brief history of the Archives of the Company and their significance as “memory” of the past. I share Sister Claire’s recognition of what past and present Sisters have done and we are grateful for their contribution to conserving and adding to the inestimable value of the Company’s Archives. I would just like to add to what Sister Claire has said and mention something inspired by two passages from John Paul II. The first is from the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. In it he said, “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but a great history still to be accomplished. Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.” (VC 110a). The archives preserve the marvellous history that the Company has written in the 370 years of its existence. But they are also open to the history that remains to be written.

Contemporary writers dealing with the question of re-founding consecrated life, make an observation which I hope does not apply to the Company: the fact that many Congregations are more concerned about their archives than they are about authentic renewal, could be a clear sign that they have no future. God grant that this is not the situation that the Company is in now. The recent revision of the Constitutions and Statutes undertaken by the General Assembly is meant to inspire us to create that history which is yet to be written.

The second observation of John Paul II is to be found in his letter to the Church of the Third Millennium. Speaking of pastoral programmes and the priorities that should underlie these, he writes, “*It is not a formula (programmes, documents, archives, etc.) that will save us, but a Person*” (Christ) (NMI, 29 § 2). The most important documents in the Archives, and the ones we cherish most, are undoubtedly the manuscripts preserved from the days of the Founders. These documents prove to us that the life and the works of our Founders were motivated by an ardent love for Christ and for the poor. It is love like this that must inspire and motivate the beautiful history that the Company has to go on writing in the future. And this as yet unwritten history will enrich the archives of the Company. So the archives are not just a memorial of the past, but a testimony and an example of how we are to continue to build the present and the future.”

After a short silence, the Litanies of the Saints were recited and then followed the solemn blessing. The celebrant went round every part of the Seminary

We will end this account with the prayer used during the blessing:

*“Lord, our God, you never cease to embellish your Church with the virtue of the Saints. Hear the prayer of your servants who desire to use these signs of your goodness in memory and in honour of Mary, Mother of the Company, and of our holy Founders, Saint Vincent and Saint Louse. May they take care to keep your commandments and grant them all the help they need in this life to advance with sureness of purpose, towards life eternal”*

Sister Claire Herrmann  
*Daughter of Charity*

**Note**

<sup>1</sup> Coste, VIII, 388

## READINGS FOR OUR TIMES

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### **Sister Gabriella Borgarino**

(1880-1949)

Sister Gabriella Borgarino was born in Boves (Italy) on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1880. She joined the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1900 and made her first vows in 1906. She was sent to serve the poor, first of all at Angera (Varese) and then at Lugano. In 1919 she was moved to Grugliasco and then to Luserna where she died in the odour of sanctity on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949.

During the time she was at Lugano, she was favoured with heavenly revelations and private visions. Her memory is still fresh in people's minds but this Sister is remembered more for the holiness of her life and for the example she left us, than for these extraordinary favours.

Here are some extracts from her writings:

- Jesus told me that I could gather flowers anywhere, even in snow.
- We have to be kind and patient with everyone: always seeing only Jesus and Mary in them.
- Whatever tribulation we have to bear, it is never too much to offer for the salvation of souls.
- It is only by being closely united to Jesus and to Mary Immaculate, our Mother, that we will be instruments for good.
- On the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, I went to the chapel and was making my thanksgiving when suddenly I could no longer see the Tabernacle, but I saw Jesus sitting down. He was so beautiful and so gracious that I immediately rushed towards him. I knelt down and pressed against his knees, saying with all my heart, "My dear Jesus, I love you so much. And I desire so much that every creature may know and love you. Jesus, I ask for this grace: when I go to Heaven I will ask your Divine Providence to care for everyone, because we all need your Providence in spiritual, moral and material matters."
- During another apparition Jesus said to me, "On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1936, I showed you a paper I was holding and written on it was the invocation, "Providence of the Divine Heart of Jesus, watch over us." I asked you to spread this devotion widely. When people pray this precious invocation with loving confidence and loving respect for my name, they will receive many graces."
- She wrote to her Superior: "Jesus told me that this precious invocation, prayed with loving confidence and with respect for the Most Holy Name of Jesus,

acts in souls in the same way as the recent welcome rain we had, making the earth green again and able to bear fruit. And he added, “Remember this: when this precious invocation becomes part of people’s lives, it gradually changes their hearts and minds. I want this prayer to be officially approved, to the honour of my Most Holy Name.”

Sister Gabriella Borgarino by Luigi Chierotti, CM. Translated from the Italian by Monsieur l’Abbaye. Gabillard.- Editions Resiac, 1996, 226 pages. 80F

## **The gateway of hope**

My child  
as soon as you say these words  
“boundless love”,  
as soon as you give this supreme truth  
a place in your heart,  
you are opening a gate  
that gives entrance to  
the Kingdom of freedom and light.  
It is the gateway of hope,  
the threshold that adds an infinite dimension to your being.

Hope;  
the expectation of what is to come,  
of the One who is to come.

A waiting that is shot through with love,  
founded on love,  
because we only hope for things we love.

A monk of the Eastern Church  
Boundless Love  
Editions de Chevetogne, 1971, p.31