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FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Advent 2007

To all the Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters,

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

A Christmas Story for Advent Reflection in 2007

As in previous years I would like to begin the Advent Reflection with a story from my past history as a missionary. Reflection on this story has helped me to grasp more fully the understanding of Advent as the great mystery which leads us to the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ at Christmas.

One of our Panamanian confreres along with two lay collaborators in our parish in Puerto Armuelles developed a programme called Anni, for children, that was celebrated annually on Christmas day. I had the opportunity to be involved in the planning, the preparation and the execution of the Christmas Programme one year when I returned to this parish in Puerto Armuelles as part of my on-going formation as Director of the Internal Seminary. Let me explain.

After my first three years in mission work in Panama serving in the parish in Puerto Armuelles, which comprised 25 villages and the main city of San Vicente, I was later called by my superiors to participate in formation which I did for two years in our philosophy residence and for two years in our theology residence. Then I was called to be the Director of the internal seminary after participating in a programme of on-going formation for a period of four months. Returning from that programme, my

superiors asked what more I might like to do to prepare myself for this role. I had approximately seven months to do that.

I thought and prayed and discerned and I felt that the best way to prepare myself to work in the internal seminary was to return to the missions. So I volunteered to return to the parish where I had my beginnings as a missionary in Panama. It was there that I was given the opportunity to serve once more the people for a period of seven months. Towards the end of that time of preparation was the participation in the celebration of Anni. Anni was conceived by its founders as the opportunity for children to gather to celebrate with joy as only children can, the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day.

There was a large gathering of children from the area called St. Vincent's. The events of the day included playing games, singing songs, running and laughing and being free. We began the day by asking the children to reflect that Jesus had been born and it was reason to be joyful because it was a sign that God has brought his love to us, a love and a joy that we are called to share one with another. At the end of the day a brown paper bag of goodies was given to the children that included fruits and nutritional bars. A healthy day was concluded by giving a healthy treat.

I like to reflect on this Anni experience first and foremost as an alternative way of celebrating Christmas, very different from other ways that I have experienced in my past. In a simple way, I learned that Christmas is not about what I get but, in part, it is about what I can do to help others appreciate and celebrate with joy God's goodness towards us which is best expressed by God coming among us in the person of His Son Jesus Christ on the day that we now celebrate in many parts of the world on the 25th of December or the 6th of January. The focus is not so much on things but on attitudes and being able to celebrate those attitudes.

Another thing that struck me with the programme Anni was the seriousness with which the team members worked on the programme as well as the involvement of other people from the area who wanted to contribute so that the day would be successful. How clearly adults have a desire to help children who normally would not have much opportunity to celebrate. They want to bring a bit of joy into their lives.

In the event, there was joy in seeing all the energy, the joyfulness being expressed by the children. This was a way of touching the hearts of us adults who were accompanying them, the opportunity perhaps, for us to get in touch with the child within that oftentimes is not able to celebrate life. It gets smothered by the seriousness with which we are called to carry out our responsibilities and duties which when done on a continual basis has a tendency to dry up our spontaneity, our child-likeness, our joyful expressions, and yes, our playful attitudes. At the end of the day I remember feeling that it is good to be a child again.

As we reflect on Advent, the joyfulness of children and alternative ways of celebrating Christmas, I am wondering how we might help others live Christmas in an alternative way, especially those who seem not to have alternatives. I am thinking of the people whom you serve: migrants, prisoners, people enslaved by drugs, young people who have alternative ways of living shoved in their faces and yet these alternatives drain life rather than give it. What can we do to celebrate with them

God's life and love among us? How can we bring the joyfulness, the playfulness of children to them so they too can celebrate the new life that is Jesus, come to live among us at Christmas.

Perhaps we can do this by seeking alternatives with and for the poor whom we serve. Might our doing this also move us into a deeper way of relating with those whom we are called to serve as well as those with whom we share and live our lives? As we work together with our local community or with the Vincentian Family we may break our own chains of stagnation in doing the same thing each year and so renew within ourselves the spirit of Christmas as we help to renew that spirit in those to whom and with whom we serve.

In our local communities, associations or with the Vincentian Family, we might reflect at the same time on how we work in teams as we prepare not only for Christmas, but in our apostolate, our service of the poor throughout the year. Is our service done in an attitude of what we get out of it or of what we are able to do for others in order that they might know God's love more fully? In other words, what can we do for others to celebrate with them God's life and love among us. Within the local community, association or Vincentian Family, what do we do to help keep our inner child alive and joyful and happy? How do we play together in order to be recreated and renewed in God's love? Certainly we can learn something from children about how to do that. Christmas is not all about children. But it is all about joy and new life and celebrating that new life among us, the new life that is Jesus Christ continually present to us.

Advent is upon us. A time preparing us for the incarnation of Christ which we celebrate at Christmas in our local communities, or in the different associations of the Vincentian Family. How do we live this Christmas experience? Maybe Advent can be a time when we look for alternative ways of celebrating, ways different from what we are accustomed to, ways that may help us to get deeper in touch with the reality of what Christmas is all about. It can be a time of joy in knowing that God loves us and that God is among us. And that joy becomes more complete when we share it one with another.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Gregory Gay, CM
Superior General

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 24th November 2007

Dear Sisters

Before I leave for Brazil with Sister Marlene, first to Rio de Janeiro for a visitation of the Province, then to Salvador for the beatification of Sister Lindalva, I am happy to share with you some community news.

It is not my intention to present an exhaustive list of the tragic events that have taken place in recent weeks, but to revisit some of them, especially now that the media spotlight has already turned its attention to other news. We can do so thanks to the reports coming from our Sisters who have been directly involved in these tragedies.

Our Sisters in the Province of Los Altos Hills who serve in health centres, hospitals and social services have seen a significant influx of people affected by the recent forest fires that have devastated California, persons suffering from burns, smoke inhalation or those who have lost their homes. The Sisters are thankful that they have been able to provide physical assistance and address the spiritual needs of the people who have suffered.

As you also know, a little more than three weeks ago several countries were seriously affected by Hurricane Noel. The Visitatrices of Mexico, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Cuba sent us poignant accounts of the destruction caused by the floods and also the responses of the Daughters of Charity in collaboration with other Church and public organisations. As is often the case, the immediate difficulty was the breakdown of communication and the impossibility of reaching the devastated areas. At times, the Sisters made use of trucks, or as in Mexico, a government-supplied plane, in order to transport aid. In all four Provinces, they were directly involved in the distribution of food, emergency supplies and first aid to those who were ill. As usual, the solidarity of the Company has allowed us to send financial assistance to the poor people in precarious situations.

It is also good to share with you the news that the local community of Pisco in Peru, which has been grieving the loss of Sister Perla and Sister Elizabeth in the earthquake on August 15th, is now experiencing the gift of our internationality. Sisters from the Provinces of Cali, Bogota and Mexico have come to give support to this local community in order to guarantee the reopening of the school and the preparation of reconstruction projects.

I would also like to mention the recent events in Eritrea; the government seems to be preparing for the possible confiscation of schools and hospitals currently belonging to religious congregations. Our Sisters are facing this situation with faith and courage. They are asking for prayers for their three bishops, the Christians and all the people of Eritrea. More and more frequently religious women and men have been denied visa renewals and have had to leave the country. This happened to the former Provincial Treasurer, Sister Isabella Limongi, who returned to Naples, her Province of origin. Two other Italian Sisters who are older in age are still permitted to stay for now. I assured Sister Lettegebriel, the Visitatrice, that all the Sisters of the Company would remember the Province of Eritrea in prayer.

In Venezuela, the Sisters are contending with a similar situation. They fear that they will lose the freedom to teach in their schools and provide social services. They are reflecting on this as Church, in faith and in prayer, in order to find an appropriate

response to such future possibilities. The Conference of Major Superiors for the country affirmed in a recent declaration “their apprehension in the face of increased violence, heightened opposition, intolerance and division in the country.” Let us entrust to Mary, Queen of Peace, our Sisters in Venezuela as well as those in Lebanon who continue to suffer the consequences of a prolonged political crisis.

I also have news of a different nature to share with you. First of all, I think it is good to tell you about the participation of two Daughters of Charity, Sister Andreja Caks from the Province of Slovenia and Sister Ana Soepratiwi, Visitatrice of the Province of Indonesia, in the first international conference that gathered together Sisters from 26 countries for the purpose of creating an international network against people-trafficking. This seminar, organised by the Italian Union of Major Superiors and the United States Embassy to the Vatican, took place in Rome from October 15th - 20th 2007. Thirty-three women representing 25 congregations who have been working for a significant period of time in the domain of human trafficking gathered to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. Their plan involved developing and reinforcing mechanisms for networking and communication among Sisters in the countries of origin, transit and destination of persons being trafficked. Similar initiatives have already taken place at the level of the Company, notably an interprovincial gathering in Dublin in February and the participation of Sister Germaine Price in various committees of the UN that address the same issue.

I would also like to call your attention to the third European Ecumenical Assembly that took place in Sibiu, Romania, from September 4th to 9th 2007. The Company was represented by Sister Barbara Selih, Visitatrice of Slovenia. The final document entitled *The Light of Christ Shines upon All* is an invitation addressed to all Christians to move forward along the path of ecumenism while deepening our faith: “*Only if we are closer to our Lord Jesus Christ, can we become closer to one another and experience true koinonia.*” The final document presented several recommendations concerning service to migrants, respect for religious freedom, a need for solidarity with the peoples of Africa, the importance of ecology, etc., all of which can be summarised in the following words: “*our **confidence** in the transforming energy of the light of Christ is stronger than the darkness of resignation, fatalism, fear and indifference.*”

This is the trust and the hope that we want to practise together, alongside those who are poor, as is indicated in our Constitutions: “*They denounce situations that exploit and exclude people.*” (Statute 8 c), “*They respect different beliefs and cultures and foster ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a spirit of friendship and truth.*” (Statute 8 f)

This is the same trust exemplified by the lives of the three Daughters of Charity who will be beatified in the coming months, Sister Lindalva in Salvador (Brazil) on December 2nd, 2007, Sister Giuseppina Nicoli on February 3rd 2008 in Cagliari (Sardinia) and Sister Marta Wiecka on May 24th 2008 in Lvov (Ukraine). The witness of their gift of humility and generosity given in the silence of day-to-day living is an example for us. We are called not only to admire this spirit and to celebrate it with grateful hearts, but above all we are invited to welcome the Spirit’s action and guidance in our lives in order to “*carry out the Father’s plan and bear witness to the Son, risen from the dead.*” (C. 17 c) ...as prophets and bearers of hope.

May I end this letter by wishing you happy feasts of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Catherine Labouré and the Anniversary of the Foundation of our Company. May Mary, who gave the medal to the world through Saint Catherine, accompany us during this Advent 2007!

With the assurance of my prayers and affection for each one of you,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

FATHER J ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Shared mission

My reason for choosing this particular theme is very simple: there are many lay people who collaborate in the works of the Company. Also, many lay people are part of the Vincentian Family. Any reflection that helps us to show interest, concern, and appreciation for lay people and to come closer to them is to be welcomed. This reflection aims at encouraging this.

For some years now, people have been speaking very much about “shared mission” in the consecrated life. By using this term they seek to deepen the relationship between the consecrated person and the laity, not simply with regard to collaboration in the common mission but also the sharing of faith and the charism. All this is summed up in the term “shared mission” which has a wider significance than “common mission.” The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* n° 54, mentions this concern and at the same time encourages persons in the consecrated life to deepen their relationships with the laity: “*Many religious institutes,*” says the Church, “*have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity..... We may say that a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.*” As we can see, the Church itself speaks about shared mission in very hopeful terms.

Why do we place such strong emphasis today on shared mission? A partial but nonetheless valid answer to this question can be found in the lack of vocations to the consecrated life. But over and above this, we have to recognise that shared mission does not simply mean that lay people will progressively take over the role of consecrated persons. In the general understanding of this movement, such would seem to be the case but we have to be able to interpret it at a deeper level in order to see where the Holy Spirit is leading consecrated life along these lines even if we do not understand what is happening. The fact that this process is taking place at the

same time that there is a reduction in personnel, makes God's call to work and to exist in the Church in a new way, more compelling.

There is another serious theological reason which supports shared mission. We are referring here to the "ecclesiology of communion". We know that this ecclesiology came very much to light at the Second Vatican Council, so much so that it became one of the central and fundamental ideas expressed in conciliar documents. "*In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission*",¹ declared the Second Vatican Council, basing its words on St. Paul's text, 1 Cor 12, 5-24. By ecclesiology of communion we understand that there is one single mission. This is carried out by all the baptised, all the particular Churches and every vocation within the Church. Jesus did not entrust different missions to us. The Risen Lord confided to us one great mission. Through time and space, throughout every century, all who believe in Him have to share in this mission. The ecclesiology of communion reinstates the value of every vocation, including of course, that of the laity.

A third idea we should keep in mind during this first introductory reflection is this: a shared mission presupposes a shared life. If, on the contrary, this is not the case, apostolic collaboration cannot take place because it is not supported by a shared life, it has no future. This has to be emphasised for two reasons. Firstly, because for decades consecrated life has been built on the premise of separation and distancing from the rest of the faithful. Sharing life means sharing faith, all following the path of discipleship. There can be no shared mission if there is no sharing of faith and the desire to follow Christ together with patient and generous acceptance of the gift of the Gospel. When this faith element is missing we will have helpers, collaborators and personnel but not "collaborators in Jesus Christ."²

SHARED MISSION IN THE PAST; SAINT VINCENT

In this second section we come to the person of Vincent de Paul. He, of course, never spoke or heard anyone else speak about the topic we are now studying. However, as he discovered, lived out and developed his charism, he must surely have reached the point of grasping what we understand today by "shared mission." In what sense can we say that Vincent de Paul shared his mission? To what degree did he succeed in achieving what we would call today "shared mission"? Is it not an anachronism to speak of shared mission in Saint Vincent's times? We can answer some of these questions when we pause to think about the way Saint Vincent acted towards and worked with, the lay people of his day.

After carefully studying Vincent's relationship with his contemporaries, we can assert that Vincent often showed an openness of mind towards sharing his mission. He was in no way mistrustful of lay people, of women, of ecclesiastics or even the religious of his times. All arms are not enough to carry out the great project of evangelisation and charity. With his characteristic common sense, he knew how to "share out the work" and involve all sorts of people in the advancement of God's Work; in short, he knew that the mission entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit is a mission for everyone and so has to be a shared or be a common mission.

¹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n° 2

² Cf. J.M. ARNAIZ, *Identidad del religioso e identidad del laico en comunión vital*, "CONFER" 41 (92002) 45-76

We know from the story of Vincent's life that this was the case.

- In Folleville he discovered the urgent need to evangelise the poor, working in conjunction with a secular lady, Madame de Gondi, who was part of the whole process of discernment. Abelly tells us that Vincent and Madame de Gondi jointly agreed on a way of improving the situation: he was to preach on the feast of the conversion of St. Paul.³ She made him aware of the ignorance of priests who did not even know the formula for absolution: she established an annual fund of 16,000 livres for the task of evangelisation and it was she who encouraged Saint Vincent to dedicate himself to giving missions with priests. That is why Saint Vincent called her "our first foundress". We might note that right from the start of the charism that searching, discernment and decision making were undertaken jointly with a secular lady.

- In Chatillon Vincent discovered the call of charity through two laywomen, Mesdames de la Chaigne and Charlotte de Brie. The first project to help the poor was carried out by a group of twelve women (Ladies of Charity). From this time onward Vincent would never cease to direct all people under his spiritual leadership towards works of charity.

- Between 1618 and 1625 Vincent devoted himself to missionary and charitable work on the de Gondi estates and he was helped in this by priests who worked with him for very specific reasons: Jean Coqueret, doctor in theology in the college of Navarre, Berger and Gontiere, clerical councillors in the Paris Parliament....and many others.

We know that during these seven years Vincent gave missions on the de Gondi estates, in a total of 30 or 40 main centres of the population, and that in all these places he founded a confraternity of charity. In the beginning the members were women but Vincent soon realised that men, too, could be enrolled in this promising charitable initiative. So confraternities of men were set up, the first of these seems to have been established in Folleville in 1620. Vincent de Paul shared his mission and his spirituality with lay people by setting up confraternities: Joigny, Montmirail, Courbon and Montreuil were the first of these.

Saint Vincent's experience at Macon was another way of sharing the mission. In September 1621 he thought up the ambitious plan of working with the charity confraternity in the city of Macon to rid the town of vagrancy. With this in mind he managed to interest the city magistrates in the project, as well as the bishop, the canons of the chapter, the municipal councillors and the middle class people and the town's principal business people. The plan was successful and this is how he summed up the enterprise: "*When I started the charity at Macon everybody laughed at me and pointed at me in the street, but when the work was finally accomplished they all shed tears of joy. The local magistrates paid me such honour when I was*

³ Cf. L. ABELLY, *Life of the venerable servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, F. Lambert, Paris 1664, vol.1, chapter 8, p.31.

leaving that I could not bear it and I had to creep away to avoid their praise. And now Macon is one of the most solidly established charities.”⁴

Another aspect of the Vincentian charism was the reform of the clergy. This, too, was a sharing of mission in two ways: it was not just Vincent de Paul who discerned the need for such a work but also Mgr. Augustin Potier, bishop of Beauvais. In the course of various conversations, the two men agreed that the clergy needed to be reformed before the people could be evangelised. Also, Vincent could always count on a group of trained priests to carry out this programme of formation and spiritual animation.

The establishment of confraternities in whole towns makes us realise the rapid growth of the Vincentian charism. Indeed, Vincent very soon made it a habit to end every mission with the founding of a confraternity. This meant that soon there were charities in every part of the de Gondi estates. From here they spread to neighbouring territories. Paris began to have charities in 1629. The first of these were at Saint Sauveur and Saint Nicolas de Chardonnet. In 1631 there were six charity confraternities: the two just mentioned and the charity at Saint Eustache, Saint Benoit, Saint Sulpice and Saint Merry. Shortly afterwards, the charities of Saint Paul, Saint Germain l’Auxerrois and Saint Andre were added to the list. From Paris, the charities spread to Beauvais and from here they spread to other towns further away from Paris. To co-ordinate the work of the charities he founded Vincent thought of a lay person and this turned out to be Louise de Marillac. We know what happened after that.

Vincent’s work with lay people was really wonderful. This should help us to share with them and make them aware of their vocation-mission in the Church. Of course Saint Vincent knew there were limits to a shared mission, particularly with regard to a shared life style. This was only to be expected. We have to understand that the times he lived in were very different from our own. Nevertheless, the way that Saint Vincent managed to share with the lay people of his day different works and discernment about these, is very praiseworthy.

SHARED MISSION IN THE PRESENT AND IN THE FUTURE

The term “shared mission” is not used in the Constitutions but the significance of the expression is indeed developed here at some length and when all is said and done, this is what counts.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTIONS WITH REGARD TO WHAT WE WOULD CALL TODAY “SHARED MISSION.”

Before going deeply into what is meant by shared mission and coming to some conclusions I would like to give a summary of this new sensibility that is emerging in the Constitutions. This will help us to find out where we are and orient us, just as tourists might do, by looking at a plan of the city they want to get to know. The plan is not the city itself, it can’t substitute for visiting each monument there, but it helps to orient the tourists by giving them an overall view of the place.

⁴ Cf L.ABELLY, *o.c.* 1.1, c.15, pp 61-63; P. COLLET *La vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, nancy 1748, vol.1 , p.104-108; I, 324 325, letter to Saint Louise de Marillac

The idea of shared mission is already indicated in the first chapter of the Constitutions entitled "*The Company in the Church.*" In the Constitutions of 1983 this chapter was placed after the one dealing with the spirit of the Daughters of Charity. Its new location is more logical and there are several reasons for this. Before going deeply into the life of the Company it is right that this should be seen in a Church context, as the Society of Apostolic Life which it is. As part of the life of the Church it will have to share life and mission with consecrated persons and with lay people. So we will have to put this interpretation on some of the statements in this chapter like the following: "*The Company participates in the Church's universal mission of salvation.*" (C.1a). Therefore "*in the various dioceses, it participates, according to its particular spirit, in the pastoral plan determined by the local Ordinary and in the life of the local Church.*" (C.1d). And this chapter ends with two statements which assure us that the Company is not an entity that is closed in on itself; "*the Company is available to the calls of the universal Church*" (C.1c); "*the Company is universal.*" (C.6). This is a good basis on which to build the edifice of shared mission.

In the third chapter ("life of the Daughters of Charity") and in the section on "Service of Christ in persons who are poor", we find Statute 9 which is the key to understanding shared mission in the Constitutions. This begins by saying how the work and service of the Sisters should be carried out "*in cooperation with private or public agencies*". The work should be done "*in loyal collaboration*" and "*in a spirit of sharing.*" (S.9a). This Statute goes on to say how the Sisters' work should be carried out in a specific town or area: "*(They) shall collaborate with those actively engaged in the pastoral plan of the area and do all they can to promote lay leadership.*" (S. 9b).

With regard to the lay members of the Vincentian Family, the same spirit of participation noted in the previous articles of the Constitutions is echoed here; "*(The Sisters) work in collaboration with the diverse branches of the Vincentian Family and encourage young people and adults to commit themselves to the service of those who are most deprived.*" (S.9c). The opening words of this Statute give a very interesting reason for this, "*Fidelity to their origins inspires them to...*"(S. 9c). That is the strongest reason we could put forward in support of the shared mission of the Vincentian Family we mentioned earlier.

Statute 22 adds an interesting aspect of the relationship of Daughters of Charity with other people, including lay persons: "*In a spirit of friendship and welcome, the Sisters may share their life of prayer and reflection with other persons.*" Here we have a clear invitation to share with lay people not just our works but also our spiritual life,

The "*Action Lines*" also echo the importance of shared mission today. The third section of the first Action Line sums up what the Constitutions have been saying: "*Let us intensify our collaboration with the laity, the Vincentian Family and other groups through concrete and long-term projects with and for those who are*

poor.”⁵ As in the Constitutions, the word “collaboration” is the key to understanding shared mission.

2. MAIN IDEAS THAT SUPPORT THE COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION OF DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY WITH THE LAITY

The reasons that justify and encourage shared mission with the laity are not very different from those that are set out in the theology of religious life though some of them are specific to the Company. When we speak of these fundamental tenets we will basically be referring to the Constitutions but we will also have very much in mind the thinking of our founders.

***The ecclesiology of communion** which is most clearly defined in the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* n° 2 “*In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission.*” How do the Constitutions reflect this Church thinking? The Company is very much aware that it is and it must be at the service of the Church but that it has its own particular way of being and of serving. This special nuance is logical and reasonable. Phrases such as, “*it is available to the calls of the universal Church*” (C.1c) or “*The Company participates in the Church’s universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of its Founders*” (C.1a) demonstrate this. Saint Louise sums up this ecclesiology of communion by saying that the Daughters of Charity are “*daughters of the Church*”.⁶

With regard to matters at diocesan level, the Constitutions are also in favour of this openness to the Church and they invite the Sisters “*to collaborate with all those actively engaged in the pastoral plan of the area and do all they can to promote lay leadership*”(S.9b). If we concentrate on that final phrase (to promote lay leadership) we will see that the Constitutions are asking the Daughters of Charity to collaborate in promoting the vocation of lay people. Is not this a very clear sign of genuine shared mission?

We know that we cannot envisage an ecclesiology of communion except from the viewpoint of collaboration, participation and sharing. It is precisely with regard to this that the Constitutions speak most strongly and clearly. The articles of the Constitutions that we will be quoting are good proof of this: “*In loyal collaboration, the Sisters work jointly with others in a spirit of sharing, living the values that the Company professes. Cooperation with private or public agencies enables them to offer better service and a more extensive Gospel witness.*” (S 9a). And the Sisters are asked to “collaborate” with the Vincentian Family at diocesan level. (cf. S 9b and c). So the Constitutions develop this first principle of shared mission although for obvious reasons they do not go into details.

*** The Christian value of serving the poor.** All the institutions founded by Saint Vincent have the one objective of caring for poor people. The Ladies Confraternities of Charity were set up “*to serve the poor corporally and spiritually.*”⁷

⁵ COMPANY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY. *Inter- Assembly Action Lines, 2003-2009. Our passion for Jesus impels us to go to those who are poor, with fearlessness, compassion and creativity.* P.6.

⁶ St. Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings* , 202

⁷ X 569

The objective of the Congregation of the Mission as defined in their Rules is “*To evangelise the poor, especially the rural poor.*”⁸ And according to their Common Rules given by Saint Vincent, the Daughters of Charity aim “*to honour Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor,*”⁹ So one same spirit should animate the mission of every Vincentian institution. It is also a question of a charism rooted in the essence of the Gospel (cf. Lk 4, 16; Mt 25). So this is a good pillar on which to base the mission that the Daughters of Charity share with all the branches of the Vincentian Family.

And with regard to lay persons who do not belong to any branch of the family but are involved in the works of the Daughters of Charity, where can we find the point of union that will make it possible to have a shared mission? In the “preferential option for the poor” which is emphasised so strongly in today’s theology. This option concerns the whole Church, that is to say, the hierarchy, religious and lay people.¹⁰ This option and commitment to work for the poor is a duty for every Christian because it is related to the very essence of the Gospel and to the following of Christ. It would be good to point out to lay people working with the Daughters of Charity, that Vincentian spirituality is consistent with the Church’s spirituality today: “*To serve the poor is to go to God.*”¹¹ Of course we have to use the most appropriate means of achieving this goal.

* **Secularity.** All the institutions that were founded or inspired by Saint Vincent are secular; secular in the sense that they do not belong to the canonical category of “religious.” In this sense the Company is secular. Saint Vincent stated this very clearly when he said, *The Daughters of Charity are not religious but Sisters who come and go like seculars.*¹²

The Constitutions of 2004 like those of 1983 do not mention this precise technical term but their contents suggest shared mission. (Cf. C12). In C. 29b we read, “*The vocation of the Daughters of Charity requires constant openness and presence to the world in which they live.*” Statute 8b completes this idea when it says that “*the mission of the Daughters of Charity is channelled through the specific ministries that associate them closely with their lay contemporaries.*” These two articles of those Constitutions give a perfect explanation of the sense in which we understand secularity: this particular path of missionary sanctity-spirituality leads the Sisters to act in the world (particularly the world of the poor) and not flee from it.

These words apply equally well to lay people. They, too, are seculars of course. Their spirituality, too, roots them deeply in the world of their contemporaries. This being so the Daughters of Charity should find it very easy to be very much in tune with the secular sensitivities of lay Vincentians and lay people who collaborate with the Sisters and take part in the Company’s works. If this were not the case we would need to ask ourselves why this harmony should prove so difficult.

⁸ *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, chapter 1 n° 1

⁹ *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity servants of the sick poor*, chapter 1 n° 1

¹⁰ Cf *Vita Consecrata*, nos. 5, 24, 33, 75, 82, 84, 86, 89, 90, 97, 110, 112; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 42; *Centesimus annus* n° 11, *Christifidelis laici*, nos. 17, 24, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43

¹¹ X, 954-955.

¹² VIII, 226

3. SHARING LIFE AND MISSION: SPECIFIC ACTIONS

We have been able to see to what extent the Constitutions are sensitive to the Daughters of Charity's collaboration with lay people. However they limit themselves to formulating general principles and do not suggest specific ways of achieving shared mission. This is only to be expected, given that the people they are addressing are in such a wide diversity of situations. It is up to us to reflect and to devise appropriate and concrete action while being careful not to move away from the broad outlines traced out by these Constitutions.

3.1 Mission shared with the Vincentian Family

We cannot speak of shared mission without including shared lifestyle. Mission does not create membership but it forges fraternal bonds. This is one of the things that lay people who have begun to share in the Vincentian mission find most pleasing. Where does shared mission lead us in the context of acting as the Vincentian family? The Company of course cannot stop living in accordance with its own particular charism but while still being careful to emphasise this aspect, it is also called to share its charism with the rest of the family. When we speak about sharing we have in mind both giving and receiving. In this essential relationship there is no fear that people will lose their identity. On the contrary, when the Daughters of Charity genuinely collaborate and interrelate with lay Vincentian people, they are helped to see better their own identity and special role within the Vincentian charism. Article 61 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* tells us that "*Priests and religious should help the lay faithful in their formation (...). In their turn, the lay members of the faithful can and should help priests and religious in their spiritual and pastoral journey.*"

Before we can share out life with Vincentian lay people we need to revise our attitude towards them because if we look on them as second-class Vincentians, as minors, as having a calling that needn't be taken too seriously and as lay people who have no contribution to make, then it will be very difficult to share our charism and therefore our mission with them. How can we share our life with the Vincentian family in such a way that people will have the experience of being brothers and sisters in a family? This experience will only come about when we share some aspect of formation, for example. Lay Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity have, or could have, many formation themes in common because they share the same charism. Sharing formation is sharing life and when formation is shared these themes take on an added richness because the perspectives from which they are approached also complement one another. As well as formation there can be prayer in common. It would be a good thing to sometimes alter our prayer times to fit in with the working hours and family commitments of lay people. The same could be said about the way we pray because there are other forms of prayer typical of shared mission that we could usefully use from time to time. It is prayer that brings us into contact with people and situations that arise from our mission itself. In this prayer we recognise the signs of God's action in these situations, we try to find enlightenment about these in the Word of God, and missionary commitment is nourished by "shared mission."

More specifically, how can we design a form of prayer that is typical of shared mission? It will always begin by invoking the Holy Spirit because He alone can

create in us an attitude of prayer which will open us to the action of God the Father and prepare us for the mission of service. Our prayer will always be based on reality because Vincentian prayer is always connected to this. We can choose some relevant matter to be prayed about; sometimes it will have reference to a person – illness, death, a celebration, a crisis...) at other times it might be an event that concerns the neighbourhood where you live, the town, the church community, the Church in general or the whole world. The important thing is that it should be based on a specific and definable situation which affects the life and mission of those who will be taking part. Afterwards, a text from Scripture which sheds light on the event can be chosen. The persons taking part in this prayer share the thoughts and feelings the Word of God has inspired in them and the enlightenment that faith has brought them concerning the event. The aim is not to start a theological discussion about a topic but to discern together how God is present in the situation. The prayer session could end with the participants praising God for the signs of his presence in that situation. We must never forget that every situation, no matter how negative it might appear, always conceals a glimmer of God's love. If we don't discover traces of this we can easily fall into pessimism. Praise and thanksgiving are followed by intercession; the praying community brings before the Lord the needs of people affected by the event which has been the focal point of the prayer. A commitment to do something about the specific situation¹³ can be made if this has become clear during the prayer.

This simple method of praying is perfectly in keeping with Vincentian prayer which tries to relate the Word we have found in Scripture with the word that is hidden in the reality of situations, it tries to bring together prayer and daily life. Shared mission can be a real opportunity to pray in this way and communities themselves will benefit from having this type of prayer occasionally with lay people.

The suggestions offered with regard to shared prayer could also be useful for special celebrations such as a Vincentian feast or other occasion in which lay people could be invited to take part.

Of course shared life should find concrete expression in actions carried out in common. The mission that the Church has confided to the Vincentian Family is an enormous and an urgent one. The number of men and women who lose their lives on a thousand paths of disbelief and injustice is countless. All this demands that Vincentians should join forces, share initiatives, cooperate and work in teams, coordinate contributions, plan together and inform one another of their projects. Union makes for strength. The Constitutions urge us to work in common and thus show "*fidelity to [their] origins.*" while not ruling out the possibility of lay people taking on posts of responsibility when they have the appropriate technical and charismatic training. Directing some of our efforts in this direction would be working with an eye to the future. In this article we cannot be more specific because common works, missions and service will depend on a great many circumstances that we cannot cover in this reflection. It is up to the Provinces and local communities to decide such matters.

3.2. Mission shared with lay staff, volunteers and collaborators.

¹³ Cf. G FERNANDEZ SANZ, *Sharing mission as a way to bringing about change*, in B FERNANDEZ-F. TORRES (eds), *Shared mission, 31st National Week for Institutes of Consecrated Life*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2002, pp. 208-212

Shared mission cannot be limited to the Vincentian Family, it must also include lay people who collaborate in the Company's works, as well as lay people who collaborate with Sisters in works that are not of the Company. In short, there is such a wide variety of ways of collaborating that exist or could exist that we cannot mention them all. What I would now like to make very clear is that our reflection should focus on those lay people who do not belong to any traditional branch of the Vincentians.

What was said earlier about lay Vincentians can also be applied to these other people. Shared mission is not simply about works shared at a material level. With these people, too, we need to widen our sense of fraternity, or to put it in Bible terms: "*Enlarge the space of [your] tent*" (Is 54, 2). The reflection and suggestions we have presented on this theme are useful here, too, just as those we will offer in this section can be useful for lay Vincentians.

What does sharing mission demand of us? First of all, we should be speaking about reflection in common. Shared mission does mean sharing mission but as a first step to this we have to do some preliminary study. With lay people who take part in the Company's works (staff and volunteers) we should search together and exchange ideas so that we can discern. Research into shared mission is enriched by the views of people with other vocations. For example, lay people have a notion of reality which is directly related to time, economic resources, family ties and technical expertise. These can be the basis of the contribution they make. On the other hand, the Daughters of Charity can contribute more in the domain of emphasising the gospel and charismatic demands of the works. We can sum up this idea by saying that the lay person brings a sense of realism to the works and the Daughter of Charity brings a gospel sense to them. Of course, each group can contribute in other ways. When any study manages to find a balance between these two extremes, discerning signs of God's presence in our reality is that much better.

The second condition for shared mission is work or service in common. Everything that was said in the preceding paragraph is valid here too. We might add that the relationship with lay people is not just a matter of their simply collaborating with the Sisters; more and more it means they should be given access to posts of responsibility. If they lack the necessary training then we should see how we can help them. So in terms of shared mission we cannot regard lay people simply as persons who can make up for any shortfall in our numbers. To think and act like that would be to treat them as children, to disregard their lay vocation and to fail to understand what is meant by shared mission. Even 40 years ago, Mother Guillemin said that we had to revise our ideas about the way we collaborated with lay people: "*We have to move away from a situation of possession to one of insertion, from positions of authority to positions where we are collaborators, from an outlook of religious superiority to a deep sense of fraternity.*"¹⁴ Can we say that the Company has achieved that goal today?

CONCLUSION

¹⁴ Mother Guillemin, 26th October 1964, address to the Bishops, Editions Fleurus, 1968 p.33

In raising the question of shared mission the Church could be inviting us to come closer to the world of lay people in order to involve them in our mission, to share in theirs and to share our faith life and our Vincentian spirituality. But this closeness will only be possible and effective if local communities remain open and welcoming to others and if lay people who have a close relationship with the local communities can freely express their ideas and opinions. As well as this, another fundamental need is that we esteem the vocation of lay people as an important vocation in the Church. The following words from the document on *New Vocations for a New Europe* are enlightening: “*If at one time in promoting vocations our efforts were directed mainly or exclusively to certain types of vocation, we should now be working more and more towards promoting every sort of vocation because we grow together in the Church or none of us grows.*”¹⁵ The Constitutions come close to this approach when they ask the Sisters to “*promote lay leadership.*” (S 9b). In fact there cannot be lay leaders if they are not aware of their vocation as lay people. By her attitude of respect, collaboration in the common mission and sharing faith, the Daughter of Charity can help lay people to grow in their mission and leadership, and vice versa.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

- **What is the relationship between your community and lay people (Vincentian groups, staff, volunteers..) do you think it is a close relationship?**
- **What specific actions could be undertaken with lay people in order to consolidate shared mission.**

Father Javier ALVAREZ
Director General

FATHER JAVIER ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Outline for the monthly retreat

“You should pray like this: Our Father...”
(Mt 6, 9-13)

The first Christians had great respect for the Our Father. In our own times this prayer is introduced in the Mass by the phrase, “*we dare to say.*” In saying these

¹⁵ OBRA PONTIFICA PARA LAS VOCACIONES ECLESIASTICAS. *New Vocations for a New Europe. Final Document of the European Congress on vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life in Europe*, Rome, May 1997, no. 13c

words we recognise the enormous audacity of our prayer. However, it is very likely that this “*summary of the gospel*” as Tertullian described it, can be part of that stream of words we say every day without giving them much attention. To put it another way, what should we do if we find that we say the Our Father in a very routine and half-hearted way? During this retreat I invite you to ponder more deeply on each of the ten invocations that make up this prayer that Jesus himself gave us.

* “***Our Father***”: The word “Father” defines, better than any other term could, our relationship with God. He is a Father and we are sons and daughters. Better still, He is the Father. Nobody before Jesus’ time had dared to address God in such an intimate and familiar way. It is really awe-inspiring to think that the One who made the whole universe and created all forms of life, recognises each and every one of us as his child, and at the same time He knows and feels that he is Father to each one of us. Presented with this first word, the best we can do is to stop and meditate on it until we feel deeply moved and experience great serenity.

The word “father” is one of those all-embracing words that are diminished when an adjective is added to them. To say “gracious father” for example, is much less evocative than to simply say “father.” The only word that can enrich and widen our concept of fatherhood is the pronoun “our.” A prayer that starts off with the words “my Father” would certainly not be a Christian prayer. How far does the word “our” extend? The heart of God has the same dimensions as the world He created. We Vincentians have the duty of remembering that in the great family of humankind, God’s most cherished people are the dispossessed. They too, are sons and daughters of God. They are in a special way God’s children.

* ***In heaven***”: If the previous invocation assured us that God is so close to us and that he is our Father, why do we now use the phrase that would place him in a distant heaven? We have to understand that heaven is not something that is measured by distance, but by depth and transcendence. When we say God “in heaven” we are acknowledging that our minds will never be able to contain and encapsulate him because God is both near and distant, or rather, he is in the heights and in the depths, he cannot be restricted. We can encounter him but each encounter will be a new searching, a new departure point.

* ***May your name be held holy***”: To the Jewish way of thinking, knowing someone’s name was tantamount to having the key to his spirit. It was like discovering the most direct route to understanding the person. This explains why the Jews had such a burning desire to know God’s name: “*Tell me your name*”, Jacob begged God after wrestling with Him all night (Gen 32, 30). In some measure, too, in our culture, also, a person’s name is important. When we meet somebody the first thing we ask them is their name. An anonymous letter is not valid, it needs a signature. Speaking well or speaking badly of a person can be the best thing we can do for them or, on the contrary, a serious form of aggression. What do we mean by holding God’s name holy? Not using that name in any wrong way, not using it without good reason, not trying to manipulate his name or to justify in his name actions that are dubious. There is a virtue that makes us careful to have a relationship with God that is always unambiguous and genuine. This virtue is simplicity.

* ***“Your kingdom come”***. The coming of God’s Kingdom to humankind is guaranteed but God wants people to ask for it to come. This will make men and women realise that they receive the Kingdom, not as a matter of justice but as a free gift. Only those who realise that what they receive comes gratuitously from God will be able to sincerely offer prayers of thanksgiving. So when we say, “your kingdom come” it is the same as saying, “thank you, Lord, because you are freely and generously offering us your Kingdom, your grace, your salvation.” Saint Vincent would often say, *“I would not desire to go to God if God did not first come to me.”* Asking for the Kingdom to come presupposes we have a sense of gratitude and our commitment to prepare our own house so that God, who always comes, can dwell in it.

* ***“Your will be done”***: This is a risky and difficult thing to ask. People want nothing more than to do their own will and their greatest fear is that other people might impose their will on them. Yet, in the Our Father we say that we want to be conformed to what God wants. In Gethsemane, just before he was arrested, Jesus prayed, *“Not my will but yours be done”* (Mk 14, 36). It is with this awareness and conviction that Jesus had, that we ourselves should be asking the Lord that his will may be done. Saint Vincent taught us that doing God’s will is the quickest and safest way to make progress in the spiritual life.

It is true that this petition could be rather dangerous but not as much as we think. Asking God that we may do his will does not automatically mean that we will have to undertake difficult and painful tasks. Of course this cannot be ruled out. In fact, we are praying for the accomplishment of the will of the one who is our Father, who loves us even more than we can love, and more than we can love ourselves. So a person would do much better to follow God’s will rather than their own which is often geared to the short term.

“Give us today our daily bread” This invocation marks an important turning point in Jesus’ prayer; from something sublime like God’s name or his will, we move to something which is as commonplace as bread or food. We realise, of course, that bread and the word are two very important needs. The Christian cannot separate these two elements. As the basis for founding both Companies we have the words of Saint Vincent, *“The poor people run the risk of losing their souls and they are dying of hunger.”*

When we ask God for bread we are acknowledging that it is He who is the giver because He alone can give it to us. In this petition we recognise God to be generous and ourselves to be poor and lowly. We only ask for today’s bread and this is fitting for people who know that God will also provide for tomorrow’s (cf. Mt 6, 25-27). And of course we ask that bread will be given to everyone. I am fairly certain that Saint Vincent often spent a long time making that petition.

****“Forgive us our debts”*** This short prayer embraces the life of every human being although modern man would prefer to forget the reality of sin, as Paul VI pointed out 30 years ago. When we pray the Our Father we have to remember that sin is part of our wounded nature that we have to keep under control. It is not a matter of changing sin into a tragedy that paralyses, but neither can we forget that when human beings sin they become separated from God and also from one another. Sin has a bad

effect on relationships at all levels. We acknowledge this and ask for forgiveness and this prayer acts as a bridge to restore broken relationships. We must never forget that God's mercy is much more powerful than the evil and separation caused by sin.

***"As we have forgiven those who are in debt to us."** This could be one of the most disconcerting sentences in the whole of the Our Father. God wants to join his forgiveness to ours. It isn't that He forgives because we forgive. No, it is simply that He wants to build up between Himself and those who love him, a community that practises forgiveness and the only people excluded from this forgiving community are those who decide not to pardon others. Forgiveness may not be very fashionable today but the Lord's message is clear: if we are to join the community of the forgiven we must pass through the gateway of knowing how to forgive others (cf. Mt 18, 21-35).

*** "Do not put us to the test".** Jesus was no dreamy optimist. *"Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation"*, he warned his apostles (Mk 14, 38). Temptation is not evil in itself: *"Yahweh, your God, is testing you to know if you love him."* (Dt 13, 4). The great personages in the Bible were subjected to temptation: Abraham, Job, Moses...and Jesus himself was in the hands of the Tempter. Saint Vincent, too, was not spared temptations. As in every age, temptation surrounds all the faithful today. It can ennoble the soul or bind it in chains. Everything depends on the way we use our free will. *"Do not put us to the test."*

*** "Save us from evil":** Save us because evil does exist. It is so real that any person can choose to follow it. To choose evil is to choose hell. And this is the direct opposite of God, it is the place where God's fatherhood and his Kingdom hold no sway.

FOR PRAYER AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

- **Read prayerfully Mt 6, 1-34**
- **Of all the petitions in the Our Father, which is the one thing you most need at the present time? Is there any invocation in the Our Father that makes you feel uneasy?**
- **What can an attentive and meditative recitation of the Our Father lead you to do?**

Fr. Javier Alvarez, CM
Director General

As in previous years, I have appreciated your kind, sisterly good wishes for my feast day and for Christmas. Thank you for all your letters but it isn't possible to reply to you all personally. I can only do so in a general way through this paragraph in the "Echoes." Some of you have asked me to pray for special intentions: rest assured that I will not fail to present all these petitions to the Lord. I would also like to thank you for your prayers for me. I am sure that this spiritual exchange is good for all of us and pleasing to God.

How many beautiful messages, both on the human and the spiritual level, came on your Christmas cards even if sometimes the phrases were ready-made! In taking on our human nature God released a torrent of kindly feelings which fill the earth these days even if it has to be said that these are mingled with the trends of a relentless consumer society. This is an insult to the dignity of poor people because injustice and inequality are becoming more and more blatant. May God bless you at this warm-hearted time of Christmas. May He give all of us the grace to understand the greatness of our vocation. I wish you all a very happy 2008 as you serve Him in the person of the poor as Saint Vincent taught us to do!

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General,
and Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Cali (Colombia)

September 14th – 22nd, 2007

HISTORY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY IN COLOMBIA

On May 18th 1882, four Sisters (three French and one Mexican) from Panama in Central America came to Popayan, Columbia, to begin serving in a hospital.

At the invitation of the pastor of the Church in Cali, the Sisters arrived in Cali on December 18th, 1884 to take charge of the Saint John of God Hospital. Before long, 4 young Colombian women asked to be admitted into the Company and were sent to the Seminary in Ecuador for their formation. Later, others would make their Seminary in Panama. Finally, a Seminary was opened in Cali in 1888. At the same time, local communities began to be established in various cities in the country. In 1957, the Province was made up of 1200 Sisters in 138 local communities including several in Venezuela. As the Province continued to grow, the Superiors decided to create a new Province, the Province of Bogota. Colombia thus comprises two Provinces: Cali in the western part of the country and Bogota in the eastern part of the country, including the houses in Venezuela which later became a separate Province.

VISIT OF SISTER EVELYNE

The Province of Cali is currently made up of 554 Sisters and 55 local communities. On Friday, September 14th, 2007, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, arrived in Cali with Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor, for a visitation of the Province. Sister Maria Lia Giraldo, the Visitatrice, warmly welcomed them to the Provincial House, where about 200 Sisters had gathered for the occasion. Sister Maria thanked the visitors for coming to the Province and expressed the joy that all the Sisters feel as members of the Company.

After meeting the Provincial Council, Sister Evelyne participated in a Eucharistic celebration. A candlelight procession was incorporated into the liturgy to symbolise the places where the Daughters of Charity carry out their service of poor persons.

A gathering with the Seminary Sisters was followed by a time of sharing with the 59 Sister Servants of the Province. With clarity and simplicity, Sister Evelyne reminded the Sisters that although the Sister Servant ensures the life of the community and acts as a model of its spirit, each Sister is responsible for the prayer life and for community life in view of the mission.

On Sunday morning, Sister Evelyne celebrated Eucharist with the Vincentian family in Cali; here several members of the family expressed their gratitude for the joy they experience in collaborating with the Sisters in their service of poor persons. In the afternoon, during a gathering with the Sisters in the valley region of the Province, Sister Evelyne focused her presentation on the following points:

- The mission of the Company is part of the Church's mission.
- Regardless of our age and our state of health, our life belongs to the Lord for the service of persons who are poor.

Currently, the Domestic Assemblies are a means offered to us to develop our spiritual life and to recognise more clearly the signs of God's presence, to intensify our efforts at building community life, and to renew the practice of asking pardon of one another.

After this presentation, Sister Evelyne responded intuitively to questions, and then urged us to study the Social Doctrine of the Church, the document from "Aparecida" and the book written by Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth*. The evening concluded with an artistic presentation of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. By means of this allegory, the Province recognises its limits and commits itself to reawaken in its local communities a spiritual force to help them intensify their relationship with God, community life and service of persons who are poor.

The following day, the local communities in the city of Cali hosted Sister Evelyne:

- Saint Louise Community, which serves children and families in difficulties in this poor neighbourhood.
- "Las Gaviotas" (The Seagulls) Rehabilitation Centre that provides help for 40 young people with addictions.
- The John Paul II Community in which the Sisters' ministries include social services, education and catechesis.
- The Social Service Centre in the Provincial House that cares for children with disabilities.

On Tuesday morning, the visitors had another meeting with the Provincial Council for a presentation of the programmes and activities of the Province. Afterwards, they celebrated Eucharist in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal where thousands of pilgrims come each Tuesday to honour the Blessed Virgin. During the Mass, Bishop Garcia, auxiliary bishop of Cali, expressed to Sister Evelyne his gratitude for the presence of the Daughters of Charity in the marginalised sectors of

Cali. Later that day, Sister Evelyne had the opportunity to meet Sisters in various ministries (parish, physiotherapy, etc.) and to visit the Archives room that houses objects relating to the history of the Daughters of Charity in Colombia. At the end of the day, the visitors spent some time with the staff of the Provincial House who expressed their appreciation of being able to work with the Sisters. The day concluded with a time of prayer dedicated to Mary.

The following day, after presenting the Seminary Sisters with copies of *The Instructions on the Vows*, Sister Evelyne departed with Sister Blanca Libia to visit:

- The city of Palmira where a group of elderly Sisters from the Communities of Buga and El Cerrito awaited her arrival with much joy and a great spirit of faith.
- The house in Cartago in which elderly and ill Sisters receive care.

On Thursday morning, Sister Evelyne met the Sisters gathered at the “Coffee Cultural Centre.” Together, they watched a documentary on the culture of coffee in Colombia and were able to enjoy a cup of authentic Colombian coffee. The Vincentian priests from the nearby communities came to celebrate the Eucharist and share a meal in a spirit of fraternity.

In the afternoon, Sister Evelyne set out for Medellin and the surrounding areas, her final destination. After meeting the Sisters in that area, she once again convened the Provincial Council regarding certain matters. The day ended with an artistic presentation of Colombian folk dances.

On September 22nd Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia flew to Bogota. From there, they returned to the Motherhouse. The entire Province of Cali, full of gratitude, echoes the words of the psalmist: *“How can I make a return to the Lord for all the good He has done for me?”*

Sisters Gloria Maria AGUIRRE and Ana Isabel PARRA
Daughters of Charity

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Mariarosa Camminati, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Turin

October 18th-21st 2007

October 18th to 21st 2007 were unforgettable days for the Province of Turin. Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, accompanied by Sister Mariarosa Camminati, General Councillor, arrived in Turin for a brief but very intensive visit.

The Provincial Council, the Sisters of the Provincial House and the 50 Sister Servants of the houses of the Province welcomed them with great joy and affection.

The Visitatrice, Sister Maria Pia Bertaglia, emphasised how providential this visit was as the time of Assemblies approaches.

A Power Point presentation illustrated the history and current realities of the Province. Sister Evelyne was amazed at the extraordinary story of the beginnings of the Company in Italy: the first Italian Sisters belonged to a congregation begun in the region of Piedmont, Italy, that united with the Motherhouse in 1788, after which time the Company spread throughout Italy.

Sister Evelyne was able to meet almost all the Sisters who gathered for the occasion in Pallanza and Turin. She met the Sister Servants and the elderly Sisters and visited several houses.

At Luserna San Giovanni, in the house named “Casa dell’Immacolata,” she stopped briefly before the tomb of Sister Gabriella Borgarino, and then she greeted Bishop de Pinerolo who directs the diocesan seminary located in one wing of the house.

Sister Evelyne particularly admired;

- the wisdom and the experience of the elderly Sisters (in Turin, Luserna, Pallanza, Grugliasco),

- the quality services provided by the Vincentians for *persons who are homeless* in Turin and the residential programme for young women with disabilities in Dronero.

-

Sister Evelyne recommended collaboration with public or private organisations and reminded us of our specific charism: to serve those whom others are not serving. She insisted upon the need to express our vocational choice clearly and resolutely.

Sister Evelyne shared her joy about the coming beatifications of three Daughters of Charity and excited our interest by telling us about the Daughters of Charity living in various parts of the world. She concluded by repeatedly calling us to personal involvement and responsible participation in the Domestic Assemblies, “*on which depends the success of the General Assembly.*”

Even though the days of her visit passed too quickly, she left us with the memory of her gentle attentiveness towards all the Sisters and her special concern for the Sisters in the infirmary who are now experiencing “*the life stage of love in its pure state*”.

Our Province is grateful to Sister Evelyne for providing us with moments of great celebration: a touching expression of accolades from the Sisters in the infirmary, friendly dialogues with all the Sisters, liturgies that were both festive and meditative, and finally, interaction with many of our daily services...

We keep in our hearts Sister Evelyne's witness to us! In response to her "Thank you and Goodbye!" pronounced in perfect Italian, we say: "Come back soon, Sister Evelyne! In the meantime, we will keep you in our grateful prayers!"

Sister Adèle BOLLATI
Daughter of Charity

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Daughters of Charity and the United Nations

The inter-assembly "Action Lines (2003-2009) call us to go beyond what we are already doing in our commitments to people living in poverty throughout the world. One of the creative and audacious responses was Sr. Evelyne and the General Council's decision to seek consultative status as an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) at the U.N. for the Company, and to name me, Sr. Germaine Price, as the Daughter of Charity full time representative.

In this first article I would like to give a brief account of my first year at the United Nations and an outline of how it came into being and its mission to promote peace and security for all peoples.

In future articles I hope to explain more fully how the United Nations works and to keep Sisters informed of what we are attempting to do at UN level to represent The Company in its service of people in poverty.

I. SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS

THE BEGINNING AND THE MISSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANISATION

In 1945, the world was coming to the end of a second world war. Many countries were devastated by bombs, many people were homeless and millions were dead. Fifty-one countries came together in the hope of forming a new organisation in which nations would work together for peace and development. In 1945 these countries signed the United Nations Charter "We the people of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small.... do hereby establish an international organisation to be known as the United Nations"

From its beginning the United Nations has been a forum for international discussion on issues that concern the rights and wellbeing of all the citizens of the world. In 2007, 192 countries are members of the United Nations.

THE AIMS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

- To maintain international peace and security
- To develop friendly relations between nations.
- To work together to help people live better lives,
- to eliminate poverty, disease and illiteracy,
- to stop environmental destruction
- to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedom

To be a centre for co-ordinating the action of nations in order to attain these common goals.

THE THREE MAIN PRIORITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Peace and security, sustainable development and the promotion of Human Rights, As Koffi Anan pointed out: *"The World will not enjoy development without security. The World will not enjoy security without development. The World will not enjoy either without respect for human rights "*

HOW THE UNITED NATIONS IS ORGANISED

The United Nations is an international organisation, not a world government. For the most part it depends on the goodwill and co-operation of its members to be effective. The United Nations. has 6 main bodies:

- **The General Assembly** - '*a parliament of nations*' which meets regularly to consider the world's most pressing problems.
- **The Security Council** - the main function of which is to maintain international peace. It has 15 members, 5 of whom are permanent and have a veto - . The United States, the United Kingdom, China, Russia and France. The Security Council has not always been successful because its success is dependent on Governments being willing to carry out its intentions.
- **The Economic and Social Council** - is the central body for co-ordinating the economic and social work of the United Nations family of nations. It has 54 members elected from all regions and devotes its time to promoting higher standards of living, full employment and the eradication of poverty.
- **The Trusteeship Council** - This Council was established to promote the development of colonies but since 1994 no longer exists.
- **The International Court of Justice** - The Court settles legal disputes between nations and has 15 judges, each from a different nation.
- **The Secretariat** -is made up of the international staff working at the United Nations headquarters in New York and in the United Nations offices in Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and other locations.

THE UNITED NATIONS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In spite of a number of failures to make and maintain peace there are at least 60 least 60 occasions on which the United Nations has brought about significant changes in the world. The following are a few examples.

- **Promoting peace and security** - by sending 60 peace-keeping missions to the world's troubled spots.
- **Promoting democracy** - strengthening democracy and free elections in 9 different countries.
- **Human Rights for All**- in 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and since then has adopted other international treaties on human rights e.g. women's rights, and children's rights.
- **Protecting the environment** - the United Nations has played a pioneering role in bringing governments together to protect the environment.
- **Providing humanitarian aid to refugees** - there are more than 50 million refugees who have received aid and 19 million who at present are receiving food, shelter, education and healthcare, and repatriation assistance.
- **Promoting development and the eradication of poverty** - about 1.3 billion people in the world live in absolute poverty - earning less than a dollar a day. At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the largest gathering of World leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and set out a series of targets to be achieved by 2015 known as "The Millennium Goals.²

THE MILLENNIUM GOALS ARE: to

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Provide gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

July 7th 2007 marked the mid-point of the time allotted to achieve these goals.

II. MY FIRST YEAR AT THE UNITED NATIONS

For a newcomer, the United Nations is a very complex organisation. At first sight it appears to be an intricate web of relationships and systems through which world leaders and those who engage with them address the concerns of the world.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are national or international, non-profit making groups committed to the common good.

NGOS –WHAT THEY DO AT THE UNITED NATIONS

When the United Nations Charter was drawn up in 1945, 42 NGOs were consulted about the text. This was the beginning of co-operation between the U.N. and NGOs. At that time, without such co-operation, the United Nations could not meet the needs of refugees fleeing from war. Such co-operation has continued to further the goals of the United Nations. in areas such as poverty eradication, disarmament, human rights, education, the environment and the rights of women and children.

Through membership on committees NGOs participate in the work of the U.N. in 4 ways by:

- Raising issues (e.g. women's rights) which may then get placed on the U.N. agenda.
- Shaping decisions - especially in social and humanitarian matters.
- Entering into partnership - with the United Nations to carry out projects.
- Acting as the conscience of the United Nations by monitoring policies/developments and providing constructive criticism.

GETTING STARTED

I began by meeting several experienced NGO representatives from other communities to seek their advice on how best to orient and insert myself into committees and work groups. During the first months I also attended the annual conference organised by the Department of Public Information and the Orientation sponsored by this Department. In addition I participated in 2 other orientations specifically for new NGO representatives from a Catholic perspective. One of these workshops focused on Catholic Social Teaching.

INSERTION INTO COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

In line with the General Council's trend to concentrate on issues dealing with women and children, I have become a member of the following NGO Committees - Financing for Development (and two of its sub-committees), Social Development and its sub-committee; The Eradication of Poverty. I have also become a member of RUN — Religious at the U.N.

Participation in these committees means regular attendance at approximately 6 meetings a week. As a member of a recognised committee, an NGO representative can contribute to the work of the United Nations. These committees work on both short-term and long-term projects in order to influence the heads of member states (governments) who are responsible for making global policies. Working papers and formal reports are circulated to Governments: "*Talking points*" are developed for lobbying during visits to member states.

The past year has been a time of unexpected blessing, a time when I have learned an enormous amount and gained many new insights, and a time of making valuable connections. All these have enriched my life and provided me with a diversity of human experiences on a global scale. As I begin my second year with the United Nations. I look forward very much to working with the General Council and with Sisters throughout the Company to make our voice for and with the people in poverty as effective as possible.

Sister Germaine Price
Daughter of Charity

TESTIMONY GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Vincentian Session
 for the Sisters from Latin America and the Caribbean

Paris
 July 3rd – August 27th 2007

*Following Christ in the footsteps of Vincent de Paul and Louise de
 Marillac*

On July 3rd 2007, 49 Sisters from the 15 Provinces of Latin American and the Caribbean arrived in Paris for a Vincentian Session that would continue until August 26th 2007. The 15 participating Provinces were: Argentina, Bolivia, Central America, Chile, Colombia (Bogota and Cali), Cuba, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo and Venezuela.

The goal of the Session was to reinforce our identity as Daughters of Charity in Latin America and the Caribbean, through a study of our Founders and the life of the Company and by deepening our understanding of our spirituality and charism.

After words of welcome from Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor, our Superioress General, Sister Evelyne opened the Session, emphasising the importance of revitalising our charism in order to live out the spirituality of the Founders in authentic ways. She reminded us that it is essential for us to open our hearts, renew our first fervour and receive the grace of perseverance in order to move forward on the pathway to holiness. Following this, Father Javier Alvarez, Director General, presided over our opening Eucharistic celebration.

Here are the three major themes of this Session:

1st theme: Life of our Founders and life of the Company

Sister Geneviève Roux described the political, social and religious setting of the 17th century, the context in which the Company was born in order to respond to the needs of poor persons in those days.

Sister Francisca Varela presented the life of Saint Vincent de Paul and accompanied us on our pilgrimage to the Berceau and other Vincentian sites.

Sister Elisabeth Charpy reviewed with us the main characteristics of Saint Louise's personality. We discovered the various aspects of Saint Louise's life: daughter who never knew her mother, young married woman, mother of Michel, Lady of Charity, Foundress of the Daughters of Charity, educator and manager of the service for abandoned children, formator of the Sisters, joyful grandmother, theologian, saint for today. She explained to us that suffering became a school of learning for Saint Louise, particularly with the help of Saint Vincent's guidance.

Sister Angeles Infante shared the history of the Company with us, something which we need to understand in order to be motivated to be faithful to Jesus Christ, to the charism of the Founders, the Church and the people of our times, particularly to the calls coming from those who are poor. We also rediscovered this history in the Archives, through manuscripts, rules, conferences, circular letters and other documents. We look back at the past in order to better commit ourselves in the future: the continuation of our story is in our hands.

Sister Claire Herrmann, Archivist, passed on to us the part of the history of our charism that is found in the original documents, objects, relics, etc. She completed our study of the history of the Company speaking about, among other topics, the martyrdom of some of our Sisters and the appearances of the Blessed Virgin.

2nd theme: The Vincentian charism in the light of the Word of God, Church documents and the Constitutions

Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM, reviewed the document from the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, from the perspective of our Vincentian charism. He highlighted the principal challenges to be addressed in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Father Fernando Quintano, CM, presented the ideal characteristics of the plan of life for the Daughters of Charity, taking the Constitutions as his starting point. He also presented a modern day interpretation of the great Charter of the Company. He also accompanied us on our pilgrimage to Chartres where, with great fervour, we renewed our consecration of the Company to Mary.

Father Alvaro Restrepo spoke to us about the face of Christ that our Founders discovered: Adorer of the Father, Servant of God's loving plan, Evangeliser of poor persons. Then, with great enthusiasm, he explained the meaning of the seal of the Company: the symbol of our spirituality.

Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, invited us to be prophetic first of all in our local communities, in living with our Sisters in an atmosphere of true charity. He presented our Constitutions as a "prophetic" document: they are the result of the life and the experience of Daughters of Charity from the very beginning of the Company.

Father Javier Alvarez, Director General, invited us to see our Constitutions as a treasure to be safeguarded, for they contain the Founders' vision adapted to our time in history. They are the pathway to holiness that God has marked out for us. He also focused attention on our three specific virtues that help us to carry out the Company's purpose.

Finally, Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo invited each Sister to let the spirit of our Company live within her; this calls for ongoing conversion. The life of our Provinces is dependent on the conversion of each Sister. In face of the profound crisis of humanity that exists today, we must continually come back to Jesus Christ and discover how we are being called to follow him. This will also help renew our motivation for vocation ministry.

PHOTO

3rd theme: Marian spirituality in the Company

Father Corpus Juan Delgado, CM, presented our spirituality as a way of following Christ through the example of Mary. Our approach to Mary should be like that of our Founders, in the way that the Company contemplates her today through the Constitutions, and by presenting the message of 1830 in a way that is relevant for today's world.

At the end of the Session, we listened to the members of the General Council who shared with us the realities of each continent. This allowed us to understand better the international dimension of the Company and its mission of service to Christ in those who are poor. The Session concluded with an address from Sister Evelyne and a Eucharistic celebration to send us on our way.

CONCLUSION

The themes that we studied and reflected upon during these two months have been very enriching for us, strengthening our vocation and identity as Daughters of Charity. We understand more deeply that the Company shares in the mission of the universal Church as it continues the mission of Jesus Christ, especially in favour of those who are poor. We are grateful to God for having given us the grace of participating in this Vincentian Session; it is up to us to be committed to living out in our daily lives what we learned from it.

Editorial Commission for the Vincentian Session

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Albany, New-York

1st Interprovincial Encounter

438 Daughters of Charity from four Provinces in the USA (Emmitsburg Maryland, Albany New York, Evansville Indiana, and St. Louis Missouri) gathered in Buffalo New York, from July 26th-29th 2007 for the first of perhaps many interprovincial gatherings. In August and again in October, 2006, the four Visitatrices and their Councils had agreed to appoint a Steering Committee, later named "Visioning for the Mission," comprising two sisters from each Province, to develop a process to consider the reconfiguration of the four Provinces. Also appointed was a Planning Committee with

representation from each Province to organise and coordinate this interprovincial meeting in 2007, the "Buffalo" gathering.

The theme of the Buffalo Gathering was "*Rooted in Charity, United in Hope*" and the central logo included the Community Seal. Backed up by creative daily prayer, and very creative liturgy, five objectives were the basis of the meeting:

- To step out in faith and hope into our future
- To deepen our common identity as Daughters of Charity and our mission to persons who are poor.
- To provide an opportunity for inter-provincial sharing
- To get to know one another better
- To receive the initial report of the Visioning for the Mission Steering Committee and commission its members.

Keynote speakers for each day were Sr. Margaret Barrett, D.C, Assistant General, Sr. Regina Beetle, S.C., and Sr. Theresa Peck, D.C., President of the Visioning for the Mission Steering Committee.

The closing liturgy reflected the feelings of the Sisters and their commitment to go forward together with this process. Indeed, the final evaluations testified that this first inter-provincial Gathering had met its stated objectives.

Sisters Margaret Scally and Margaret Quinn

Daughters of Charity

TESTIMONY GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

France South

At Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin, catechist for Bernadette Soubirous

On the occasion of a conference on catechetics, Bishop Perrier, Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, shared some reflections on the teaching that Bernadette received between February 11th and July 16th 1858. May we who are called to follow Christ the Evangeliser of poor persons, allow ourselves to be guided by God's privileged messenger.

FIRST APPARITIONS

Everything begins with the sign of the cross, something that Bernadette was not able to master until the Lady demonstrated it for her. Mary would be Bernadette's guide in her introduction to the mysteries of faith, her instructor. Those who carry out the mission of catechist are called to discover what it is that those in their care, whether they are children, young people or adults, do not yet know

Mary did not teach lessons to Bernadette but rather passed on to her a pious practice: how to make the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross is the perfect summary of Christianity. This gesture reminds us of the extent of God's love for us; the words that accompany it describe the perfection of Love, which is the reality of the Trinity. From the outset, we have this sign of everything that is to follow. In catechesis, we know where we are going.

During the first two apparitions, the Lady did not speak. She established a relationship of trust with Bernadette. Before requesting something of Bernadette, the Lady built up a personal relationship with the young girl. The latter needed this, for objections accompanied by blows would soon be coming her way. Bernadette found herself facing contradiction, the experience of any believer today.

During the third apparition, Mary refused to write her name but asked Bernadette to do her the honour of coming regularly for fifteen days. What does that say for us in terms of catechesis? Not that writing is useless, but that it is not the most important part. We are not limited to the culture of the written word and Christianity is not merely a Book religion.

After refusing to write her name, the Lady asked Bernadette to come every day for two weeks. She spoke to her in a friendly way, in her own dialect. She showed Bernadette more respect than other people had done in Bernadette's life, addressing her with the formal form of "you". She was expecting something from the young girl, just as God expects us to have faith in him. She asked a commitment of Bernadette, a limited commitment of course, but one that was difficult to fulfill, due to the opposition of her family, the Sisters, and soon afterwards, the opposition of the civil authorities. Catechetics whether for a child or an adult, takes time. The Blessed Virgin did not begin with this request, but when the moment came, she made a contract of sorts with Bernadette.

PROGRESS BY WAY OF THE CROSS

What followed was a time of trial. Bernadette was asked to practise penance, the difficult aspect of conversion. Christ had no need of repentance, but in order to save us from sin, he counted himself among the sinners who received baptism from John, a baptism of conversion. His journey was by way of the Cross, as all Christian initiation takes place via the Cross. Christ has gone before us on this path. Bernadette bowed down to the ground, as Jesus had done in the Garden of Olives. Her face, covered with mud, was hardly recognisable, like that of the suffering servant in the prophecies of Isaiah.

Penance is not a strictly private matter. When Bernadette was asked to do penance, it gave her wider perspectives. Until that time, it seemed that the events that were occurring involved only Bernadette. Her conversations with the Lady remained private. Now, Bernadette was to receive a mission: to pray for sinners. She would do this all her life. In this way she discovered that we are not Christians for ourselves alone, for we live in the communion of saints.

At the same time, the Lady helped Bernadette discover a spring. Bernadette first moved towards the Gave River, and the Lady had to point her in the right

direction. This is the role of the Church: to guide humanity toward the everlasting Source. Mary helped Bernadette discover a spring that until that time had been hidden. Isn't this a beautiful model of catechetical activity? Bernadette was actively involved in the discovery, although at first she took the wrong direction. She would never have found it had not the Lady directed her, and then redirected her along the way.

Mary is not the spring, nor is the catechist. They guide others to the spring. This reminds us of the Samaritan woman at the well, who hurried back to her townspeople to encourage them to go and meet the one who understood her so well.

During the "two weeks of apparitions", there were two occasions in which the Lady was not there to meet Bernadette. Bernadette was troubled by this: had she in some way offended her? Likewise, in catechesis, there can be times of emptiness, for no apparent reason. Education in faith is also a learning process that includes desert experiences.

MISSION, EUCHARIST AND SERVICE

Bernadette's faith was put to the test, by disconcerting gestures that were asked of her as well as by absences. This prepared her to be charged with a mission in the Church and for the Church. Her mission in the Church was to go and "speak to the priests." Her mission for the Church was to have a chapel built where the faithful would come in procession. In the same way, catechesis must enable each one to discover their place and mission in the Church.

Throughout all this time, Bernadette never became discouraged although the Lady consistently refused to give her name. At last the Lady told her: I am the Immaculate Conception. Names also have an importance even if the Lady's teaching and that of the Church puts more emphasis on the experience, certain aspects of which we have noted. Mary's words when she reveals her name were the last words that Bernadette would hear. The final two apparitions were once again silent ones. This is a beautiful teaching about prayer: it goes from silence to silence.

These weeks of the apparitions coincided with the time that Bernadette was preparing for her First Communion, which would take place on the Feast of Corpus Christi. For Bernadette, the visions would only be temporary. The Eucharist, however, is enduring. Bernadette would not live in a state of nostalgia for the apparitions but in a growing desire to unite herself to Christ through the Eucharist and service to sick people+.

Bishop Jacques PERRIER
Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

1906 – 1968

Daughter of God– Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

VI –POST-CONCILIAR PERIOD

*The Council has cast the seed,
it is now a matter of cultivating the plant
and gathering the choice fruits.
(Pope Paul VI)*

The Second Vatican Council presented the world with a renewed perspective on the Church. On December 7th 1965, the eve of the final session, the newspaper *Le Courrier de Geneve* gave some impressions of the Council from various people including Mother Suzanne Guillemin:

“How can I summarise my impressions as a Religious Auditrice at the end of the Council, when the final work is being concluded quickly and very conscientiously, but when there is already a foreshadowing of post-conciliar tasks to be done?”

First of all, there is the feeling that an enormous work has been successfully accomplished; reassurance in the truth that emerges after the period of discussions – a moving into security, in the face of that unity which in the end, and often contrary to all expectations, unites minds and hearts

There is also the sense of light that proclaims a new day: this ending is also a beginning. The Church has just experienced a time when it deliberately paused, in an attitude of recollection and reflection, and it is now ready to take up the journey again. The Constitutions and Conciliar Decrees do not close the Church in on one static truth. Quite the contrary, they have traced out wide avenues towards perspectives that are to be pursued. A time for expressing ideas opens up a period of life for us. Our thoughts must be translated into actions.

*A dominant characteristic emerges: **charity**. It seems appropriate that for future generations the Council should appear under the sign of charity. This is the thinking of Pope Paul VI, who called it ‘an act of love towards God, towards the Church and towards humanity.’*

The Council, a product of John XXIII's love for the Church, progressed in an extraordinary climate of charity towards all people: every single person on earth was at least symbolically thought about. Each action of the Council was an act of love for various groups of people and many of these gestures healed breaches of charity that have taken place over the centuries.

The Council will not end just with doctrinal or disciplinary findings but will show us a new way of looking on the world with love, of being open to this world and from now on we religious must feel responsible for doing this, each in accordance with our function in the Church.

MOTHER GUILLEMIN AND THE POST-CONCILIAR PERIOD

On October 28th 1965, Pope Paul VI promulgated the decree on “**The Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life.**” This was neither an exhortation nor a directory: it simply stated what religious life should be, in accordance with the evangelical counsels, together with certain principles which would guide institutes in their renewal process, taking into account their specific characteristics and including Societies of Apostolic Life and Secular Institutes.

Renewal and adaptation of religious life means that the members have to be continually returning to the sources and original charism as well as adapting these to the changing conditions of the present time.

Mother Guillemin firmly supported these decisions. For the previous ten years, had she not already been tentatively reflecting on the life of the Company in accordance with the Gospel's ever-new demands, so that the Company might be more adapted to present day circumstances? And now, putting this decree into practice was an act of obedience that would promote all the richness of the various aspects of religious life as it followed the path traced out by Christ. The aggiornamento of the Company was alive in her heart and mind. She had followed the discussions in the conciliar hall with careful attention in order to draw out the overall concepts of renewal from the perspective of adaptation and revision that would conform to present day demands.

With great satisfaction, Mother Guillemin had retained certain necessary details regarding the vocabulary relating to the topics used by the president of the Commission at the beginning of the meetings:

*“When we refer to religious life and religious, we understand this to mean those who seek perfection through the profession of the evangelical counsels. In order to avoid the danger of confusion among Religious in the strict sense of the title, the Societies of Common Life and Secular Institutes, we included in the introduction the expression ‘**while guarding their proper nature**’”* In the future, we will need to find a common definition with which all forms of consecrated life will feel at ease.

The focus on the idea of **religious life** was open to question. The following response came at the end of the discussion: put briefly, we have the dynamic Gospel concept of life with all that this implies with regard to charity and human commitment.

A third area of clarification concerned the two words in the title: **adaptation and renewal** in order that they should not be separated. *“The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”* (P.C. no. 2)

Mother Guillemin had no difficulty with these perspectives that gave a profound and spiritual setting to the concept of renewal. In 1959, she was the one who said to a Sister arriving at the Centrale to take on a new ministry: “I will see that you discover the Founders in order to better understand your vocation today.”

The time of “adaptation and renewal” had arrived for the Company. As the acts of the Council had become the official thinking and the law of the Church, adhesion and obedience were essential.

AGGIORNAMENTO OF THE COMPANY

What did this involve? Certain points had been brought up in the conciliar discussions, notably from Cardinal Bea who insisted on the relationship between religious life and the Church: *“that religious, while remaining faithful to their Rule and the spirit of their congregation, might have an even greater sense of belonging to the Church, that they breathe the life of the Church and use it for their own aggiornamento, in harmony with that of the Church.”*

The Company could respond to this appeal in the words of Saint Louise de Marillac written to Fr. Portail in Rome: *“...does this not indicate strongly to us that we have the double happiness of being Daughters of the holy Church and, being admitted in this manner, will this not be a new obligation for us **to live and to act** as children of such a Mother?...”*¹

Article 8 of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* indicates the direction to be taken by institutes devoted to apostolic life: *“Apostolic and charitable activity belongs to the very nature of the religious life, seeing that it is a holy service and a work characteristic of love, entrusted to them by the Church to be carried out in its name.”* For Mother Guillemin, this involved seeking God’s will in relation to present day spiritual and apostolic needs. The overall principles of renewal are outlined in *Perfectae Caritatis*. Other complementary documents showing “how to apply them” are *Ecclesiae Sanctae* and *Renovationis causam* for formation.

Guidelines for this renewal provided in the norms that come from careful reading of the decree: *“the constant **return to the sources** of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”* The first principle is that this renewal be made according to the **Gospel**, the imitation of Christ and the spirit of the Founder under the guidance and authority of the Church.

¹ Spiritual Writingsp.202

Participation in the life of the Church, not just in the Church, but also in its life, in line with one's particular vocation, requires attention to the local church, the privileged place where the Church expresses itself.

Attention to the contemporary world and its problems "so that the Institutes might more effectively assist humanity" was strongly emphasised in the Council Fathers' interventions.

It is clear that conversion of the heart alone does not suffice; adaptation and renewal must be integral, not only in the institution or its works, but above all in the members. Mother Guillemin had for a long time been convinced of this by wise recommendations expressed with great charity, in meetings with other congregations on the general level. In addition, she determined to study with her Council specific ways of carrying out the official decisions of the decree. She knew that in the end renewal would depend to a large extent on those who would be responsible for carrying it out and the spirit in which they would act.

*"An effective renewal and adaptation demands the **cooperation of all the members of the institute**"² under the guidance of the competent authority."*

FROM THE SEED... TO ITS FRUIT

On returning to the Motherhouse, Mother Guillemin set to work. In response to the invitations of the Council to give greater attention to the appeals of the world on the one hand, and to an interior aggiornamento of Religious Institutes on the other hand, three areas of action awaited her.

The first was the aggiornamento of the Company, something she had been acutely aware of since 1962. The principles of adaptation and renewal, among them, "to live one's particular charism in line with the **Gospel**" were not something to inspire fear. Certainly Saint Vincent's life and teachings were present in her mind and heart. Like everyone else, he had heard the Gospel proclaimed according to the rhythm of the liturgical year, and he had read it more carefully after becoming a priest. But it was no longer a book or a doctrine; it was **Jesus Christ himself** that he discovered. For him, the Gospel was a place where he encountered Christ who had revealed himself to him in life. This is the Good News, and it must dwell within us as the fire with which Jesus wanted to inflame the earth, a fire that possesses us, that consumes us from within. And just as it was for Saint Vincent, "the Gospel: his book and his mirror" so it would be for each Daughter of Charity: "a light for our path."

A second vast and profound area of action: "**service in the Church after the Council**". Mother Guillemin understood that the valuable insights she had received were not intended solely for the Daughters of Charity, on whom she had a direct influence. Rather, she would generously go even farther and allow other congregations to benefit from what she had learned. A deep doctrinal understanding, spirituality of action, special attention to the world, a missionary sense, continuing to

² *Perfectae Caritatis* no.4

live in the spirit of Vatican II in following the furrows “of liberty and truth” traced out by the Council, all went well beyond the process of outward reforms not sufficiently prepared for by a change of mentality.

“**Service of the universal Church**” would be her third focus of action. The International Union of Superiors General would proceed with its renewal. It was during the Council that a breath of unity and universality came into everyone’s minds. This would culminate in the plan of study that would lead to the formulation of statutes, bringing about a real institutionalisation of the directing entities of the Union: the General Council and the General Assembly.

Mother Guillemin was an active member of this foundation which would take place at the Rome residence of the Motherhouse, Casa Maria Immacolata.

When visiting the Provinces of the Little Company on the other continents, Mother Guillemin was invited by the Conference of Religious of Latin America to reflect on “the problems of religious life in Latin America and to find possible solutions.” This is one example.

The Union of Major Superiors in France requested her collaboration on various occasions, as did the Catholic Associations in various regions in France.

On March 8th 1967, Mother Guillemin was named Consultant to the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace by Pope Paul VI. This allowed her to promote the fundamental concepts contained in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, for the Company through her writings in the Echoes of the Motherhouse and for consecrated life in general via the International Union of Superiors General.

Post-conciliar meetings of the specialist commissions for Consecrated Life and the Apostolate of the Laity also benefited from her collaboration.

AGGIORNAMENTO: FROM WORDS...TO ACTIONS

Several months before the closing of the Council, Mother Guillemin addressed the Company in the April issue of the Echoes in order to sensitise the Sisters to the work to come and the nature of it. “...*the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...*”³ “...It simply means knowing if our external actions are really the extension of our interior attitude, and if our life is being lived in the light of truth, in God’s sight. Mother Guillemin listed the three major topics to be studied:

- Rediscovering and deepening our understanding of God’s will for us, that is, the original authenticity of our vocation, while discovering the demands of the Church and the world of today.
- Adapting our methods of formation to this established goal, taking into account different backgrounds and contemporary thinking.
- Revising and revitalising the forms and formulas that help us to live out and express our vocation.

³ Jn. 4:23.

The key word in her text is **formalism**; to avoid this is to live according to truth, either in our relationship with God, or with our brothers and sisters, in our way of practising the Rules and observing the Vows. A quotation from Pope John XXIII clarifies her position on our relationship with God:

“It is not a matter of mechanical repetition of formulas, but of an indispensable means of coming into contact with the Lord, of understanding better the dignity of Daughters of God, Spouses of the Holy Spirit, the ‘dulcis hospes animae’⁴ who speaks to anyone who listens to Him in recollection.”

Mother Guillemin concluded the development of this research with some encouraging words: *“...light on this point can only be a gift from God. The gift of a more lively faith to enlighten our outlook on all that makes up the framework of our life...it is faith that will allow us to discover the mystery of love hidden in all the little acts of fidelity.”*

AGGIORNAMENTO ...WITH THE PASSING OF TIME

After the election of Sister Suzanne Guillemin as Superioress General of the Company on June 11th 1962, the Visitatrices remained with the General Council to address certain urgent matters. Beginning in October, the Superior General, Father Slattery, in an address to all the Sisters, announced with great sensitivity certain changes: *“...without a doubt, all religious communities need to carry out a revision of their practices from time to time...modifications of customs are particularly necessary at some time or other for communities which are not strictly isolated from the world in the way that cloistered orders are...certain practices that have never changed and that date to a particular time period, appear to have become outdated...this work of adaptation will not be left to the whims of one person; the modifications relating to your practices will be decided by your major superiors after mature reflection and fervent prayer...”*

In 1963, the community prayers were revised; Mother Guillemin had already requested on October 11th of the previous year that the antiphon of the Blessed Virgin that was used to conclude Compline be sung at the end of evening prayer. Beginning on September 8th 1963 a hymn for Lauds was introduced into Morning Prayer.

The cycle of meditations, entitled Meditations on Scripture Texts and the Conferences of Saint Vincent, was revised. To the great satisfaction of the Sisters, Father Diebold, CM. prepared meditations for the first Saturday of the month as a complement to the daily meditations.

1964 – On August 15th Mother Guillemin announced the change of the habit and the days of study planned for 1965. Another event would be taking place; Mother Guillemin was called to the Council.

⁴ The soul's delightful guest

In a retreat at the Motherhouse, Mother Guillemin shared with the Sisters the repercussions of this call: “...*the fact of being involved in this great Assembly of the Church seems to me to be a way that God is blessing the Community’s belonging to the Church.*”

Her circular letter of August 15th stated that “*the Council has judged that a work of research and thorough study be undertaken in the spirit of the Council to enable us to keep in step with the Church ...it is important that we be able to distinguish and reaffirm together **the essential values** of our vocation, seek the means of enabling the Sisters to respond to them, and ensure the form in which the customs will be practised by all, something that is all the more demanding since they will be trimmed of all that is superfluous.*”

On October 21st a circular letter announced a **general consultation** of the Company in preparation for the study days. “...*it is not enough for the Superiors, Visitatrices and Sister Servants to study the question of aggiornamento and renewal in the community, it is the duty of each Sister to reflect before God on her role in the Church and in the Community...the main thrust of this work is **values.***”

The second theme to be studied concerned formation: here the Seminary Directresses, the Sisters in the Juniorate and the Sisters responsible for postulants were consulted. The Director General contacted the Provincial Directors to learn their thoughts on this subject.

The Customs Book would be the third topic of consultation for the Community. Mother Guillemin encouraged “*each one of you, when you express your wishes for the revision of the Customs Book, to do so with the realisation that you have a responsibility to the entire Community.*”

The result of this first general consultation was positive, very positive. In a conference to Sisters in retreat at the Motherhouse, Mother Guillemin expressed her joy. “*We have received the responses, almost all of which are veritable theses that could be presented at university level, and we have an extremely short and simple task before us; but I think that from a spiritual perspective, from the longest response to the shortest, from the wisest to the simplest, our great joy has been to find a perfect, **absolute unity of spirit.** This is simply beautiful. We realised that the Lord was speaking in the same fashion in all the Provinces, and that the major aspects of the teaching of Saint Vincent, this teaching that is so pure because it is the teaching of the Gospel, truly remains the force that animates us. Even despite our deficiencies – and God knows we have them – the spirit and the will show integrity. We have much to thank God for....*”

AGGIORNAMENTO LITURGICAL REFORM

On December 4th 1963, the Constitution on the Liturgy was promulgated. It announced a new era of liturgical renewal for the entire Church after 400 years of continuity for the Roman liturgy in which the people of God passively participated in the display of ritual pomp and ceremony, seeking to nurture a personal religious experience through private devotions. Nevertheless, religious fervour guided the faithful from baptism to burial; in attending Sunday Mass it was quite possible to

experience the spirit by which the liturgy inspired secular life itself. Civil holidays were religious feasts: the customs of the seasons and the months were borrowed from sacred mysteries. Popular hymns celebrated events in salvation history. The angelus bells rang out through the countryside. The village church was the centre of all human activity.

Times have changed, however. Gradually, through the work of reflection in the domains of history, theology and pastoral ministry, while discovering the richness of the rites, certain obstacles also came to light. The Council was responding to these shortcomings. Through the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Church developed general directives and doctrinal themes that were of primary importance for liturgical renewal.

Mother Guillemin wasted no time in setting in motion an awareness of the importance of reform for the Company. Even when she was still Sister Servant at the Centrale, the liturgy was one of her favourite topics for reflection with her companions. She confided this work of information and investigation to Father Jamet, the Director General at the time. On September 26th 1964, the Instruction from the Post-Conciliar Commission appeared, presenting the application of the Constitution on the Liturgy that would be put into effect on March 3rd 1965. Careful study of this instruction was necessary since it included certain modifications of the organisation of the Mass itself.

Father Jamet provided formation for the Company through an article in the Echoes of the Motherhouse in which he pointed out the true scale of values and duties: God has first place, and prayer is our first duty. The Constitution demands that the exercises of prayer should take into account the liturgical seasons. It included some guidelines to help in understanding:

- Introduction of the vernacular
- Greater emphasis on the Word of God
- Simplification of rites
- Principle of an adaptation of the liturgy

This last point, "adaptation of the liturgy" was accompanied by a short commentary from Father Jamet: *"The Church is one, but unity is not the same as uniformity; Christians remain persons of their own time, race and civilisation; it is important that their joys, pains, prayers and penance be translated into meaningful words, gestures and symbols. The African and Asian bishops were the ones who most emphasised this need for adaptation. Why impose on an African person, who sings and dances, or an Asian, who is quiet and contemplative, our liturgy that is so profoundly marked by the western spirit? There is an unchanging aspect of the liturgy, and with all adaptations, the liturgy must safeguard the noble characteristic of the prayer of the Church and its harmony throughout the world, **with careful attention to avoiding individual initiatives and reckless innovations.** To this end, the Council has given authority to the bishops' conferences to ensure this adaptation."*

The Community began to enter into the spirit of the Council with a formulary of prayers and new meditations inspired by the feast days and liturgical seasons. The life of prayer, however, was not limited to the liturgy. *"To seek in the liturgy,"* wrote Father Jamet, *"effective teaching, involvement and gathering side by side as Sisters to*

share a community celebration, feeling a collective emotion, all this risks overlooking the essential thing which is interior silence, freedom for contemplation, in order to enter, by faith, into the mystery and communion with God. It is meditation that prepares one for a conscious, active and fruitful participation in the liturgy.”

This powerful presentation on liturgical reform concluded with some practical directives coming from the Instruction: that liturgical formation be provided for all men and women in consecrated life. Is this concern for formation evident in your local communities?

- In the days preceding the actual implementation of the text, preparation for it included procuring the necessary missals and booklets. In community gatherings, the Sisters were to reread the text of the instruction and try to understand together the significance of each change.

- In houses that have a chaplain, the Sisters were to remember that the chaplain had authority for all that concerned worship and liturgy. He was under the obligation to conform to the directives set up by the bishops.

- Before making any modifications in the chapel or the altar, the competent ecclesial authority was to be consulted.

- On Saturday evenings, the Sisters were to prepare together the Mass for Sunday.

And here is the spiritual note from Father Jamet: *“May the Liturgy, which is the assembly of the people of God around Christ, be for your local communities a source of union of hearts and minds.”*

For Mother Guillemin, the Liturgy was not only to be celebrated on the altars of prayer but also on the living altar of the heart. The liturgy has an interior, spiritual dimension and whenever the Church celebrates liturgy, Christ is truly present. The liturgical reform recommended that the Liturgy of the Hours be celebrated in a manner that was communitarian and solemn. So it was necessary to learn how to celebrate it. The Conference of Major Superiors in France took measures to provide formation concerning the Divine Office. One such session was organised in Angers to bring together the contemplative religious orders and those having apostolic activities. The Company was represented by two Sisters from the Motherhouse and two Sisters from the Centrale. The general theme of “The importance of the Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office” was very broad because it included the sanctification of the whole day and the elements of the Liturgy of the Hours in the various celebrations during the year-long liturgical cycle. The days of this session were filled with conferences, studying the themes of the Constitution on the Liturgy, practical applications of the topics and above all, study of the psalms.

For the Company, it was a matter for reflection. It was new, but greatly appreciated. Once again, it was Father Jamet who would help the Sisters in the Motherhouse. In the retreat room, he explained the structure of the Office with its intrinsic rules, the psalmody, the brief Scripture reading. He did not hesitate to come several times to practise all this. Mother Guillemin’s thinking went even further. This

was a real upheaval on the practical level for the Sisters. To remedy this situation and in order to move progressively in an understanding of what was possible to carry out faithfully, she introduced a **Liturgy Commission** to facilitate participation and understanding of the liturgy. This required ongoing effort, one that was continually made with faith, attention and recollection. Father Jamet would be the President, and Sister Rocha, General Councillor for the Portuguese-speaking Sisters, would guide the proceedings of the meetings. There was not only the Liturgy of the Hours, morning and evening, there was also Mass, the Sacraments and “devotions.” The Sisters expressed their opinions. It was necessary to find solutions that were in keeping with our vocation, and even more so as the work of applying the liturgical reform required time and thought. The renewal, as had been foreseen, could not be accomplished by the mechanical observation of a set number of directives; rather it was education and formation that were needed.

The Liturgy Commission worked diligently. The Sisters of the Motherhouse were open to change. So all the customary practices were brought into question: feast days, novenas, rosary, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, hymns, music. It was necessary to find means of explaining these to the Company in general. Mother Guillemin spoke during retreats and sessions in order to inform the Sisters, provide explanations and ease worried minds. Later on, the documentary bulletins sent out by the Centrale would include a text each month that would help the Sisters to better understand the different stages, the variations in celebrations and the new aspects that had been introduced.

All over the world the Sisters would profit from the teachings of their bishops and decisions made over time, *“but for everyone, what is expected is a change of mentality, a genuine new education regarding our liturgical life with a great common effort that is generous and disciplined.”* (French Episcopate, 1964)

December 4th 1963 was an historic date that inaugurated a new era in the prayer and life of the Church. The Superiors of the Company understood its challenges and took necessary measures. To conclude the explanations just given, here is an example.

In April 1964 in Ballainvilliers, at the end of a catechetical formation session to obtain a national catechist diploma, Father Diebold said, *“According to Saint Vincent, the Daughters of Charity are catechists by vocation”*. How could all of this be used? How could the serious challenges of modern catechesis faced by catechists be made known and reflected upon together? The answer can be found in an invitation given by Mother Guillemin to 320 Daughters of Charity at the 4th National Congress of Religious Education taking place in Paris. The theme was “How can we speak about God to people of today?” There was an enthusiastic response to the invitation to participate. There was also a “follow-up to the Congress” at the Motherhouse with the Superior General, Father Slattery, who came over from Rome, Mother Guillemin and the General Council, the Visitatrices, the Provincial Directors and those who had attended the Congress. It was not a question of looking back with satisfaction on the journey that had already been made, but of reinforcing the need to study together, calmly and clearly, this difficult apostolic situation caused by lack of information and conversion.

Mass was presided over by Father Slattery, and animated by Father Vanstenkiste, a professor of Liturgy and Sacred Scripture, Assistant Director of the Scholasticate of Saint Lazare, who led the singing and the common prayers. The morning session was dedicated to catechesis, and the afternoon one focused on Liturgy.

Father Diebold, professor of Sacred Scripture at the major seminary in Verdun, and member of the managerial staff of the Higher Institute of Catechetical Ministry in Paris, presented the topic, **Catechesis in the mission of the Daughter of Charity**. Several symposia followed his presentation, and the summary was of great interest. In particular, it expressed the great concern of all the Sisters to make God known in a turbulent world. In the closing ceremony Mother Guillemin emphasised the Sisters' desire to continue to better understand the doctrine that they were to teach.

In the afternoon, the Sisters gathered to hear Father Vanstenkiste present the new Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy. The explanation of the seven chapters was a bit dry, but the spirit animating them was brought out so clearly throughout the study that the listener felt more prepared than ever to enter wholeheartedly into the reforms that had been announced. *“Vatican II requires of us a change of mentality: that is the real challenge of the Constitution. If aggiornamento, the updating of the liturgy, were to be a matter of simply revising the external features of ritual, it would be in vain. The real updating is spiritual in nature, and that is what demands our attention above all else.”*

Present at this conference was Canon Honoré, (today Cardinal Jean Honoré), who at the time was Director of the National Centre of Religious Education. In his brief and very warm remarks to the group, he expressed his appreciation of the double family as well as the confidence he placed in it.

The day concluded in the Chapel of St. Lazare. Father Vanstenkiste invited the Sisters to hear once again the Lord's call to those whom he carefully chooses: “I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’”⁵

AGGIORNAMENTO... APPLICATION OF THE CONCILIAR TEXTS

On August 6th 1966, Pope Paul VI signed the document *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, which established new laws and regulations in response to needs in the new apostolic arenas that had been brought to light by the Council. The new regulations contained specific points relating to the adaptation and renewal of religious life that would be put into effect on October 11th 1966.

As a matter of interest, we should note certain criteria for renewal emphasised in the document. This will help us to understand more clearly the purpose and the need for revising the Constitutions that Mother Guillemin initiated. She saw this as an obligation imposed by the Church on all religious institutes throughout the world. “A

⁵ (Is 6: 8)

*special general chapter, ordinary or extraordinary, should be convened within two or at most three years to promote adaptation and renewal in each institute.*⁶

THE CRITERIA FOR ADAPTATION AND RENEWAL ACCORDING TO *ECCLESIAE SANCTAE*

15. The norms and spirit to which adaptation and renewal must correspond should be gathered not only from the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* but also from other documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially from chapters 5 and 6 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*.

16. *The institutes should take care that the principles established in No. 2 of the Decree Perfectae Caritatis really do inspire the renewal of their religious life; therefore:*

(1) Study and meditation on the Gospels and the whole of Sacred Scripture should be more earnestly fostered by all members from the beginning of their novitiate. Likewise, care should be taken that they share in the mystery and life of the Church in more suitable ways;

(2) The various aspects (theological, historical, canonical, etc.) of the doctrine of the religious life should be investigated and explained.

(3) For the good of the Church, the institutes should strive for a genuine knowledge of their original spirit, so that faithfully preserving this spirit in determining adaptations, their religious life may thus be purified of alien elements and freed from those which are obsolete.

17. *Those elements are to be considered obsolete which do not constitute the nature and purpose of the institute and which, having lost their meaning and power, are no longer a real help to religious life. Nevertheless, consideration must be given to the witness which the religious state has the obligation of giving.*

18. *The form of government should be such that "the chapters and councils... each in its own way express the participation and concern of all the members for the welfare of the whole community" (No. 14 of the Decree Perfectae Caritatis). This will be achieved especially if the members have a really effective part in selecting the members of these chapters and councils. Similarly the form of government should be such that the exercise of authority is made more effective and unhindered according to modern needs. Therefore, superiors on every level should be given sufficient powers so that useless and too frequent recourse to higher authorities is not multiplied.*

19. *Nevertheless, suitable renewal cannot be made once and for all, but should be encouraged in an ongoing way, with the help of the zeal of the members and the solicitude of the chapters and superiors.*

⁶ *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, no.3

These texts do not provide formulas that can be used directly for the Constitutions, but instead, trace out pathways and open up a new spirit for the work of renewal. It is also advisable to use the papal documents, as well as the historical and spiritual documents of each institute. In this way, all adaptation will be based on a profound spiritual renewal which is the principal aim of this renewal and one which applies even when developing new works. This is clearly the understanding that Pope Paul VI intended when he addressed the Daughters of Charity gathered in Rome in 1965 at the Business Assembly: *“Daughters of God and Daughters of the Church, you desire to be faithful to your vocation of serving Christ in the Poor, spiritually and corporally, and to do this you experience more than ever your need to ‘be clothed with the mind of Christ’ and ‘to live Christ in His Mysteries.’ It is this very fidelity and your concern to carry to the Poor the convincing witness of the Charity of the Church which leads you today to revise your Book of Customs and to adapt the structures and methods of Sister formation...Therein lies your true fidelity, for that is what Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac desired.”*

AGGIORNAMENTO – FORMATION

“...Religious should strive during the whole course of their lives to perfect the culture they have received, in spiritual matters and in the arts and sciences. Likewise, superiors must, as far as this is possible, obtain for them the opportunity, the means and the time to do this.” (P.C. n°18) After a careful reading of this article 18 of the decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, one is convinced of the need for genuine formation that aims at the development of one’s natural as well as supernatural talents, supported by an authentic doctrinal, apostolic and technical formation that each one must continually perfect throughout her life.

This implies the need for formation personnel who have a broad perspective as well as the requisite human and Christian qualities. It requires seeing the person in the totality of her being, someone who is consecrated to the Lord while at the same time involved in the life of humanity. The perfection of the Daughter of Charity therefore requires her to constantly seek greater union with God and at the same time a greater sense of being fully human. In this way she will be a sign of the Church: the Church of God and the Church of humanity.

All these considerations had been among Mother Guillemin’s concerns for more than ten years: she saw that it was no longer appropriate to work purely out of charity and without the necessary competence. The formation of members must cover spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal and technical domains. It also seemed absolutely essential that adult religious formation be based on a sense of personal responsibility. Had she not introduced this view of future formation to the bishops in Rome during the Council? As she saw it, the spiritual challenge facing contemporary religious life was to give women religious a true and profound awareness of their legitimate place among the people of God with the strict obligations of spiritual poverty as well as their communion with the world with its demands for dialogue and competence.

FROM PROJECTS... TO ACTIONS

Apostolic activity is not the work of an amateur, it requires adequate formation. From the time of the foundation of the Centrale, Mother Guillemin envisaged two inseparable aspects of formation: formation that included technical, scientific and cultural dimensions, and at the same time, put equal emphasis on development of doctrinal and religious knowledge. “...to honour their patron Our Lord, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the poor persons, sometimes as a child, or someone in need, or a sick person, or a prisoner or others who through shame fail to make known their wants.” (Common Rules, 1.1) This text speaks for itself in eliciting a response from the formators.

It is impossible to present all the achievements made prior to Vatican Council II, or afterwards, everything that *Ecclesiae Sanctae* required. Sessions, congresses, extensive formation sessions for all areas of apostolic work, and information regularly shared in the documentary bulletins most certainly convinced each Sister of the importance of formation.

SESSION FOR SISTER SERVANTS

On the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the death of the Founders, a session in Paris brought together 435 Sister Servants from France along with Visitatrices or Sister Servants from the following Provinces: Germany, Belgium, Spain, Great Britain, Holland, Portugal and Switzerland.

Several Vincentians and specialists including Bishop Garonne, Bishop de Bazelaire and Father Rochet shed light on the topic, **Essential values, today's values**, examining how these values are lived out in today's world. Seeking together what Christ intends for the Little Company today – making itself available to the calls of the Church coming from many directions and the areas of action that it prioritises – and finally putting our vocation of charity in perspectives that are more and more ecclesial and Gospel-based.

The work began in all the local communities well before the actual gathering, with prayers and special readings chosen to introduce the Sister Servants and their companions to the background of the gathering. Circular letters, articles in the Echoes and catechetical guidelines for the Sisters continually directed everyone to the teachings and example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, as to an ever-flowing stream. Over 8000 Masses were celebrated “among us,” as the chronicle of the Motherhouse reported, in order to promote the spirit of charity even more. In a time when everything was open to question, the session provided a response: in-depth study that shed light on the current difficulties and multiple problems posed by evangelisation in today's world.

The organisation and the preparation for the day to day working of the session was Mother Guillemin's responsibility, with the blessing of the Major Superiors⁷.

SPECIALIST SESSIONS

Locations: Motherhouse and Ballainvilliers

⁷ The supplement of the Echoes n° 11 – December 1960 gives all the details of this session

The specialist sessions were wide-ranging. The spirit of the Gospel is the spirit in which the Company has sought to establish itself since the time of its origins. Saint Vincent asked us to commit ourselves to keeping our eyes continually fixed on Christ who is alive in the midst of humankind. Our first response to God's call was an act of faith. This outlook must be continually lived out each day in the details of situations that risk being invaded by material needs, professional obligations and various currents of thought.

Saint Vincent did not dissociate "mission" and "charity", but the Daughters of Charity are formed for the mission. *"You see, dear Sisters, you can't all be alike; some are suitable for nursing the sick, others for schools. It's up to Superiors to decide what you're suited for."* In another conference to the Sisters, Saint Vincent was more specific: *"Now, the Daughters of Charity must teach poor persons the things necessary for their salvation; therefore, the Sisters themselves have to be instructed first before being able to teach others."*⁸

The need for formation is expressed in various ways. It is seen as a desire to return to the sources of faith: knowledge of the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, theological reflection. Being responsible for a specific service in the Church, such as catechesis, liturgy, preparing people for the sacraments, or various forms of animation, awakens the desire for special formation geared to a given ministry.

The stage had been set, and the catechesis sessions allowed the Sisters to be formed with a view to taking on more responsibility.

(to be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Services

⁸ Coste X, p. 503

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Our Lady of the whole world, pray for us