

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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Letter of November 12, 2013

My dear Sisters,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us forever!

We have read and heard and seen the devastation left by the passage of Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines. The Visitatrix, Sister Efleda Ferriols, not being able to get electricity last Friday at the height of the typhoon, was able to write the following day, Saturday, while the typhoon continued to ferociously slam other parts of the country, on its way to Vietnam and China. I would like to share with you excerpts from her letter: *It's truly the strongest and most intense typhoon we have experienced ... many areas in the country have been devastated, with many houses turned into rubble.* We do not know, as yet, the cost to human lives because many areas are still unreachable, but we do know from reports that at least 10,000 persons died in just one city.

Haiyan/Yolanda battered central Philippines or what is known as the Visayas Islands where we have many Communities. This is the same part of the country where two cities (Bohol and Cebu) suffered from a 7.2 magnitude earthquake last month. Quoting liberally from the Visitatrix's letter, allow me to share with you some scenes, both hopeful and painfully sad:

The typhoon entered from the Pacific Ocean through Eastern Visayas, principally the Samar/Leyte region where the Province has already turned over its missions to the Dioceses. Thus, we no longer have any Sisters in this region. One of the worst-hit cities was Tacloban:



Spiritual Life

Letter of November 12, 2013

Tacloban City suffered the worst of the typhoon... Seeing the devastation has made me weep. I really feel for the parents whose children were drowned in the evacuation centers.

In Cebu, our Sisters in Colegio de la Inmaculada in Mandaue are safe; the school served as evacuation center for 500 informal settlers near the seaside... What truly touched our hearts was the fact that some of the village leaders in the neighboring poor communities volunteered to help in cleaning up the disarray caused by the typhoon... teachers and other lay mission partners arrived to help even if classes were still suspended. The Sisters from the Colegio de la Inmaculada in Gorordo (our nearby school) also brought bags of relief supplies for the evacuees.

In Northern Cebu... I have been trying to contact the Sisters (in our schools) in Bogó and Daanbantayan but I was not able to call them because electric power, telephone lines, and cellphone sites were cut-off or destroyed. This afternoon I received a message from one of the Sisters in Bogó telling me that the typhoon has horribly devastated the area... I tried to call but I cannot get through. I requested Colegio de la Inmaculada, Gorordo to send Sisters to Bogó...

In Masbate, the Sisters helped in the evacuation of the poor in the coastal areas. They negotiated with one of the benefactors to make use of one of their buildings as an evacuation center. All the Sisters are safe... and attribute it to the protection and intercession of Mary, the only Mother of the Company.

In Western Visayas: one of the worst-hit areas was Roxas City.

The roof of St. Anthony Hospital was ripped off, but God is so good because before the ceiling in the third floor collapsed, the Sisters and staff were able to transfer the patients to lower floors. It reminded me of the experience of St. Louise and the first Sisters when the ceiling of the Mother House collapsed.

In Iloilo City, in the Colegio del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus, 200 evacuees living in the coastal areas sought refuge and stayed for more than a day in the school campus.

In Boracay, our Sisters evacuated together with the Atis (indigenous people). The roof of the Sisters' residence was also blown away by strong winds. So far there are no reported casualties in the areas where our Sisters are.

In New Washington Aklan, the mango trees beside the house of the Sisters were all uprooted, but their house was spared from destruction.

Our Sisters in Manila are now helping to pack relief goods in the office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. We will be sending Sisters to respond to the needs of those in the devastated areas as soon as airline operations are resumed.

Let me end by quoting Sister Efleda's last paragraph: Please continue praying for us and our brothers and sisters who continue to suffer the effects of intermittent calamities. In the midst of all these successive tragedies in our country, we continue to trust that God will never abandon us... While we need to accept these sufferings, please pray that those affected in the Visayas especially in Bohol will not be cast into despair. May our people continue to hold on to the belief that even the most disastrous storms can never defeat God and His love, for nothing is more powerful than Him.

Let us be united in prayer for our Sisters - those in the Philippines and those in the missions - and for members of the Vincentian Family. Many come from the Visayas Islands, and their families have been affected in varying degrees. While writing this letter, another storm has entered the Philippine area of responsibility; locally named 'Zoraida', it is affecting the Mindanao Islands and, again, parts of the Visayas. Let us entrust the Filipino people to the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the country!

With my devoted affection,

Sister Evelyne FRANC
Daughter of Charity

Letter of November 26, 2013

Dear Sisters,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us forever!

I sincerely wish you a holy and happy triduum of the Feasts of November 27, 28 and 29 and share some news of the Company.

Each year on November 27 it is a joy to relive the apparition of the Immaculate Virgin Mary to Sister Catherine Labouré: to receive the gift of the Miraculous Medal and its message along with Saint Catherine; to admire the Virgin who tenderly and firmly holds the globe placed between her hands; to renew our confidence in her intercession: *“These rays are the symbol of the graces which I will pour out on the persons who ask me for them”* and to rediscover the invocation *“O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you”* in preparation for the Feast of December 8.

The following day, November 28, we review and meditate on the life of Saint Catherine, totally permeated with the virtues of the Daughters of Charity: the peasant woman from Burgundy, faithful to her duty, hardworking and already very close to Mary; the very ordinary Seminary Sister who went unnoticed and whom the Virgin chose as her messenger; the Sister in Reuilly, a humble and loving servant of those who are poor and her Sisters, a strong woman during revolutionary upheavals; the Sister silent about the apparitions of the Virgin and always in interior dialogue with her.

This year, November 29 marks the 380th anniversary of the foundation of the Company and offers us an additional opportunity to thank the Lord for the charisma that He gave to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Let us remember how *“on the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew, Mademoiselle*

Le Gras gathered the first girls together under the same roof” in order to form servants totally given to God, united in Community and completely available to serve those who are poor corporally and spiritually. Let us give thanks for belonging to the Company, to this long chain of faithful servants who, like Saint Catherine, saw *“God in everything, everything in God and everything for God.”*

In my previous letter, I wrote about the tragedy caused in the Philippines by Typhoon Yolanda. The Visitatrix, Sister Efleda Ferriols, wrote to me again to tell me that some Sisters of the Province along with lay collaborators have already been sent to the scene of the catastrophe to distribute initial food aid, provide spiritual assistance and evaluate projects that will be developed during a second phase (housing, planting, etc.). Sister Efleda asked me to thank you for your prayers and support.

You know that central Vietnam also suffered from the same typhoon. We do not have any local communities in that region, but the Sisters have gone to bring assistance to the victims. In the south of the country, flooding is also causing great damage.

The Province of Sardinia (Italy) has been affected as well by torrential rains that caused significant damage on a human and material level. Our prayers are with the victims and their families who are living through difficult times.

I would like to again bring up the situation of our Sisters in Damascus (Syria), Safa (Central African Republic) and the northern region of Nigeria, who courageously continue their ministries in a violent environment. In Eritrea, the population’s daily life is worsening (lack of food and water, power outages in the cities, shortages of medicine and fuel); despite all this, the Sisters still manage to keep their schools and clinics open and distribute aid to the most destitute. We also know how many other countries suffer from major political instability: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt...

So many intentions to present to the Lord through the hands of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal!

Letter of November 26, 2013

On September 18, the General Council appointed Sister Mary Louise Stubbs, from the Province of St. Louise-USA, as the new director of IPS (International Project Services). Sister Mary Louise will begin to work with Sister Felicia Mazzola in February 2014 and, after an orientation period, will take on responsibility for IPS.

In addition, the General Council appointed Sister Purita Espaldon, from the Province of the Philippines, to replace Sister Felicia on the International Finance Commission. Sister Felicia and Sister Purita will participate together in the April 2014 meeting.

I wish to thank Sister Mary Louise, Sister Purita and their respective Visitatrixes for the generosity and availability they have shown. I also express the Company's gratitude to Sister Felicia for her dynamic contribution to the International Finance Commission and for the excellent work that she has enthusiastically and perseveringly carried out at IPS on behalf of those who are poor in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.

I conclude this note by wishing you a very fervent Advent season.

Let us live this path of hope in union with all those who await the coming of a new world. Let us help them discover the way of poverty and humility that leads to Bethlehem.

What I hear about your Domestic Assemblies is very positive. The Spirit has been at work in the Company... for 380 years!

I entrust my prayer for each one of you to Mary, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

With my devoted affection,

Sister Evelyne FRANC
Daughter of Charity

Advent 2013

“...and a little child shall guide them.” Is. 11:6

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

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

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

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

Hope and renewal are sorely needed in today's world. The realities of war, violence, poverty, hunger, and injustice all plague us as we live out the Vincentian charism. However, they are not “problems to be solved” but points of entry into solidarity with the human family.

Advent 2013

Advent awakens and renews our hearts in hope with Christ, our way, truth, and life.

THE EVENT: INCARNATION

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

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

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

THE RESULT: TRANSFORMATION

It is not enough to “enjoy” Advent’s trappings and bask in the “glory of the Christmas story”. Like all moments in the Church’s life and liturgy, Advent is a season of formation for transformation. It challenges us to imitate Christ who, *“for your sake became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich”* (2 Cor 8:9). The poverty Jesus undertook for us and the richness he bestowed on us came in his incarnation, literally, his “enfleshment” of our human condition. How do we “enflesh” Christ in our lives?

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

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

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

THE RESPONSE: LIVING VINCENTIAN VIRTUES

A favorite poster I once received was of the back yard of a small country house. In the center was a woman hanging laundry out to dry, a familiar scene the world over. It held a simple message: *“Love is hard work.”* How true! Sometimes, the “hard work” of discipleship can

feel overwhelming or impossible. That is how transformation starts: allowing the person of Jesus and the way of St. Vincent to shape our lives, so we become a virtuous extension of the Gospel.

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

This Advent let us take time to examine the level of simplicity and humility in our own lives. Often at odds with the "ways of the world", they were essential to Jesus and St. Vincent. In my travels, I am always edified in my encounters with the members of the Vincentian Family who live the virtues of simplicity and humility in word and deed. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, inspires the world with his great witness of simplicity and humility. Reflect on his words below: "*Look, there is Someone who wants what is good for you- Who calls you by name- and Who has chosen you. The one thing that is asked of you is that you let yourself be loved.*"

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

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Father G. Gregory GAY, CM
Superior General

**Rekindle the bond of fraternity,
the key for "living together in great union
and cordiality"**

In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced.

Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace. We should remember that fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.

The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today's world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another. But this vocation is still frequently denied and ignored in a world marked by a "globalization of indifference" which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.

In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. The tragic phenomenon of human trafficking,

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in which the unscrupulous prey on the lives and the desperation of others, is but one unsettling example of this. Alongside overt armed conflicts are the less visible but no less cruel wars fought in the economic and financial sectors with means which are equally destructive of lives, families and businesses.

Globalization, as Benedict XVI pointed out, makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers. The many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fuelling that “throw away” mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered “useless”. [...]

At the same time, it appears clear that contemporary ethical systems remain incapable of producing authentic bonds of fraternity, since a fraternity devoid of reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation is unable to endure. True brotherhood among people presupposes and demands a transcendent Fatherhood. Based on the recognition of this fatherhood, human fraternity is consolidated: each person becomes a “neighbor” who cares for others.

“WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER?” (Gen 4:9)

To understand more fully this human vocation to fraternity, to recognize more clearly the obstacles standing in the way of its realization and to identify ways of overcoming them, it is of primary importance to let oneself be led by knowledge of God’s plan, which is presented in an eminent way in sacred Scripture.

According to the biblical account of creation, all people are descended from common parents, Adam and Eve, the couple created by God in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26), to whom Cain and Abel were born. In the story of this first family, we see the origins of society and the evolution of relationships between individuals and peoples.

Abel is a shepherd, Cain is a farmer. Their profound identity and their vocation is to be brothers, albeit in the diversity of their activity and

culture, their way of relating to God and to creation. Cain’s murder of Abel bears tragic witness to his radical rejection of their vocation to be brothers. Their story (cf. Gen 4:1-16) brings out the difficult task to which all men and women are called, to live as one, each taking care of the other. Cain, incapable of accepting God’s preference for Abel who had offered him the best of his flock – “The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Gen 4:4-5) – killed Abel out of jealousy. In this way, he refused to regard Abel as a brother, to relate to him rightly, to live in the presence of God by assuming his responsibility to care for and to protect others. By asking him “Where is your brother?”, God holds Cain accountable for what he has done. He answers: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). Then, the Book of Genesis tells us, “Cain went away from the presence of the Lord” (4:16).

We need to ask ourselves what were the real reasons which led Cain to disregard the bond of fraternity and, at the same time, the bond of reciprocity and fellowship which joined him to his brother Abel. God himself condemns and reproves Cain’s collusion with evil: “sin is crouching at your door” (Gen 4:7). But Cain refuses to turn against evil and decides instead to raise his “hand against his brother Abel” (Gen 4:8), thus scorning God’s plan. In this way, he thwarts his primordial calling to be a child of God and to live in fraternity.

The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice: many men and women die at the hands of their brothers and sisters who are incapable of seeing themselves as such, that is, as beings made for reciprocity, for communion and self-giving.

“AND YOU WILL ALL BE BROTHERS” (Mt 23:8)

The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?

World Day of Peace

By paraphrasing his words, we can summarize the answer given by the Lord Jesus: “For you have only one Father, who is God, and you are all brothers and sisters” (cf. Mt 23:8-9). The basis of fraternity is found in God’s fatherhood. We are not speaking of a generic fatherhood, indistinct and historically ineffectual, but rather of the specific and extraordinarily concrete personal love of God for each man and woman (cf. Mt 6:25-30). It is a fatherhood, then, which effectively generates fraternity, because the love of God, once welcomed, becomes the most formidable means of transforming our lives and relationships with others, opening us to solidarity and to genuine sharing.

In a particular way, human fraternity is regenerated in and by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The Cross is the definitive foundational locus of that fraternity which human beings are not capable of generating themselves. Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature in order to redeem it, loving the Father unto death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), has through his resurrection made of us a new humanity, in full communion with the will of God, with his plan, which includes the full realization of our vocation to fraternity.

From the beginning, Jesus takes up the plan of the Father, acknowledging its primacy over all else. But Christ, with his abandonment to death for love of the Father, becomes the definitive and new principle of us all; we are called to regard ourselves in him as brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we are children of the same Father. He himself is the Covenant; in his person we are reconciled with God and with one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus’ death on the Cross also brings an end to the separation between peoples, between the people of the Covenant and the people of the Gentiles, who were bereft of hope until that moment, since they were not party to the pacts of the Promise. As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, Jesus Christ is the one who reconciles all people in himself. He is peace, for he made one people out of the two, breaking down the wall of separation which divided them, that is, the hostility between them. He created in himself one people, one new man, one new humanity (cf. 2:14-16).

All who accept the life of Christ and live in him acknowledge God as Father and give themselves completely to him, loving him above all things. The reconciled person sees in God the Father of all, and, as a

consequence, is spurred on to live a life of fraternity open to all. In Christ, the other is welcomed and loved as a son or daughter of God, as a brother or sister, not as a stranger, much less as a rival or even an enemy. In God’s family, where all are sons and daughters of the same Father, and, because they are grafted to Christ, sons and daughters in the Son, there are no “disposable lives”. All men and women enjoy an equal and inviolable dignity. All are loved by God. All have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who died on the Cross and rose for all. This is the reason why no one can remain indifferent before the lot of our brothers and sisters.

Excerpt from the message of Pope Francis
for the 2014 World Day of Peace

“The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum” From a Biblical Perspective

The intent to speak about “the boldness of Charity” from a biblical perspective offers an “embarrassment of riches.” The very nature of charity suggests a boldness and a momentum which thrusts us into new ways of thinking and acting for the future. In this presentation, I will limit myself to four basic stories: the Good Samaritan, the Rich Young Man, the Last Judgment, and the woman who is a public sinner. In each of these stories, a question is asked and alternative responses to the situations are offered as well as the bold one.

1) THE GOOD SAMARITAN: “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

This is probably one of the two most well-known parables in the New Testament. Jesus tells the parable in response to a specific question asked by a lawyer on the question of charity:

But because [the lawyer] wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which

of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (Lk 10:29-37)

Numerous elements in this story can be of interest to us, as we engage the central question: “Who is my neighbor?”

The victim in the story is ignored by some who travel this route. The two priestly figures who come along this same road where the victim lies see him and pass by on the other side. There is no question of not knowing the troubles of the victim; there is an active effort to avoid him and to shun getting involved in his plight. This is an alternative response to the needs of the poor.

That certainly describes someone for whom the Daughters of Charity would have a particular attraction as we place our emphasis on the most neglected.

Secondly, we notice the complete care which the Samaritan provided—“time, talent, and treasure”. He personally attends to the needs of the victim: “he pours wine and oil over the cuts,” then “he bandages the wounds,” then he “lifts him onto his own animal,” “brings him to an inn,” and “cares for him.” That is how he spends his night! When he is no longer able to continue that level of care directly, he arranges for the needs of the victim in another way: he seeks the help of the innkeeper and provides monetary support with the assurance that he will reimburse additional expenses in the future. The story makes the charity of the Samaritan evident from beginning to end, and it is not a modest charity. It is bold. It involves time and effort and planning and investment. One can imagine the joy and attention with which Jesus constructed this story and its details.

The care which a Daughter of Charity provides for the afflicted also has that total involvement. It is not simply the physical requirements of those who are poor which must be engaged but also the social and spiritual. Not all needs can be met by the Sister; sometimes others must be invited to help in the care of those most deprived. The needs of the poor do not operate according to our own clocks and calendars.

The Boldness of Charity from a Biblical Perspective

Jesus changes the question the lawyer is asking by his story; Jesus asks the lawyer's question in a different way. Do you see the difference? It is really important to do so! At the beginning, the lawyer asks Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" At the end, Jesus asks the lawyer: "Who was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" The question as first asked is from the position of power: "who is neighbor to the influential person who is willing to be generous?" The question as posed by Jesus is: "who is neighbor to the poor person who is in need of assistance?" They are profoundly different questions. The answer to Jesus' question is: whoever is able to provide for the needs of the poor—whatever their race, religion, etc.—is neighbor. Jesus has changed the question of the lawyer and thus profoundly changed the response.

Our neighbor is not simply the person we want to serve, but the person who needs our assistance. The power does not rest with us, but with the one who is in need. The boldness of charity does not lie within my power to choose, but within the person who looks to me for assistance. André Dodin has a wonderful line in his book, *Vincent de Paul and Charity*. He says: "We do not choose the poor, it is they who choose us" (p. 31). That is what it means for them to be our "lords and master." They determine who and how we serve because it is their needs which summon us to action and which must be treated with respect and confidence.

At the end of the parable, Jesus returns to the opening question of the lawyer. For Jesus, the response to questions—particularly questions about charity—can never be theoretical. Listen to the way in which Jesus concludes their conversation:

*[Jesus asked] "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" [The lawyer] answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and **do** likewise."* (Lk 10:36-37)

This response to the lawyer always involves "doing" and doing "with compassion." This is the means for attaining eternal life for the lawyer and for us.

2) THE RICH YOUNG MAN: "WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?"

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Many people come to Jesus to ask him the question about eternal life and about the most important of the commandments. The rich young man who approaches Jesus in his story raises the same issue as the lawyer in the parable of the "Good Samaritan".

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mt 19:16-24)

The man wants to know "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" We, too, want to know the answer to this question. Jesus takes the question seriously and responds with an answer which might be expected of a pious rabbi. He basically says: "keep the commandments." When the man answers that he has always done that, Jesus begins to take a particular interest in him. Jesus wants this man to choose to follow him with boldness. I can see Jesus looking the man straight in the eye and telling him: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mt 19:21).

Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter and sees what could be holding this man back from allowing God to be the absolute center of his life, his possessions. Jesus invites him to relieve himself of these possessions for the benefit of the poor, and then to come and follow him. He offers the man an opportunity to be a disciple! What a privilege!

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But Jesus has identified precisely what it is that will cause the man difficulty. The story puts it succinctly: *“When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions”* (Mt 19:22). The eagerness of the man to do what was right has been deflated. He wanted Jesus to tell him some particular action which he needed to do, some particular virtue which he needed to practice, but he was not prepared for Jesus’ solution. He was comfortable and secure in his wealth. Jesus’ suggestion to abandon all that in order to follow him was more than this man could handle. He goes away sad. One can imagine that Jesus is a little saddened as well, and he turns to his disciples to offer them a lesson on too much dependence on material goods and the bold choices which one must make.

When this man says that he follows the commandments, Jesus believes him. When Jesus invites him to a deeper discipleship, we should believe that this man wants that as well, but he is not prepared to surrender what is most important in his life at that moment: his security in his possessions. Perhaps, with a little time and more reflection, he will come to that point.

Jesus might not ask us to make the same choice. We, too, can say that we keep the commandments, but when Jesus tells us the deeper reality which we must surrender to follow him, it may not deal with material possessions. Are you prepared to identify that one element of which you would need to let go in order for Jesus to genuinely be the most important value in your life?

- to surrender the need to have the right answer all the time?
- to grant forgiveness to those who have hurt us?
- to ask for pardon?

Whatever it is, Jesus looks at us with love, but we turn away sad because that is the one thing which we are unwilling to surrender. This story reminds us of what we must do in order to allow Jesus to be the center of our lives, to call us to greater acts of charity. Jesus wants us to follow him, he asks us to look at our vocation and pay attention to the demands of our charism. We are asked to recognize our special “need” and to be willing to surrender it in order to allow him to take the central place in our lives. We are asked to “become ever more deeply rooted in

Jesus Christ” (IAD, p. 9). As he regarded the rich man, Jesus looks on us with love and invites us to deeper discipleship. We need the grace to be able to respond fully to that invitation.

One of the interesting lessons which this story can teach us about boldness in charity is that we are not in competition with the opinion of other people and with ways of living which others suggest. Sometimes we are encouraged to look more closely into a mirror, to see more deeply within ourselves. When we rediscover the call to live our charism in a faithful but ordinary way, we can find the way of acting as a Daughter of Charity which seems ever fresh. To act boldly as a Daughter of Charity can suggest new roads and different decisions which will upset our preferred and comfortable paths.

The question which we ask ourselves is not: “what do I want to do” or “how do I stay within the bounds imposed by our rules”? The questions become: “Lord, what do you want me to do? What do I/we still lack? Where does boldness in charity lead me?”

3) THE LAST JUDGMENT: “WHEN DID WE EVER SEE YOU HUNGRY?”

This powerful story in Matthew’s Gospel was one of the favorites of St. Vincent. It is presented as a description of the end time! That may attract our attention to its boldness in a particular way.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill

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or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Mt 25:31-46)

Note also the repetitiveness of the telling. We are told over-and-over (four times!) that the Lord is served in the most ordinary of ways—food, clothing, shelter and visits. We need to get the point, and thus it is repeated so that at the end we cannot say “I did not know what I should be doing.” It is simple: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, attend to those imprisoned. The Lord must be served in these ways. It is not complicated, and it means eternal life. None of these tasks is alien to the ministry of the Daughters of Charity!

Both those on the right and the left ask the same question: when did we see **you** hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or in prison? The implication for those rejected is that if they had recognized the Lord, they would have responded positively to his needs. Yet, those who are saved and welcomed into the Kingdom of the Lord voice the same question: when did we see **you** hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or in prison? They did not recognize the Lord in their service, but they carried out their ministry anyway. We remember how Vincent urged us to “turn the medal.” Jesus is not especially evident in the poor but is there nonetheless. We are called to respond to him as he chooses to be present.

Service is not carried out according to our timetable—when we are ready to act. The Lord must be served when the needs are evident: when he is hungry, when he is thirsty, when he is naked, when he is in prison, when he is sick, and so on. The sheep and the goats all ask “when” they did this or did not do this, and the Lord said that it happened whenever they

served the least ones. This readiness to act on their schedule continues to define the poor as our “lords and masters.”

This wondrous story of the Last Judgment again connects us with what is necessary for achieving eternal life—just like the parable of the Good Samaritan and the meeting with the Rich Young Man. The boldness in charity suggested to us in this story can take several forms. First of all, there is a commitment to act when the time is ripe for the needs of the poor. There is an emphasis on Christ being present and served among the poor. The type of service to which we are called involves simple and direct service in terms of what is most needed. Being bold in all these ways suggests the direction for our missionary momentum.

4) THE WASHING OF THE FEET: “HOW DO I WELCOME THE LORD?”

The story of the woman who is a public sinner yet who comes to wash the feet of Jesus is endlessly fascinating for me. It says a lot about the boldness of charity.

A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. . . . [Jesus] turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” (Lk 7:36-38, 44-47)

Notice how the woman serves Jesus. It is completely personal. Another could offer hospitality in a much simpler manner: some water and a towel to wash his own feet, a drop of perfume on the top of a person’s head, a gentle kiss on the cheek in welcome...

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This woman washes Jesus' feet herself with her tears and dries them with her hair. One can wonder about the source and reason for her tears, but they certainly signify her deepest self and her feelings. As these tears provide the water for the washing, her own hair provides the towel for the drying. She invested her whole self in the effort to serve and reverence Jesus. The woman showers his feet with her kisses: "*she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered.*" Her desire to welcome Jesus into her life is profound.

Thinking herself unworthy to come near to the head of Jesus with her oil and to offer her gift there—remember the 23rd Psalm, "*You anoint my head with oil*" (23:5)—she continues her care at his feet. This woman pours her ointment on the feet of Jesus. Considering the boldness of the action of this woman in her care of Jesus, we can ask ourselves what lessons are being offered for our future. Her response to him is in contrast with that of Simon, the Pharisee, who is Jesus' official host.

What does this woman teach us about how we are to carry out our charitable ministry?

We are invited to carry it out with humility. The placement at the feet of Jesus emphasizes that truth. Our service must also be a total investment of self: of our feelings and our person (suggested by her tears and her hair). We give ourselves completely to the ministry and care of those whom we serve and who are in need. And we do so with love. All our resources are brought to bear in the support and care which we bring. Whatever we can do to make their lives more pleasant and humane, we do. One gives the whole of one's self and one's resources, as the woman models for us in this Gospel story.

This narrative of the sinful woman teaches us the boldness of charity. This woman brings herself into an environment in which she was clearly not welcome in order to seek and serve Jesus. She does so without hesitation or embarrassment and with the total gift of herself. She has much to teach us about courage in the carrying out of our charism.

CONCLUSION

The "boldness of charity" is a wonderful phrase. It draws our attention to the dynamic character of the ministry which is ours as Daughters of Charity. It also promotes the missionary momentum which sends us forth in the service of the crucified Christ. The Bible offers an extraordinary basis for reflection and action in this regard. Each of the stories and presentations can enable us to enter into a deeper contemplation and call to action. We have noted the way in which the stories can enable us to ask some questions:

- * Whom should I serve?
- * How shall I serve them?
- * When shall my service take place?
- * What shall I do?

In some ways, these questions are artificial since the stories can be approached in different ways, but the questions can offer a starting point for our thoughts and serve as an example for considering the theme of the "boldness of charity" in other Gospel stories:

- * Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19-31)
- * The widow's mite (Lk 21:1-4)
- * The parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:13-21)
- * Paul's hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13)
- * Jesus' teaching that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)
- * Paul's teaching that "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor 9:7)
- * Entertaining angels (Heb 13:2)
- * Paul's letter to Philemon
- * The multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Mk 6:30-44)
- * The charitable practices of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles (4:32-37)
- * Jesus' finding the inspiration for his ministry in: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (Lk 4:16-30)
- * The healing of blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52)
- * The widow insisting on justice (Lk 18:1-8)
- * What verses/stories would you add?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1) How does the Biblical evidence suggest to us the “boldness of charity” by questioning us on who must be served? What does the parable of the “Good Samaritan” teach you in this regard?

2) When the Lord acknowledges our fidelity to the ordinary demands of our charism, what might he suggest that we still lack as individuals/ as a Province in responding boldly to following him in charity? What might the story of the rich young man teach us?

3) How good is your vision? Can you recognize the Lord in those who are most in need? The story of the Last Judgment in Matthews Gospel (25) places our response to the needy as the essential element for entering into the Kingdom of God! How bold are you in accepting this truth, in welcoming others to this commitment, in responding when the need arises?

4) The story of the woman who comes to wash the feet of Jesus teaches us a lot about activism and total gift of self in humble service. How bold can we be in carrying out the types of service which confront us? Are we willing to invest our whole self? Do you acknowledge that the depth of our service is a sign of the depth of our love?

5) Select a Gospel story; what does it teach us about “the boldness of Charity”? What does it encourage as we think about our Assemblies as Daughters of Charity?

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, CM
Director General

**“The Boldness of Charity”
in Saint Vincent and Saint Louise
From a Charism Perspective**

We have considered the question of the “boldness of charity” from a biblical perspective. Now we will take up this same question from the point of view of our charism.

“And that Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn’t then what it is now, there’s reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it... Since your institution is not the work of human persons, you may therefore boldly declare, Sisters, that it’s the work of God. Surely a Company ordained for a ministry so pleasing to God, so excellent in itself, and so useful to the neighbor can have no other author than God himself.” (Coste IX, p. 194)

I discern three important affirmations in this statement.

*The Company was not then, nor is it now, what God wants it to be. We continue to evolve with God’s grace, and we must seek and respond to that gift. For this reason, we embrace a “new missionary momentum”.

*Our Company is the work of God, and as God’s work we must accept its ups-and-downs as part of the mystery of God’s plan, which is beyond our understanding. Our responsibility is to move boldly and trustingly to where God leads us.

*Our work is pleasing to God, excellent in itself, and useful to our neighbor. As such, it must have a future in God’s plan of charity. We have an important charism to share with the Church, and thus we trust in God’s plan.

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In the previous presentation, we allowed four questions to emerge and to guide our reflections. We noted the way in which the biblical stories enable us to ask always-relevant questions regarding:

- 1) Whom should I serve?
- 2) How shall I serve them?
- 3) When shall my service take place?
- 4) What shall I do?

Let us allow these same questions to direct our reflections on the words and actions of Vincent and Louise. They teach us! The words are familiar, but they must be heard ever-new with the audacity that they offer.

We must grasp the essential point that was at the heart of the theology and instructions of both Vincent and Louise: Christ is among the poor. This point cannot be exaggerated or diminished when we speak about them. Their teaching was solidly incarnational: Christ came among us as flesh and blood. He served and taught and lived among the poor, and he was one of the poor. He sat with them, taught and learned from them, hungered with them, and touched them. The poor are the ones who help us to know Christ; he was, and continues to be, found among them. They continue to teach us about him and enable us to know him. Christ is among the poor, and it is there that he must be served boldly and faithfully.

1) WHOM SHALL I SERVE?

In the Gospel presentation, we considered the story of the Good Samaritan and the response to the question: “who was neighbor to the robbers’ victim.” The Samaritan did not cross the street to avoid the victim, but chose to minister to the one whom fate had placed in his path.

In the time of St. Vincent, there must have been others who saw the desperate plight of the poor. Louise and Vincent choose to stop, take note of the needy among them, and then do something to help. As Fr. André Dodin writes in *Vincent de Paul and Charity*, “We do not choose the poor, it is they who choose us.” (p. 31). That suggests the meaning of our description of the poor as our “lords and masters.”

We know the beginning of Vincent’s story. His experience with the poor country folk whom he encounters first at Clichy and then at Gannes, Folleville and Châtillon (and then a hundred other places) teaches him a lot about the needs of the Church and how he must respond to the corporal and spiritual needs of those who are poor. All this emerges from his practical experience. A British writer offers the warning “beware the person who dreams with his eyes wide open.” Vincent and Louise saw the needs of people and sought the most practical ways of responding. Ways not dared before. They acted boldly.

Whom did they serve?

a) Poor country folk: “*that lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the people to make a general confession*”

The number of priests in the cities and the chaplains available to the people of means, made Vincent more aware of the abandonment of the poor country folk. They had many fewer priests available to serve their needs. Their want for good priests was evident to him. Thus, he founded the Congregation of the Mission to reach out to the people in a particular way. The familiar story of the poor serf at Gannes and then the preaching of Folleville are significant in this regard:

“In the month of January 1617, [...] on the twenty-fifth, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, that lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the people to make a general confession, which I did, pointing out to them its importance and usefulness. Then I taught them how to make it properly; and God had such regard for the confidence and good faith of that lady—for the large number and enormity of my sins would have hindered the success of this act—that He blessed what I said; and those good people were so moved by God that they all came to make their general confession. . . . That was the first sermon of the Mission and the success that God gave it on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul.” (Coste XI, pp. 3-4)

As we well know, Vincent calls this the first sermon of the Mission, and it becomes the touchstone for his other efforts. As he boldly moves from this experience (with the support of the de Gondis) to the founding of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent looks to the teaching of

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Luke 4:16-30 for his particular inspiration and direction: “*He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor*”. This becomes the identifiable trademark of his priests and brothers: the care of the poor through faithful service and proclamation of the Gospel.

Not only does he establish a company of men, he also realizes that the inferior training of the clergy contributes to the rejection of the poor. And so he becomes involved in formation retreats and seminaries. He realizes that the spiritual needs of the poor cannot be separated from their physical needs, and so he begins to organize groups to respond to this situation. A character of boldness in charity is to keep one’s eyes open and to stay on the side of the street where the neglected are located!

b) The orphans: “*compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures as your own children; you have been their mothers according to grace*”

The abuses suffered by the children abandoned on the streets of Paris in the 17th century are well known. Dodin writes that each year more than 300 children were forsaken on the streets and that between 1600-1638 twelve thousand children died of hunger and neglect (p. 37). To repeat these stories of how infants and children were bought, sold, and used as tools for begging is to engage our hearts once again and to call for our tears. Vincent de Paul knew the reality well and spoke to the Ladies of Charity about it. We all know the accounts of Vincent finding rejected orphans and bringing them to Louise and the Ladies. (The two dominant images of Vincent in art portray him either with a crucifix while preaching or with children surrounding him; it is not hard to imagine Jesus similarly.) The problem for so many people of his time, of course, was that these orphans were considered to be the product of sin, and so their care was repugnant to some—including Louise, initially. What can capture our imagination for Louise in this matter is not her initial rejection, but her willingness to overcome her limitation and cross to the side of the streets where one found the orphans and minister to them. And, like the Good Samaritan, her care was not minimal but whole-hearted and committed.

One of Vincent’s most stirring talks is given to the Ladies of Charity as he invites them to a bold response in caring for these orphans when

their charity becomes tepid:

“Well then, Ladies, compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures as your own children; you have been their mothers according to grace since the time their mothers according to nature abandoned them. See now whether you, too, want to abandon them. Stop being their mother to be their judges at present; their life and death are in your hands. I’m going to take the vote; it’s time to pass sentence on them and to find out whether you are no longer willing to have pity on them. If you continue to take charitable care of them, they will live; if, on the contrary, you abandon them, they will most certainly perish and die; experience does not allow you to doubt that.” (Coste XIIIb, pp. 423-24)

Charity cannot be on-and-off. It cannot be for a limited time but according to the needs of those who are poor and who cannot plead for themselves. Their care calls forth a bold and ongoing response. Vincent invites his benefactors to act boldly. He offers no middle ground. Decide.

c) Victims of violence: “*let’s devote ourselves with renewed love to serve persons who are poor, and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned*”

Violence was common in the time of Louise and Vincent: the Thirty Years War and the conflicts of the Fronde, joined to numerous other struggles for power and control, caused suffering of many kinds—ranging from famine and homelessness to disease and death. The Daughters of Charity responded positively to the national need, attending to the soldiers who were hurt as well as the other kinds of victims. Women and children, as usual, were among those who suffered most grievously from the ravages of war and violence; refugees multiplied.

On their behalf Vincent boldly spoke to the Prime Minister, Cardinal Mazarin, asking him to resign for the sake of the peace. This certainly alienated the powerful cardinal, but Vincent considered this effort on behalf of the poor as essential. Sometimes boldness in charity requires one to make a political stand which is unpopular with the powerful.

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Vincent also responded to the needs of the regions which suffered particular hardships during these times of war. He informed the rich who had means to help in the care for the poor and used his great gift for organization to promote an original response for those who would otherwise be abandoned.

In all their efforts, Vincent and Louise did not want to duplicate the ministry carried out by others but desired to have a particular emphasis on those who were most afflicted among the poor. One could make an extraordinary list of all those who were served by them. One could list (besides the sick, the country folk, orphans, and the victims of violence):

- * The galley slaves/prisoners
- * The girls without means
- * The hungry, homeless, and ragged
- * The priests and religious who were displaced by the wars
- * The refugees

It was to the sick poor that the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity were first directed. We know that Marguerite Naseau, our first Sister, died as a result of her care for a plague victim. Whom should we serve? Vincent and Louise offer the simple and general answer: “those who are most poor and most abandoned.”

“Come then, my dear confreres, let’s devote ourselves with renewed love to serve persons who are poor; and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned; let’s acknowledge before God that they’re our lords and masters and that we’re unworthy of rendering them our little services.” (Coste XI, p. 349)

“Above all, be very gentle and courteous towards your poor. You know that they are our masters and that we must love them tenderly and respect them deeply. It is not enough for these maxims to be in our minds; we must bear witness to them by our gentle and charitable care.” (Spiritual Writings, L. 284b. p. 320-321)

In every age, the Daughters of Charity are called to identify the members of that particular group and how will they respond in Charity with boldness.

2) HOW SHALL I SERVE THEM?

We allowed the Gospel story of the sinful woman and her willingness to wash the feet of Jesus to give us direction on how one needs to serve the other with personal involvement, affection, and investment. All these elements may be discerned in the direction which Vincent and Louise offer.

If we look at the story of Vincent at Châtillon, we can discern three lessons, among others, for our service of the poor.

a) Collaboration: *“a large number of people visited the sick family, carrying bread, wine, some meat, and several other provisions”*

Abelly writes about the experience of Vincent in this humble parish in 1617 (only some months after the experience in Folleville) where he served as pastor:

“While Monsieur Vincent was still at Châtillon, as he was about to mount the pulpit one feast day, a lady of a noble house in the neighborhood said a few words to him. She asked him to recommend to the charity of the parish a family whose children and servants had fallen sick on their farm about a half league from Châtillon. They needed help urgently. He felt obliged to speak about them in his sermon. In it he spoke of the duty we have to help the poor, especially the sick, and in particular this family which had been recommended to them. God so blessed his words that after the service a large number of people visited the sick family, carrying bread, wine, some meat, and several other provisions. After vespers, he himself went with some of the people of the parish, unaware that others had already gone. He was astonished to meet a number on the road returning in large groups, and even some sleeping under the trees, since it was so warm.” (Abelly I, p.72)

Vincent believed in the responsibility of people to help each other. He speaks to the people of his parish who respond with energy and dedication to the work which he proposes. Vincent did not see this ministry as one which was required of him alone, but something which must be carried out by the whole Christian community.

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Vincent believed in the goodness of people, and he wanted to offer them the opportunity to express this goodness in the best way possible. This leads to his second great insight and effort on behalf of the poor as well as those who minister to them.

b) Organization: The poor suffer more “*through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons.*”

Abelly continues to write about the experience of Vincent with this parish of Châtillon.

“The Gospel text came to mind: “These are as lost sheep, with no shepherd to guide them.” He said: This undoubtedly shows that these people have great charity, but is it well organized? The poor sick family will be overwhelmed with so much in such a short time, most of which will spoil. Afterward they will be no better off than before. The following day he met with several zealous and wealthy women of the parish to seek ways of establishing greater order in the way the sick poor of the moment and those who would call for help in the future could be helped. He found these women well disposed toward this project and was able to work out with them a plan for action. He drew up a few regulations which they promised to observe and which would encourage these virtuous women to give themselves to God through this practice of charity. Thus began the Confraternity of Charity, for the corporal and spiritual help of the sick poor.” (Abelly I, p.72)

If someone asked me what was St Vincent’s particular gift in the service of the poor, I would say “organization.” He knew how to get people excited about ministry, and he knew how to invite them to carry out the ministry effectively according to their particular gifts and limitations. He organizes lay people in a way which enables them to work for their salvation while serving the needs of their most vulnerable neighbors. Vincent, himself, writes about this experience with characteristic humility:

“Since charity towards the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God, and since one of its principal acts is to visit and bring food to the sick poor, some devout young women and virtuous inhabitants of the town of Châtillon-les-Dombes, in the Lyons diocese,

wishing from God the grace of being His true daughters, have decided among themselves to assist spiritually and corporally the people of their own town who have sometimes suffered a great deal, more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons.” (Coste XIIIb, p. 8)

Notice again his insistence on the need for organization and his emphasis on meeting the spiritual and corporal needs of the poor.

c) Personal care: “*you need to serve your sick poor in a spirit of gentleness and great compassion*”

When we read the instructions that Vincent wrote for the Ladies of Charity, the famous instruction which he gave to the Daughter of Charity who was going on her first visit, and the letters which Louise wrote to the Sisters, we see how important personal care was to the mission. It is not enough to be a professional. The poor must know that they are loved and cared for personally. Louise encourages her Sisters:

“I hope that your gratitude will place you in the disposition necessary to receive the graces you need to serve your sick poor in a spirit of gentleness and great compassion, in imitation of Our Lord who acted this way with the most unfortunate.” (Spiritual Writings, L. 383, p. 434)

It was, in fact, the limited ability of the Ladies of Charity to carry out the physical ministrations in the care of those who were poor that gave rise to the Daughters of Charity. As we remember, the good Ladies were unable to handle some of the strenuous and menial tasks which were required in the care of the poor. As a result, they would send their servants to handle the service. This was not ideal.

Thus, Marguerite Naseau enters into the picture, and her particular gifts are recognized and employed for the proper care of the poor. Like the sinful woman who washes the feet of Jesus with her tears and dries them with her hair, Marguerite is able to invest her whole self in this service. She becomes the model for the Daughters of Charity.

And so, what do the stories of Vincent and Louise teach us about how the poor are to be served with boldness?

The Boldness of Charity from a Charism Perspective

***With collaboration** since the resources of different groups are used—some invest their time and effort; others invest their resources and organizations. Together the poor were served.

***With organization:** no one can do everything all the time. The various gifts and availability of different folk gives rise to a system of organization and division of labor. Women of standing were in cooperation with women of low birth for a common task; the differences among them were less important than the service which they rendered together.

***The care is given personally.** One needs to know and serve the poor not abstractly but with love.

3) WHEN SHALL MY SERVICE TAKE PLACE?

The story of the Last Judgment demands that the afflicted receive attention when their needs are present, not simply when we choose to notice them. Their wants do not appear or disappear according to our timetable. Remember the story of the Foolish Virgins who were not prepared for the Lord at his coming (Mt 25:1-13); remember the story of the vigilant servants who are ready and at work:

“Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to [other servants] their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so.” (Mt 24:45-46)

And so, when do we offer our service as faithful and prudent servants?

a) When we recognize the poor and their needs: “turning the medal”

The Last Judgment story reminds us that Christ may not be so obviously present among the poor. Vincent invited us to “turn the medal” so that we might recognize Christ present among them.

“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar

they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people. . . . He describes himself as the Evangelizer of the poor: Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.” (Coste XI, p. 26)

b) When we are prepared to act: “leaving God for God”

Vincent and Louise spoke about the need for “leaving God for God” in ministry (*Spiritual Writings*, L. 439, p. 510). Sometimes, we must leave prayer in order to serve God differently in the given moment; and sometimes we may need to leave our service in order to find God in our prayer. There is boldness to this decision! We cannot schedule our ministry in such a way that we always know when or how we can respond.

Vincent really comes to eloquence when he speaks to the Sisters of their spirit consisting in this always-ready love for the poor and recognizing Christ present whenever they go forth. It is hard to imagine the Sisters not being moved to tears and resolution as they listened. These words are also clearly addressed to us. Our last judgment scene takes a different shape as the poor intercede for us! Listen to Vincent.

“In serving persons who are poor, we serve Christ. How true, Sisters! You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there. . . . Go to visit a chain gang, you’ll find God there. Look after those little children, you’ll find God there. How delightful, Sisters! You go into poor homes, but you find God there. Again, Sisters, how delightful! He accepts the services you do for those sick persons and, as you have said, considers them as done to himself. . . .

“God has promised an eternal reward to those who give a cup of water to a poor person; nothing is more true, we can’t doubt it; and that’s a great source of confidence for you, Sisters, for if God confers a blessed eternity on those who have given them only a cup of water, what will He not give to a Daughter of Charity who has left everything and makes the gift of herself to serve them all the days of her life? What will He give to her? We can’t even imagine! She has reasons to hope that she’ll be

The Boldness of Charity from a Charism Perspective

among those to whom He'll say: "Come, blessed of my Father, possess the Kingdom which has been prepared for you."

"... the poor persons assisted by her will be her intercessors before God; they'll come in a crowd ahead of her and say to God: 'My God, this is the Sister who helped us for love of You; my God, this is the Sister who taught us to know You.' ... 'My God,' they'll say, 'this is the Sister who taught me to hope that there was one God in three Persons; I didn't know that. My God, this is the Sister who taught me to hope in You; this is the Sister who taught me Your goodness through her own.' In short, Sisters, that's what the service of the poor will earn for you." (Coste IX, p. 199-200)

Could anything be more moving or offer a more compelling motivation for carrying out the vocation of a Daughter of Charity? As she carries out her ministry with boldness and reacts to the needs of the poor wherever they are experienced, she allows herself to be drawn into their timetable and she serves Christ.

c) When we recognize our role as servants: Seeing the poor as "*our Lords and Masters*"

What does it mean to call the poor "our Lords and Masters"?

- Do they need to be grateful for any care provided for them since we are only their servants?
- Does it mean that we depend on them for our well-being?
- Does it mean that our salvation is intertwined with theirs – like the rich man's salvation was linked to Lazarus, or the person who fed (or did not feed others) was bound to the hungry?

If the poor are indeed our "Lords and Masters", then our treatment of them as Daughters of Charity and Vincentians has eternal consequences for us. We need to learn to recognize them and be ready to serve them when summoned.

The story of the Last Judgment, as told in Matthew's Gospel, reminds us that the gifts which we bring in our service are the simplest for responding to human need with a deep respect for the one served. For Louise and Vincent, we provide this richness to Christ boldly whenever we perceive a genuine human need.

4) WHAT SHALL I DO?

The story of the Rich Young Man again sets the stage for us to consider what we need to do. He was a good man, but unwilling to take the next step in ministry and thus could not follow Jesus further. This story teaches us that Jesus does not stay with us in the comfortable places of our ministries, but is always forging ahead and demands that same effort from us. He calls us to "*be perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect*" (Mt 5:48). He tells us: that it is not enough to go one mile, we need to go the extra mile; that we need to give our coat as well as our shirt; that we need to turn the other cheek after being struck on the one. In Jesus, loving our friends is not enough, we also need to love our enemies; caring for the ninety-nine sheep is not enough, we need to seek the one which has wandered away; holding on to the nine coins is not enough, we need to search for the one which is lost. Over and over Jesus summons us, as he summoned the rich young man and the apostles, to "*put out into the deep*" (Lk 5:4). This effort allows our thoughts and actions to be bolder and more inclusive.

Vincent and Louise were the kinds of people who were able to make those bold decisions for the sake of charity. Have we lost sight of the boldness of our founders? In the modern era, some of the things which they did may seem less impressive, but how different were they in their time? How does that translate into our time?

a) Consecrated women working outside the convent: "*for a cloister, the streets of the city*"

As important and proper as the service of God in the cloisters was, neither Vincent nor Louise saw this as their calling or the place from which they could carry out their ministries. We can hear once again St Vincent's description of where we need to dwell:

The Boldness of Charity from a Charism Perspective

- for monastery, only the houses of the sick
- for a cell, a rented room
- for a chapel, the parish church
- for a cloister, the streets of the city

One can discern in this listing the call to be both spiritual women and working women. There is a summons to simplicity and poverty, as well as to the interior life. How bold were Vincent and Louise in taking the traditional and important symbols of consecrated life and translating them into the realities of our world! Or, perhaps, taking the ordinary spaces of our world and transforming them into the images of the sacred. We could be reminded of what we celebrate at the Eucharist where the common bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, where human words become the Word of God.

Our sense of where we live and work and pray gives meaning to what we do and for whom we do it. Vincent writes:

“You know . . . that, although the contemplative life is more perfect than the active life, it is not, however, more so than one which embraces at the same time contemplation and action, as does yours, by God’s grace.” (L. 931, Coste III, p. 173)

b) A ministry involving: “much coming and going”

Louise’s experience which gave rise to her “lumière” has provided a challenging and broadly understood description of the ministry of the Daughters of Charity.

“I then understood that I would be in a place where I could help my neighbor but I did not understand how this would be possible since there was to be much coming and going.” (Spiritual Writings, p. 1)

“Much coming and going” offers a dynamic description of the life of a Daughter of Charity. Both actions are important and one complements the other. As often as one goes forth in service to the poor, one also comes home for support and friendship. As often as one comes home to the community, one also goes forth renewed for ministry to those in need. Both the “coming” and the “going” define who we are and

contribute to our becoming whom we need to be. Gospel-living, prayer, and virtue are all parts of the one world in which we live and serve. Again we see the boldness driven by charity which guided the decisions of our Founders.

c) A seal and a motto: “The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us”

Both Vincent and Louise would willingly lead us back to the cross for any discussion of what should characterize the extent of our charity. The crucified Christ is literally and figuratively placed at the center of our seal and motto. The desire of the rich young man to place limits on his surrender of self in following Christ would be unacceptable to our Founders.

“I thank God for having given the Company subjects who belong more to Him than to themselves, and who serve the neighbor at the risk of their lives! They are like unrefined gold, which becomes visible in fire and which would otherwise remain hidden under ordinary actions and sometimes under faults and failings.” (L. 1565, Coste IV, p. 493)

That love which knows no bounds was given its fullest expression by Christ in his surrender of self on the cross. That is the love which impels us. We can imagine the boldness with which both Vincent and Louise faced the needs of the poor and how they were prepared to sacrifice their own lives for this effort. Many of our Sisters certainly accepted this call and this sacrifice urged by the love of Christ crucified.

As we consider the ways in which Christ continues to suffer in our society, we may ask what delays us in our efforts. What holds us back from responding? Vincent and Louise saw him everywhere among those who suffered, and they both knew the meaning of the cross in their lives.

CONCLUSION

We have listened to what our Scriptures and our Founders have to teach about “boldness in charity.” Now we need to ask the meaning of this phrase in our time and place. To what are we called as Daughters of Charity?

The Boldness of Charity from a Charism Perspective

“And that Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn’t then what it is now, there’s reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it. . . . Since your institution is not the work of human persons, you may therefore boldly declare, Sisters, that it’s the work of God. Surely a Company ordained for a ministry so pleasing to God, so excellent in itself, and so useful to the neighbor can have no other author than God himself.” (Coste IX, p. 194)

May the Holy Spirit lead us in being faithful to our call and transformed into the Company which God calls into existence in this time and place. Let us take Mary as our model for boldness in responding to what God asks of us.

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, CM
Director General

FATHER P. GRIFFIN, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Greetings and good wishes

Dear Sisters,

For the past two celebrations of Christmas, I have had the honor of being your Director. At those times, I wrote to you after I had received hundreds of letters from you. This year, I decided to get ahead of you and write first—though it is unclear when you will read this message. Nonetheless, it comes from a heart filled with joy while thinking about the birth of the Lord.

With our Sisters on the rue du Bac I shared a Christmas homily around the biblical phrase “there was no room for them (the Holy Family) at the inn” (Lk 2:7). Usually, we envision Mary and Joseph and Jesus alone and surrounded by animals in a stable where they might receive occasional visitors. I have wondered if there is another way of imagining the scene. Is it possible that they were not the only ones to arrive in the village who found no room at the inn? Could they, in fact, have been surrounded by the poor who were in similar circumstances?

This line of thinking offers some opportunities for reflection on the forming of communities, and particularly among the poor. I shared some of these ideas with our Sisters in Paris and invited them to further contemplation. I would like to do the same with you. Let me present one thought to get you started. I believe that a community would have emerged in that stable, and perhaps more tightly as a result of the birth—a common experience of life and hope and beauty. Everyone would have wanted to hold Jesus to feel his tiny warmth and soft breath. People would recognize the natural miracle in their midst, though few would know how great a miracle. Generosity and gentleness would have reigned as Jesus became present among them.

Greetings and Good Wishes

I am cheered by this image. I offer it to you with a hope that we, too, might be women who form and are formed by community life among one another and among those whom we serve. Perhaps it was Jesus' first lesson taught with his first breath! It is a gift which we give to one another and which I certainly experience among you.

May the Lord bless you during the Christmas Season as well as in the challenges of a new year. May it be a time to reflect more profoundly upon the importance of a community and particularly one which gathers together around Jesus. The love of him as a newborn child deepens our charism in ministry in these days.

There may be no room at the inn, but there is a place for us in the stable.

Peace in Christ,

Fr. Patrick J. GRIFFIN, CM
Director General

APPOINTMENTS

Designation of Visitatrixes and Appointment of Provincial Directors

DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Sister Concepcion VICUNA was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, March 12, 2013.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAN VICENTE: Sister Maria Eugenia GONZALEZ MARTINEZ was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria del Carmen ZABALLOS LOSADA, May 15, 2013.

PROVINCE OF SAN VINCENZO-ITALIA: Sister Béatrice PRIORI was designated Visitatrix, May 31, 2013.

PROVINCE OF KRAKOW: Sister Anna BRZEK was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, July 24, 2013.

PROVINCE DEL CARIBE: Sister Servia Tulia GARCIA MARTINEZ was designated Visitatrix, March 25, 2013.

PROVINCE OF LA MILAGROSA BOGOTA-VENEZUELA: Sister Maria Nubia QUINTERO QUINTERO was designated Visitatrix, July 18, 2013.

PROVINCE OF NUESTRA SENORA DE LA MISSION AMERICA-SUR: Sister Maria Isabel RUIZ RUIZ was designated Visitatrix, April 17, 2013.

CHINESE PROVINCE: Sister Maria WU was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, August 21, 2013.

PROVINCE OF AMAZONIA: Sister Rosa Maria Leite dos SANTOS was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria



*News
from the
Provinces*

Cristina CARDOSO DA SILVA, September 4, 2013.

PROVINCE OF FRANCE-SOUTH: Sister Alice PONS was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, October 24, 2013.

PROVINCE OF PORTUGAL: Sister Berta dos Anjos Gonçalves CARRICO was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, October 24, 2013.

PROVINCE OF ERITREA: Sister Lettegebriel TESFAGABUR was re-designated Visitatrix for three years, December 11, 2013.

APPOINTMENT OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Father Damian NWANKWO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, April 30, 2013.

PROVINCE OF LA MILAGROSA-BOGOTA-VENEZUELA: Father Luis Alfonso STERLING MOTTA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, May 16, 2013.

PROVINCE OF GREAT BRITAIN: Father Paul ROCHE was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a term of three years, April 29, 2013.

PROVINCE OF SAN VINCENZO-ITALIA: Father Giancarlo PASSERINI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, for a term of three years, May 31, 2013.

PROVINCE DEL CARIBE: Father Gilbert WALKER was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a term of three years, June 14, 2013.

PROVINCE OF NUESTRA SENORA DE LA MISION-AMERICA SUR: Father Pedro DUARTE ALONSO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a term of three years, June 14, 2013.

PROVINCE OF BARCELONA: Father José Ignacio CAAMANO was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, September 13, 2013.

PROVINCE OF ERITREA: Father Haile TESFAMARIAM was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, November 22, 2013.

Sister Evelyne Franc and Sister Neghesti Michaël, General Councillor, to Burkina Faso (Mission of the Province of Nigeria)

On February 10, 2013, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, Sister Neghesti Michaël, General Councillor for Africa, and Sister Gloria Aniebonam, Visitatrix of the Province of Nigeria, arrived in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. The next day, they drove with Sister Felicia Ezeimo for the long journey to Nouna, the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in Burkina Faso.

We, the Daughters of Charity of Nouna, know the fatigue caused by such a journey, which is why we received this visit as a sign of love and sacrifice, for we are really in the middle of nowhere.

When they arrived in Nouna, the visitors were welcomed by the Sisters of the local community. A little later, we met to share our experiences of each one's mission in the diocese, with the joys and struggles of the apostolate: it was a quality time for listening to each other. This dialogue allowed us to recognize the importance of our missionary presence in this part of the world.

We next visited the Bishop of Nouna. Despite a very busy schedule, he cleared a considerable amount of time to receive us and talk to us about his pastoral mission. When the conversation ended, as it was already late, we went to the Cathedral in Ouagadougou for the Eucharistic celebration.

To begin the second day, we assembled in our lovely chapel for morning meditation and Mass, into which Morning Prayer was incorporated. After breakfast, the visitors had the opportunity to meet our parish priest

Visit by Superiors

and then visit Charles Lwanga College, where Sister Felicia teaches English, and finally the prison. They were welcomed there with great ceremony by the prisoners, their guards and the prison administrators. All expressed their gratitude for Sister Felicia's regular visits and her gift for listening. The morning ended with a short visit of our beautiful town of Nouna.

The afternoon was devoted to a visit to Ocades, where Sister Toyin serves the poor of that area. The Catholic Women's Association gave us a warm welcome with beautiful traditional dances and songs.

Next day, we had the grace of beginning Lent with our Superioress General, with the celebration of Ash Wednesday in the larger chapel of the former seminary. The visitors then met the diocesan representatives and afterwards visited the health center where Sister Esther has the joy of serving Christ in the sick poor. They admired all that has already been established for malnourished children and all that is at the planning stage.

However, everything has a beginning and an end. The two days allotted to the mission in Nouna passed very quickly. Our three visitors left for Ouagadougou and continued their journey to visit our Sisters on mission in Ghana.

We felt privileged for the visit of our Superioress General and General Councillor. Although the visit was short, we greatly appreciated it and hold in our hearts the memory of their gentle attentiveness, appreciation of and interest in the services we render to those who are poor. We thank God for their safe return and pray that God will bless them.

Sister Esther EKPO
Daughter of Charity

Sister Evelyne Franc, and Sister Neghesti Michaël, General Councillor, to Ghana (Mission of the Province of Nigeria)

February 14 -16, 2013, will always be a precious memory in the hearts of all the Sisters on the Ghana Mission!

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Neghesti Michaël, General Councillor, arrived in Kumasi on February 14, 2013, with Sister Gloria Aniebonam, Visitatrix of the Province of Nigeria, for a brief but intensive visit.

This occasion brought together all the Sisters from the three local communities in Ghana to welcome the visitors in Kumasi. Sister Evelyne had the joy of meeting the two first Ghanaian Daughters of Charity. She warmly thanked them for having generously answered God's call and encouraged them to continue to give themselves to Christ to serve Him in those who are poor.

The following day, Sister Evelyne gave a conference to the Sisters on the spirit of simplicity and humility of the Daughters of Charity, during which she urged them to cultivate the habit of reading and interiorizing the Word of God, particularly during this Year of Faith, because faith develops when it is nourished and practiced. By reading and internalizing the Word of God, we can know Jesus better and live our vocation in the service of the poor in union with Him.

The second point Sister Evelyne emphasized is the call to authentic living in a world driven by the idols of materialism, individualism, relativism and hedonism. She urged us to resist these temptations of our time in order to offer the Gospel message to those to whom we have

Visit by Superiors

been sent. Lies (falsehood), excessive comfort and lack of a balanced life style can be great obstacles to authenticity.

She concluded by calling us to cultivate our interior lives, taking time to read the writings of our Founders and to live our day's service in union with Christ the Servant. She invited us to continue to deepen the particular spirit of our vocation, to be available to render any service and to grow in the poverty of heart that sets us free.

After the conference, the Sisters of the local community of Kumasi spoke about their services. Then the visitors went to see the parish center where thousands of children living in the streets are welcomed, listened to, cared for and educated, the new vocational training center, the drop-in center and the site where the day-care building is under construction. Sister Evelyne was very interested in each project and showed great appreciation for the services in which we are involved.

At about 3:30 pm, she left for Drobonso (location of the first mission in Ghana), where she visited the ministries of the community there. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, she was unable to reach the third local community in Kongo-Logre. We do hope that in the future she will have the opportunity to return to Ghana and that the community in Kongo-Logre will be her first "port of call."

We are very grateful to Sister Evelyne and Sister Neghesti for providing us with these moments of great joy, unity, reflection and celebration. We ask God to continue to bless, guide and keep them in His love!

Sister Caroline OLOGUNWA
Daughter of Charity

TESTIMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Former Provinces of the Canary Islands, Grenada and Seville

Birth of the Province of España-Sur

March 15th, 2013, was a special day in Spain because of the birth of a new Province, España-Sur, bringing together the three former Provinces of the Canary Islands, Grenada and Seville.

This day, long prepared for on a personal and community level, was lived in joy and solidarity as a new birth. We would like to thank the Sisters of the "Commission Sur" for their preparatory work. United in joy and hope, we reaffirmed our availability in order to respond sincerely and according to our abilities for the service of those who are poor, without letting our personal desires hold us back.

We also thank all the Sisters who participated in various groups for the preparation for this event.

On this solemn day, the words of a song from our celebration express our feelings very well: *"The words speaking of our unity are genuine. They are not dreams that are far from reality. By saying that Jesus is with us, we are expressing our faith and our hope."*

March 14, 2013

The Provincial House of Seville welcomed the Visitatrixes of Spain, the Visitatrix of Portugal invited for the occasion, many Sisters from all over the Province of España-Sur, Sister Juana Elizondo, Sister Maria Luisa Morante, Sister Ana Maria Olmeda, Secretary General, and the Provincial Directors of the former Provinces of the Canaries, Grenada and Seville... Then, Sister Maria del Pilar Rendon, Visitatrix of Seville,

Testimonies of the Sisters

welcomed Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, accompanied by Sister Rosa Maria Miró, Assistant General. Father José María López Maside welcomed Father Patrick Griffin, Director General. All gathered in the chapel to join in a welcoming celebration with a prayer to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal said together.

At the beginning of the ceremony, Sister Evelyne and Sister Rosa Maria approached the altar together, carrying the relics of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, preceded by a candle symbolizing the light of Christ. The Visitatrixes of the Canaries, Grenada and Seville placed the maps of their respective Provinces next to each other around the reliquaries in order to show that they would soon form one single Province. A **spring of water**, artistically arranged, flowed near the altar: the source of Charity.

During this symbolic procession, readings and songs followed each other in a prayerful atmosphere that expressed God's presence in our assembly.

In the second part of the celebration, the procession of the relics of the Founders and the maps of the three Provinces left the spring and set off into the interior courtyard of the Provincial House, towards another space, the **"tributary of service"** which was decorated to symbolize the service of persons who are poor.

Then the tributary of service introduced the third part, represented by the **"river of Community."** After listening to the Word of God, the Sisters approached the "river of Community" to plunge their hand into it, amid background music that symbolized water coming out of the rock. This symbolic gesture was meant to express the grace of faith and the strength needed to fulfil the mission of serving all who are poor, everywhere.

Then, following the river's water, the participants returned to the chapel for the fourth part of the celebration: the **"sea of faith"** where each one reaffirmed her trust that it is God who makes her enter into the "immense river" of His love. At this point, a Sister of 50 years vocation read a passage from the book of Deuteronomy recalling the **past** of the nine former Provinces of Spain and, in prayer, some Sisters invited us to become aware of Christ's presence. He is the Light of the nations, who

is with us in the **present** and guides us towards the **future**.

This solemn celebration concluded with a final hymn during which Sister Evelyne presented the participants with a picture that had the text of Saint Louise's Spiritual Testament on the back.

March 15, 2013

After solemn Lauds, all the Sisters gathered in the large hall where the proceedings that would give birth to the new Province of España-Sur would take place.

Despite its size, this room, specially set up for the event, was not big enough to accommodate the 570 people present. Many had to follow the ceremony on television screens set up in the interior and exterior hallways.

Each Sister received a folder containing the program of the official proceedings of the unification of the three Provinces of the Canaries, Grenada and Seville, giving birth to the Province of España-Sur, as well as various notices and a scarf symbolizing the event.

After a hymn to the Holy Spirit, the Visitatrixes of the three former Provinces gave back to Sister Evelyne their official Provincial seal, which had marked many legal community documents that had to be presented in various official administrative departments, in the Provinces' quality as juridical persons.

Then, Sister Evelyne read the declaration that sealed the unification of the three provinces after almost 50 years. She invited the assembly to praise God for this new Province of more than one thousand Sisters and 121 local communities. Next, Sister Evelyne gave Sister Maria del Pilar Rendon the patent as Visitatrix and the new seal of the Province of España-Sur, thanking her for generously accepting this new ministry.

She then introduced the seven new Councillors and the new Director of this new Province, Father José María López Maside; his appointment was read by Father Griffin, speaking in the name of the Superior General.

Testimonies of the Sisters

Several Sisters warmly expressed thanks to the Visitatrixes, Councillors and Provincial Directors of the former Provinces. Sister Evelyne then addressed these sisterly words to us:

“A big thank you to all the Sisters for the work carried out in the reconfiguration process, with your attitude of openness to the action of the Holy Spirit. On the feast of Saint Louise, let us not forget the past, let us be grateful for the present and let us confidently open ourselves to the future... Thank you, Lord, for all the good that was done in Grenada, the Canary Islands and Seville. We thank God and bless Him for the witness of so many Sisters, for the silent offerings of the elderly and sick Sisters... We ask for the gift of the Spirit to live the present with firm faith and manifest joy. The present is a time that brings us back to basics: let us not forget the importance of formation, the need for availability... Let us walk toward the future with hope: the future is God’s time, and the Holy Spirit will support us. May God bless you. I entrust the new Province to the Blessed Virgin, and never forget: wherever God is, there is always a future.”

The singing of the Magnificat marked the end of the ceremony.

After a break, Father Griffin presided at the solemn Eucharist, concelebrated by 17 priests. In his homily, the Director General recalled some important features of Saint Louise:

- *“her way of looking at those who are poor: her eyes fixed on them, she saw God in them,*
- *her way of listening to the cries of the poor and being a voice for the voiceless,*
- *her open-mindedness and her quest to improve the life of those living in poverty,*
- *her exceptionally deep prayer life.*

Can these features be seen on the face of Daughters of Charity? Yes, all the Sisters have something of these family traits, whatever their country, language or culture... That is why we give thanks to God. Let us also ask Him that the beginning of the new Province may be an opportunity for us to grow in our love of the charism and our particular spirit.”

During the offertory procession, the document recording the birth of the new Province was presented to the Lord. After Communion, the three former Visitatrixes, each carrying a candle, lit a large torch representing the new Province. Then, all the Sister Servants of the local communities came forward towards the torch to light their small candle from it.

At 2 pm, the Sisters went to the gymnasium of “Virgen Milagrosa” High School, which was transformed into a dining room. Traditional dances from Seville were performed before the meal.

Afternoon of March 15: the final step in this great day

We make history together

A carpet presented the different regions of the Canary Islands, Extremadura and Andalusia as well as Morocco, each represented by a different color. It is the variety of colors that made the carpet beautiful. Some rhythmic dance steps on the carpet symbolically expressed our desire to eliminate all borders.

Seeking the land flowing with milk and honey

A slide show presented the history of the origins of the Company and the history of the 50 years of the three former Provinces: erection of the Provinces, Assemblies, development of the Constitutions, visits of Major and Provincial Superiors, important events...

The new Visitatrix of the Province of España-Sur, Sister Maria del Pilar, very emotionally reminded those present of the importance of a sense of unity and pointed out to them that the opening of the new Province takes place within the Year of Faith, along with the election of Pope Francis and the coming beatification of the Spanish martyrs. She then expressed her confidence in the Company and her gratitude at feeling supported by everyone to make unity a reality in order to respond to the appeals of the poor. She concluded with these words, “Let us begin to travel this new path without fear and respond to Mary’s advice: do whatever He tells you.”

Conclusion of the day

Testimonies of the Sisters

Sister Evelyne delivered a final message: “In this Year of Faith, the new Province has begun its life under the protection of Saint Louise. I encourage you to persevere in a spirit of faith, in community life and in devotion to Mary...If we are faithful, the Holy Spirit will light the way for the new Province.”

Sister Ubaldina PERTEJO and Sister Rosa Maria MUÑOZ
Daughters of Charity

NEWS BRIEFS

NEW PROVINCES

On March 15, 2013, the new **PROVINCE OF ESPAÑA-SUR** was erected (regrouping the former Provinces of Grenada, Seville and the Canary Islands).

On May 31, 2013, the new **PROVINCE OF SAN VINCENZO-ITALIA** was erected (regrouping the former Provinces of Rome, Sienna and Turin).

On July 16, 2013, the new **PROVINCE DEL CARIBE** was erected (regrouping the former Provinces of Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic).

On July 18, 2013, the new **PROVINCE OF LA MILAGROSA-BOGOTA-VENEZUELA** was erected (regrouping the former Provinces of Bogota and Venezuela).

On July 21, 2013, the new **PROVINCE OF NUESTRA SENORA DE LA MISION-AMERICA SUR** was erected (regrouping the former Provinces of Argentina, Bolivia, Chili and Paraguay).

DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY FROM 4 CONTINENTS COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

From August 4 -11, Sisters from England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, Kenya, France and the United States gathered at Saint John’s University in New York for a week-long conference on human trafficking, which has more than 27 million victims worldwide (75% women and girls, 27% children, 58% involving sexual exploitation, and 36% involving forced labor). It is a 32 billion dollar a year market. The participants sought to create a work plan to conscientiously involve each other in concrete responses. Networking, human promotion, education and action were identified as objectives for the future.

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**JUST AFTER HIS ELECTION AS POPE,
JOHN XXIII SAID THESE
SURPRISING WORDS:**

**“The cross is really the poetry of life:
it allows us to accept different
situations,
duties and inevitable trials,
while preserving the smile
that gives a supernatural
understanding
that brings serenity.”**

(November 13, 1958)

