

# *E*choes *of the Company*

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**General Assembly 2015**

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**MAY**  
**JUNE**  
**2015**  
**No. 3**



# General Assembly 2015

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**Thank you for not reproducing these articles  
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## Introduction

*“The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum”* was the theme of the 9th General Assembly, which took place at the Mother House from Friday, May 15 to Friday, June 12, 2015.

On May 5, 2015, 136 Sisters, who came from every continent (60 Visitatrixes, 1 Regional Superior and 75 delegates), began an eight-day retreat in order to prepare to live this General Assembly under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Led by Father Bernard Schoepfer, Director General, the retreat theme was: *“For a new missionary momentum, receive the Holy Spirit, pray and remain with Jesus and Mary, care for persons living in poverty and evangelize them like Jesus.”* Father offered reflections to rekindle the fire of our vocation and invite us to allow Christ’s charity to dwell ever more in us for a new missionary momentum.

The General Assembly opened Friday, May 15 with Eucharist presided by Father Gregory Gay, Superior General. We can note that, of the 149 members present (74 ex officio members and 75 elected members), more than half were participating in a General Assembly for the first time. Twenty-seven Sisters serving as translators and interpreters allowed for good communication among the Sisters.

On May 16, Sister Evelyne Franc recalled some of the major events that marked the life of the Company over the past six years, especially stressing the apostolic vitality of the



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Company. The same day, Sister Pia, Treasurer General, presented the financial report of the Company. Over the following days, the Sisters were invited to make use of the *Working Guide* developed based on the *Synthesis of Responses* from the Provincial Assemblies.

Reflection centered around three main themes, selected as concerns shared by all Provinces:

**- *A way of living driven by the Gospel***

This 1st theme was enriched by the presence of four presenters who opened up new perspectives.

**- *A missionary momentum inspired by charity***

This 2nd theme was enriched by missionary experiences of various Provinces.

**- *A Company enriched by the participation of all Sisters***

This 3rd theme was enriched by each member's contribution.

The members of the Assembly gathered in 12 groups using 8 languages, in 3 forums grouped by language (English, Spanish and French) and in plenary sessions to share on the three themes and discuss them. A deep unity of the Company emerged from these gatherings and reflections. At this beginning of the third millennium, the desire to live our vocation with a bolder charity in order to ever better reach out to those who are most poor was strongly expressed. The *Inter-Assemblies Document* will bear witness to this dynamic momentum, which must be put into practice in the concrete realities of our lives.

The members of the Assembly had the joy of hearing a message from Pope Francis addressed to the new Superioress General, Sister Kathleen Appler. They were able to celebrate two special Eucharists, one presided by Archbishop Luigi Ventura, Apostolic Nuncio in France, and the other by Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris.

This edition of the *Echoes of the Company* reports on this Assembly. The presentations and sharings of missionary experiences that did not fit in this edition will be published in the next edition. **Thank you for not reproducing these articles from the General Assembly, which are for internal use by the Daughters of Charity.**

## OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

### Conference for the Opening of the General Assembly 2015

*Father Gregory Gay, CM  
Mother House, May 15, 2015*

Let me begin our time together acknowledging my gratitude for the great efforts of Sister Evelyne Franc and her Sisters on the General Council for their service to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The ministry of administration of a large, worldwide Society of Apostolic Life is a most difficult and challenging one.

Please notice that I said *ministry*, not *work*, because I know that Sister Evelyne, her General Council, and the Sisters in the Secretariat assisting them all exercise a great ministry of service, which they see as a labor of love for the good of the Company. In so doing, they have enabled the Company to function fruitfully and effectively. To you, Sister Evelyne, and to the Sisters on the Council, I extend my heartfelt thanks for your ministry of service. Your witness and example would make our Holy Founders most proud! I ask you and your Council to stand so we may all gratefully acknowledge your generous service.

The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum: These are not words, a slogan, or even a familiar theme. No, this is an idea whose time has come. As you begin this General Assembly, you have all been carefully praying, studying, and dialoguing on this theme for over two years. In her communications with you, Sr. Evelyne has skillfully steered you into various phases of reflection and discussion to help you grasp its import and practical application, so

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that, as a result, this General Assembly may help to renew and strengthen the Company.

In the first phase, you explored “the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum,” reflecting on the inner and outer dimensions of this theme. How does the “boldness of charity” challenge you to reflect on your vocation in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, both as individuals and as community? How does it manifest itself in the midst of today’s world, and by extension, in your many apostolates and missions? These are central questions for this Assembly to come to grips with, and I look forward to your discussions and proposals for action.

Then, you took time to reflect on, pray, and discuss the various dynamics involved in achieving a “boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum.” You proposed three ways to proceed: a spiritual path of union with Christ, a renewed community life, and innovation in the apostolate to better serve those who are poor. This may seem to be an ambitious agenda, but please remember that when faced with a challenge in his life, St. Vincent would say, “Grace has its moments!” I believe that this is an appropriate sentiment now, so I ask you to make these words of St. Vincent an “unofficial theme” for this General Assembly! May this gathering of the Company in prayer, reflection, discernment, and decision-making be a graced time of renewal and action.

According to your Constitutions, a General Assembly “represents the entire Company” (C. 87a). It “enjoys supreme authority to...elect the Superioress General, the Councillors, and the Assistant, and to establish Statutes and Decrees for the good of the Company, while observing the principle of subsidiarity...” (C. 87d). I offer this sentiment of St. Louise to the first Daughters, cherished words still applicable today: “Please pray to our good God for this fine work, so that His most holy will may be accomplished there” (SW, L. 365b, p. 419). I know all gathered here will make this Assembly a truly fine work in accomplishing God’s plan for the Company.

Using phrases from the section on the Constitutions that I just referred to, I will explore three key points relevant to this General Assembly. They are “the entire Company”, the “supreme authority”, and the “principle of subsidiarity”. Properly understood and applied, all three can help to

bring about what you desire: “the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum.”

First, as this Assembly is a “symbolic sample” of “the entire Company”, it is important you come to grips with the richness and depth of diversity of people and cultures represented in your Sisters, as members of the Company. In formulating necessary statistical models for information, we must be careful that they not become the only determination in interpreting the makeup, outreach, and effect of the Company. I know well the importance of statistics. The number of provinces, missions, Sisters, and formation houses are essential in strategic planning and sharing of information. But if you are not careful, you can let the Company become defined by statistics, not by the richness of its members. The phrase “entire Company” is a call for inclusion, to look beyond borders, countries, and continents, realizing how profoundly “*the Charity of Christ crucified presses you.*” A sad reality in the early Church (and later, in religious communities) was an all-too-human tendency to develop ‘insider and outsider’ status for its members, often skewed by differences in their religious background, language, culture, or national origin.

We can look back with regret at such past problems, assuring ourselves how we think things are different right now. But each one here must ask herself: what am I doing personally to promote inclusion, membership, and participation for each Sister in the Company? Can I see with new eyes and hear with new ears the hopes and concerns of Sisters who are different from me? St. Vincent told his early communities, “*Charity is the paradise of communities and the soul of virtues*” (CCD XI, Conf. 1, p. 1). While it is not likely we would consider a General Assembly as ‘paradise’, a task of this Assembly is to affirm that all Sisters are welcome in the Company.

Secondly, when using words such as “supreme authority” to describe the Company, one must be cautious, as they can easily be misunderstood. Authority in the Church and the Company is a mediated reality, flowing from the power and inspiration of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. It is through the Word of God, the sacramental life of the Church, our Holy Founders, and the Constitutions and structures for community life that we find a mediated authority to discern present and future directions of the Company. While this Assembly has a unique, powerful authority

### Conference for the Opening of the General Assembly 2015

while in session, its work and outcomes are mediated by these channels of God's grace.

Perhaps a helpful way to first understand and exercise this "supreme authority" is through the lens of the Word of God, which is "*living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating ever between soul and spirit... able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart*" (Heb 4:12). In the Scriptures, we are given many examples of how we should and should not exercise authority. In the Old Testament, the Israelites became too comfortable after settling into the Promised Land and forgot their own "supreme authority", the Divine Covenant with God. The prophets continually tried to bring them back to an acceptance of the Lord God as their supreme authority, and not to be distracted by a quest for worldly wealth, power, or superficial status.

Jesus defines "supreme authority" in a way that we, as his disciples, and who are imbued with our Vincentian charism, can understand. Authority is service. "*I am in your midst as one who serves*" (Lk 22:27). In Mark's Gospel, two of the disciples try to position themselves for preferential treatment after Jesus' death, conveniently forgetting that the way of the cross is the only path they can travel. Jesus sets the one standard for "supreme authority" as he tells them and us that, "*Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest*" (Mk 10:43). So it is essential that a Gospel-based and Vincentian way of authority be rooted in readiness to be humble servants, listening to one another in simplicity and honesty, dialoguing with a goal to "to understand before being understood," paraphrasing words from a popular prayer of St. Francis.

The third phrase your Constitutions highlight as a key element in a General Assembly is the "principle of subsidiarity". Strictly speaking, it is not a new idea. It goes back as far as the early Church, such as the conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentiles that led to convening the Council of Jerusalem. While at times Church leadership may seem to focus on centralization, the principle of subsidiarity is a core teaching of Catholic Social Doctrine. First introduced in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, and fifty years later in *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI, it has been used in doctrinal statements of Conferences of Catholic Bishops across the world.

This principle re-surfaced in the Second Vatican Council, specifically for those in consecrated life and religious institutes, amidst discussions of "*aggiornamento*" and "*ressourcement*", a call to update our practices and to return to the core of our charism. Soon, the principle of subsidiarity found its way into the Constitutions and best practices of religious communities. This principle promotes the idea that matters should be entrusted to a competent authority at the local level whenever possible. Based upon the autonomy and dignity of the individual, it holds that society should be at the service of the human person. One tangible effect from this principle today is that it promotes a sense of greater responsibility for members in local communities and apostolates.

So how does the principle of subsidiarity relate to your General Assembly? I offer you a quote often attributed to St. Vincent for your reflection. "Love is creative unto infinity." As we survey the lives and actions of our Founders, we see that their creativity in evangelization and service to the poor began on the local level, often in response to immediate needs. Through their presence, patient mentoring, and empowerment of those around them, they enabled the first sisters, priests, brothers, and laity whom they trained to serve God and the poor. Care for the person in need by 'helping the helper' to reach full potential was their loving and creative response. Centuries later, we can still marvel at how such small efforts have yielded what seems to be an infinity of good works. Trust in God, competent training, and respect those they formed, led to innovations in evangelization and care for the poor that are admired and imitated almost four centuries later.

Let me return to the theme of your General Assembly: "the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum." I believe this theme and the preparatory work that has gone into putting together this Assembly are opportunities for a truly graced moment in the life and history of the Company. The question is: how can you make this 'boldness' an active force, instead of just an inspirational saying? How will you create and sustain a 'missionary momentum'? How will you embody the compassion of Christ and the competence of Vincent and Louise in your works of charity? These are serious questions that this Assembly must discuss and act upon, not only for your satisfaction, but for the good of the Company and for God's poor and needy.

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Pope Francis has repeatedly said that he believes the Church should be “on the peripheries” of society, not only to serve those neglected, but to draw its members out of their comfortable places for a true conversion into a deeper experience of the presence of Christ. He spoke to the Union of Superior Generals in Rome in November 2013, and I quote at length his remarks:

“I am convinced of one thing: the great changes in history were realized when reality was seen not from the center, but from the periphery. It is a hermeneutical question: reality is best understood only if it is looked at from the periphery, and not when our viewpoint is equidistant from everything. To truly understand reality, we need to move away from the central position of calmness and peacefulness and direct ourselves to the peripheral areas. Being at the periphery helps us to see and understand better, and to analyze reality more correctly, to shun centralism and ideological approaches.” (November 29, 2013, Rome)

These important words should inspire and challenge this Assembly. How can you empower your Sisters to listen and learn from those on the peripheries? By those on the peripheries, I mean not only those living in poverty you serve, but the very Sisters who serve there! To “shun centralism” and the “ideological approaches”, Pope Francis warned us, this Assembly must be willing to do what the Constitutions state is your charge as a General Assembly. You must formulate resolutions and decrees that are truly representative of “the entire Company”, using the “supreme authority” entrusted to you as servant leaders, to create a more inclusive and empowered Company which accepts and lives the “principle of subsidiarity”. Then you will truly be able to engage the boldness of Charity for a new missionary momentum.

May the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, guide and inspire the work of the General Assembly, and may Mary, Mother of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, intercede for us. Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, pray for us!

Father Gregory GAY, CM  
*Superior General*

## OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

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### The Company Today

*Address of Sister Evelyne Franc  
Mother House, May 16, 2015*

#### Introduction

Dear Father Gregory, Father Bernard and Sisters,

Our Superior General officially opened our Assembly yesterday, and I thank him, in your name, for the message that he offered us and that will help us to live out this time of the Assembly in a spirit of faith and trust, the hour of grace.

I also express my gratitude to Father Bernard for the retreat we have just made and for his unobtrusive and wise accompaniment during our Council meetings. Allow me to mention two other Directors General, Father Javier, who was “stolen” from us by the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 2010, and Father Patrick, who had to cut short his service as Director General because of health issues. We have thus benefited from the assistance of three excellent Directors since our last General Assembly, and I express my gratitude to Father Gregory who each time appointed the Director whom we needed.

It is my great joy to speak to you this morning, and I know that we are all feeling a “holy longing” to fully live out this General Assembly whose theme, it seems, deeply touched the Sisters of the Company. You observed this during your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies, and you read the result of it in the synthesis that you received at the beginning of last month. In this introduction, I would like to say a few words about the preparatory work for this ninth General Assembly and about its composition.

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### Preparation

Since the Visitatrixes' Meeting in 2012, a Commission was established, under the authority of the General Council, to get down to the practical preparations for the General Assembly. It is made up of the Assistant General and a Councillor (Sister Rosa Maria Miro and Sister Françoise Petit), with the participation of Sister Marie Odile Herbet, of the General Secretariat. As for the last Assembly, the commission benefited from the assistance of Sister Micheline Tremblay, our Facilitator. Several months ago, three Sisters joined them: Sister Marjory Ann Baez, Sister Carmen Polo and Sister Zenaïde Rahelinirina, the Visitatrix of the Province de Los Altos Hills in the U.S.A. and delegates from the Provinces of España Sur and Madagascar, respectively. This Preparatory Commission has now become the Coordinating Commission and is responsible for leading us safely to harbor (yesterday Sister Rosa Maria brought up possible traffic jams, but, for my part, I am taking my comparisons from maritime language), helping us avoid reefs and shallow waters, providing us with wind in case of doldrums and giving us the means to confront the storm if necessary and to stay on course... and to always have a plan B, in case one is needed!

Naturally, the General Council closely followed the work of this Commission during each special Council meeting that took place every six weeks and then, more recently, each month. It studied the documents presented, often suggested changes and then approved their final version. I must say that the Sisters of the Commission were patient and competent.

I also highlight the role the Sisters of the Secretariat, the International Translation Center and the Treasurer General's Office played in this preparation. It is important for me to mention as well all the Sisters of the six local communities at the Mother House who have been preparing for your arrival for several months. They prayed and are praying for our Assembly, made some of their spaces available to us and changed their schedule to make our work easier.

### Composition

To speak about the make-up of our Assembly, we must start with C. 87c: *“The number of delegates must be at least equal to the number of ex officio*

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*members. When the number of delegates is less than that of the ex officio members, the Superioress General with her Council determines a method to complete the required number.”* Now, we had 74 ex officio members (59 Visitatrixes, one Regional Superior and one Sister Servant of the Quasi-Province, the ten General Councillors, the Treasurer General, the Secretary General and the Superioress General), but only 68 delegates (one per Province and one additional delegate for the eight Provinces that had more than 500 Sisters as of April 1, 2014: Madrid San Vicente, Madrid Santa Luisa, España Sur, Gijón, Pamplona, San Sebastian, San Vincenzo-Italia and Vietnam).

We thus had to find a method to add delegates, and we decided to favor the three most recently reconfigured Provinces that had fewer than 500 Sisters (la Milagrosa Bogota-Venezuela, Nuestra Señora de la Mision-America Sur and the Province del Caribe), as well as those with the greatest number of Sisters on the other continents (Madagascar and the Philippines, since in Asia Vietnam already had an additional delegate). We also chose to give two delegates to the Province of the Near East, which includes five countries on two continents, and to ask the Region of Albania-Kosovo to elect one delegate, on the one hand to give a sign of encouragement to this Region that has the youngest average age in the Company, and on the other hand because, up until the last minute, we did not know if certain Provinces would reach 500 Sisters and thus have two delegates. Therefore, we have an Assembly with 149 members by right, divided into 74 ex officio members and 75 delegates. To refresh your memory, the eighth General Assembly in 2009 was made up of 184 members, 92 ex officio members and 92 delegates.

I would add that our median age is 59 years old and that 81 of the 149 members, or 54.3%, are attending a General Assembly for the first time. Some Visitatrixes are coming for the second time (occasionally even more times because of reconfigurations) and some former delegates have become Visitatrixes. However, I note in particular that some former Visitatrixes have been elected delegates (4) and that several delegates are coming as delegates for a second time (9). The last time, in 2009, the percentage of members who were coming for the first time was 59.2%.

In fact, beyond the numbers, what is really important to emphasize is that all of us represent the Company as a whole, and that we are here to

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listen to the Spirit, to learn from each other, to understand the diverse realities around us and make decisions for the continuation of the journey.

You will be given many instructions so that the Assembly will function smoothly, but I would like to stress the conditions for good dialogue and the necessary role of silence. Blessed Paul VI, in the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, gave the following as characteristic of an effective dialogue between the Church and the world: clarity, meekness/respect, prudence and confidence in the other's good will to enter into the dialogue; these conditions apply to dialogue among ourselves as well. As for silence, Pope Emeritus Benedict spoke about it in these terms: "*Silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist.*"<sup>1</sup> Let's not be afraid of taking times for silence during our group discussions; they will bring out the shared perspectives and hone our listening.

We'll now attempt to, if not retrace these past six years, at least highlight some of their defining features. It is indeed a way for me to give you who are members of the General Assembly an accounting for the service that the previous Assembly entrusted to the General Councillors and me; however, at the same time, I wish to place myself before you as a humble witness of God's grace at work in the Company. Of course, I am not denying these years have had their dark sides and difficulties (Sisters who have left, those who have refused a missioning and the objective obstacles coming from the political, economic and ecological context, etc.), and you know them as well, but my experience leads me to praise today. I have seen, we have seen, God's grace at work in the Company, and I have seen, we have seen, the wonders worked in Sisters' hearts and the exceptional services provided to persons living in poverty. I will thus develop the following points:

- A Company that is very much alive, evolving and changing
- A Company at the service of Christ in persons who are poor
- A Company that shares and that takes an interest in formation
- A Company made up of faith communities that participate fully in the mission of the Church

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1. Benedict XVI, Message for the 46th World Communications Day, January 24, 2012

## **1. A COMPANY THAT IS VERY MUCH ALIVE, EVOLVING AND CHANGING**

### **• Statistics**

Traditionally, a report is given during this presentation on the statistics of the Company. You have in front of you a small booklet with the principal data, and you will have the opportunity to study it at leisure. We'll just mention that the Company numbered 19,436 Sisters in 2009, and we are currently 16,179, or 3,257 less Sisters. The difference is explained in this way: during this period, there were 723 entrances, but 3,443 deaths, to which we must, unfortunately, add those who left, 537 Sisters, including 104 Seminary Sisters and 148 Sisters who had not made their vows for the first time (and 285 Sisters who had made vows). The departure percent was .41% in 2014 (a slight decline) and always presents the same questions: was discernment before admission too rapid? Was formation appropriate? The Seminarium allowed us to more deeply study certain subjects related to formation; as the fruit of this gathering, we sent Guidelines on Initial Formation intended for the Visitatrixes and her Council as well as for all the Sisters who collaborate in initial formation (Sister Servants, Councillors, etc.).

As I mentioned, many Sisters have gone to the Father's House since 2009, but three deaths were particularly tragic: that of Sister Brigitte, who died in 2010 during the earthquake in Haiti, Sister Rosa Sotelo, Provincial Treasurer of Peru, who died in a traffic accident in August 2012, and Sister Miguelina Florido, Visitatrix of that same Province of Peru, who died this January.

### **• Reconfigurations**

After the six Provinces of France were regrouped into two Provinces (2001) and the two Provinces of Graz and Salzburg in 2004, do you know how many new Provinces have been created since 2009? Eight: they are the Province of St. Louise-USA (4 Provinces), the Province of Cologne-Netherlands (2 Provinces), that of Graz-Central Europe (3 Provinces), that of España Sur (3 Provinces) and that of San Vincenzo-Italia (3 Provinces), then the Provinces del Caribe (4 Provinces), la Milagrosa Bogota-Venezuela (2 Provinces) and Nuestra Señora de la Mision-America Sur

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(4 Provinces). This represents 25 Provinces that were reconfigured to form 8 new ones. The Councillors and I can only admire the spirit of faith, inventiveness and courage of the Provinces involved. I had the grace and joy of participating in all of these reconfigurations, and I have dear memories of them. Their fruits are already evident: these new Provinces have discerned their priorities, closed some local communities and opened others; Sisters have been available to respond to apostolic needs and change regions, sometimes even countries. We'll add that 20 other Provinces have already begun a process of reconfiguration that will result in regroupings in the coming years. I once again pay tribute to the Sisters' courage and their vision of the future. In this coming together already carried out or being prepared, I see the result of good spiritual discernment and wise moving forward with Providence. *"The things of God come about by themselves, and... wisdom consists in following Providence step by step."*<sup>2</sup>

#### • Implantations and openings

The Sisters who participated in the 2009 Assembly surely recall the sending on mission of Sisters from Nigeria to Burkina Faso; this implantation thus already dates back six years and is flourishing; the Sisters are at the service of the diocese of Nouna for social, health and education services. They are planning to begin a work for persons with disabilities.

In June 2012, Sisters from the Provinces of Central Africa and Eritrea were sent to the Central African Republic (Safa); this mission as well is full of hope although the Sisters have had to face many challenges... tropical diseases, civil war in the country and inter-religious clashes... I am tempted to compare their tenacity to that of the Sisters whom our Founders sent to Calais to care for the wounded and had to be replaced because some died and the others fell ill. Saint Vincent had these wonderful words to say about the replacements: *"Have you ever heard of anyone being so detached from all natural sentiments that, despite*

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2. Saint Vincent, to Bernard Codoing, August 6, 1644. CCD II, p. 521

*knowing that, of the four Sisters already sent there, one is dead and the others very ill, they come forward to replace them and say, 'Here I am, Monsieur; I'm ready.'"*<sup>3</sup>

On June 15, 2013, a local community of three Sisters from the Province of Chelmno was opened in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, but already on July 9, the Sisters had to leave this house because the government, despite its promises, refused to extend their visas, even as they agreed the Sisters could come for about four weeks for youth ministry once or twice a year, which they did in 2014 and will do in 2015. Recall that Polish Sisters from the Province of Chelmno have been present in Kazakhstan since 2000. They already have three local communities in this country with a very harsh climate where the Christian population is a tiny minority and where they joyfully serve persons who are poor. After the difficulties encountered in Uzbekistan, the Visitatrix and her Council will soon open a house in Siberia in the city of Slavgorod, diocese of Novossibirsk (an immense diocese of Russia in which we already have two local communities that depend on the Province of Slovakia).

We should also note the opening of the mission of Belize in November 2013. Sisters from the Province of Mexico and one Sister from the Province of Central America were the foundation stones. There as well, they serve a very underprivileged population, namely, migrants who work on farms and whose dignity is not respected by their employers. The Sisters are at their side for pastoral care and help them to defend their rights.

After a presence of ten years and according to the original plans, the Sisters of the Province of Los Altos Hills left the Cook Islands at the end of 2014. They were greatly appreciated in the parish and establishments for persons with disabilities. They were able to form lay personnel capable of replacing them. For the record, I remind you that this mission was opened on the initiative of the Province of Australia in collaboration with other Provinces: Ireland, Great Britain and in the United States.

Therefore, as of today, by the grace of God, the Company is present in 94 countries.

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3. Saint Vincent, *To Four Sisters being sent to Calais*, August 4, 1658. CCD X, p. 442

## The Company Today

### • Sendings on mission

Since 2009, 37 Sisters have come through the International Missionary Center and went to the mission *Ad Gentes*. They came from the Provinces of Poland, Nigeria, Vietnam, Spain, Lebanon, North India, South India, Brazil, Argentina and Columbia. I warmly thank their Visitatrixes and would like to highlight that, among these Sisters, eleven came from Vietnam and four from India (two from each Province).

We currently have five Sisters in the Mission Center, one Sister from Peru and four Sisters from Vietnam, and we will have the joy of participating in their sending on mission during this Assembly... These sendings on mission are a sign of vitality given by an international Company; I know that they will continue! I would also add the importance of other forms of departures for the mission: sometimes Sisters leave their country without leaving their Province and, for example, leave Spain for Morocco, Guinea, Chad or Angola; the Sisters who serve in Kenya come from Ireland, the United States, Great Britain, Ethiopia and Nigeria. Sisters from Congo depart for Tanzania; Polish Sisters are sent to Ukraine or Belorussia, and I know this list is not exhaustive.

All of these departures and uprooting also bear witness to the generosity and availability of the Sisters and their Visitatrixes. As Pope Francis so often repeats to us: *“Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ... If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.”*<sup>4</sup>

## 2. A COMPANY AT THE SERVICE OF CHRIST IN PERSONS WHO ARE POOR

### • Close to persons who are poor

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4. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49

I base my comments about the service of persons who are poor first on the visits I had the joy of making in your Provinces over these past six years; I especially rely on the General Councillors' regular visitations, which are always the object of a detailed report during special Council sessions, a report followed by discussion. Of course, your Council sheets, your letters and quarterly reports that you regularly send me are also a great source of information, feeding our prayers and strengthening the communion among us. This “family sharing” thanks to visits or correspondence is an inheritance from our Founders that we must preserve.

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise wanted us to be close to persons who are poor, alongside them: *“In the name of God, my dear Sisters... be very gentle and courteous toward 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.”*<sup>5</sup> During one of our community reflections as a Council, we considered what the distinguishing characteristic of Daughters of Charity is today... Our responses expressed that proximity with persons living in poverty, the fact of feeling comfortable with them and they with us, a familiar relationship, simplicity and seeking out the most abandoned are still today “our way of being”, in fidelity to our Founders. We observe this in your requests to open a local community, addressed to the General Council. You choose the places where there is a minimal religious presence, where the residents' poverty is obvious... whether it is the outskirts of a large city, like La Cañada near Madrid, or a remote corner of Burundi or Amazonia, and you also prefer simple means. I give thanks for this fidelity to our spirit, of which we find an echo in the circular letter by CIVCSVA, *Scrutate*: *“Let's plant a small and humble type of work and presence, like the mustard seed in the Gospel (cf. Mt 13:31-32), where the intensity of the sign should shine without any limits; the courageous word, joyful fraternity, listening to the small voice, the memory of the dwelling place of God among human kind.”*<sup>6</sup>

### • Faced with natural disasters and violent situations

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5. Saint Louise, to Sister Cécile Agnès, May 4, 1650, L. 284b. *Spiritual Writings*, p. 320-321

6. *Scrutate*, 16

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This is the time to bring up the tragedies that we have experienced over these past six years... from the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, the one in Chili the following month, the tsunami in Japan in March 2011, up to Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines in November 2013. The response to these natural disasters was exemplary... in some cases, as in Haiti, human and financial resources were almost immediately made available to the suffering Province. The earthquake took place January 12, 2010, and by January 23, Sisters coming from ten Provinces in Latin America, the Caribbean, North America and Europe arrived in Port-au-Prince to reinforce services and replace Sisters who needed time to recover after the chaos of the first days.

In the case of the Philippines, the Province rallied to come to the assistance of the region that was so harshly touched by this extraordinarily strong hurricane; Sisters and their lay collaborators went on site to bring food, clothing and spiritual support to the survivors. In Chili and Japan, the Sisters were a part of relief efforts organized by Caritas, the Conference of Major Superiors and other branches of the Vincentian Family; they placed themselves at the service of families struck by the disasters.

In addition to these natural disasters, these past six years were marked by domestic or international conflicts, revolts, in short, violent situations. Sometimes the Sisters had to withdraw when it was impossible to act, as in Libya; sometimes they witnessed national revolutions like in Tunisia and Egypt.

What can I say about Syria, Nigeria, Haiti and other countries like Columbia or Venezuela? What can I say about northern Cameroon, this region that foreign Sisters had to leave and where the native Sisters courageously keep all the services running, including a pediatric hospital? Each situation is different, but the living conditions of a population in the grips of violence, terrorism or war are terrible, and our Sisters continued to provide medical care, pastoral care and educational services, in simplicity and the joy of fulfilling the mission confided to them.

### • **At the service of victims of trafficking and migrants**

You surely remember that we drew up a declaration at the end of the 2009 Assembly to express our desire to become more involved as a Company in

the fight against human trafficking. Several times at the General Council we returned to this theme and studied all that is done in the Provinces, and we were filled with wonder. In one place, the Sisters inform and warn students in primary and secondary schools and their parents about the potential dangers of offers for work abroad; in order to do this, the entire school network is put to work. In another place, Sisters make safe havens available for persons who attempt to escape the slavery to which they've been subjected. Elsewhere, it involves pressuring governments to more actively seek out those responsible for trafficking and punish them more severely. We also asked a number of Sisters to participate in formation meetings organized by the continental delegations of the Union of Superiors General. The results are positive, but too small compared to the magnitude of the task.

Mexico, Guatemala, the United States, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Calais (France), Great Britain... migrants arrive in these countries, our countries, in a state of total physical and psychological exhaustion and after having lived through terrible experiences. The Company is present in all of these critical locations to bring assistance, advice and legal aid within the framework of various associations. Very recently, the International Union of Superiors General asked us to participate in an inter-congregational project in Sicily on behalf of migrants who cross the Mediterranean at the risk of their lives and in sub-human conditions. In conjunction with the Province of Naples, we responded affirmatively to this call. This action, like all that the Provinces have implemented, intends to break one of the links in the chain of indifference surrounding refugees. But let us pray that, thanks to Pope Francis, countries will join forces and act to a greater extent!

The big question remains: why does this emigration occur? Why do so many men, women, families, youth and even children flee their countries at the risk of their lives? Surely in the hope of finding better living conditions, the freedom to live out their faith, to have an education, etc. Our Sisters who serve at the United Nations, both in New York and in Geneva, have the opportunity to unite the voice of the Company to that of the Church and of many NGOs who want to see this problem addressed, both in terms of emergency assistance and at the level of the deep causes for these migrations of entire populations. I was not able to go to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, but I did have the

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opportunity to participate in a session in Geneva concerning respect for human rights. I was pleased to observe how important the presence of the Company has been and to what extent the on-the-ground experience of religious congregations was valued.

### • **Serving in collaboration**

When we speak about collaboration, it is right to begin with the Vincentian Family and first of all the Congregation of the Mission, of course. In no particular order, I can give examples of collaboration between the Company and the Congregation: parish ministry, youth ministry, popular missions, social works, etc. We also collaborate considerably with the other branches of the Vincentian Family. In some countries, like Brazil and India, we work more with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; in other countries mostly with the AIC, as in Italy and Japan. We should note that the Daughters of Charity very often found and accompany groups of the Vincentian Marian Youth or young adult SSVP and groups of the AMM and that they also enjoy the support of some MISEVI communities.

But, as we know, collaboration extends beyond the Vincentian Family. Allow me to first mention the international Catholic organizations to which we belong: the Catholic International Education Office (OIEC) (and I would like to especially mention the inter-American confederation of this same organization with which we closely collaborate), International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) and the Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEAFJ). We could then speak about the groups with which we work for the holistic development of the person and for the eradication of the causes of poverty: for example, the Network of Solidarity Entrepreneurs, which evaluates the needs for milk and medications in Madagascar and Haiti and then meets those needs; Electricians without Borders, which has already developed projects for Madagascar and Burundi.

I cannot leave out Covide and Covidec, IPS and the Rosalie Rendu Fund, associations founded by the Daughters of Charity (and Covide and Covidec by the Priests of the Mission), which weave a network of donors and, I would dare say, of friends, around the Daughters of Charity. They support their services of persons who are poor and connect the actors on the ground, namely the Daughters of Charity, servants of those who are

poor, with those who have the desire and the means to help them. We have had many beautiful examples of this with the King Foundation in Eritrea, Cameroon and soon in Mozambique.

We could also mention the DREAM network, in which we help each other in the assistance that is provided to persons with HIV, following the protocol developed by Sant'Egidio. The far-reaching network of Caritas Internationalis is also a privileged partner for many Provinces, not to mention relationships with diocesan and parish Caritas or Catholic Charities. This is the time to quote Constitution 24e: *“The Daughters of Charity are constantly solicitous for the development of every person in all the aspects of their being. This is why they are alert to ways of helping their brothers and sisters to become conscious of their own dignity and agents of their own promotion. They plead the cause of the underprivileged, who do not have the possibility of making their legitimate demands and aspirations heard. While respecting the situation of the individual, they take up the cause of those who are poor and collaborate, according to the directives of the Church, with those who are working to defend their rights. They commit themselves to work for social transformation to change the unjust structures that cause poverty.”*

### **3. A COMPANY THAT SHARES AND THAT TAKES AN INTEREST IN FORMATION**

#### • **That shares its human and financial resources**

I am persuaded that the few days that you have just spent at the Mother House have been enough for you to assess how fortunate we are to have an international community here, made up of Sisters of 26 nationalities. I thank the Visitatrixes who have lent their Sisters to us for 3, 4 or 6 years. I can vouch that the six local communities of this large house are enriched by these different cultures, and I think I can affirm that the Sisters who spend several years here return to their native Provinces with a more concrete vision of the universality of the Company. It is an experience that should be continued, even expanded...

Sister Pia, our Treasurer General, will have the opportunity this very afternoon to speak to you about the Company's finances, but it is important for me to thank the Provinces that generously share their surplus with

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the Company. In that way, they allow the General Council to support those Provinces that need assistance, and they are numerous. They are thereby following our Founders' recommendations. With Sister Pia, I was invited to a gathering last year by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA), and I had the opportunity to explain how mutual assistance operates in the Company, coordinated at the General level. I had the clear impression that some other congregations do not share their financial resources as effectively and easily.

#### • That takes an interest in formation

The 2009 Assembly suggested that we turn our attention to formation on the international level, and we tried to faithfully respond to its request. In addition to the usual Vincentian Sessions, whose program was slightly modified, we organized a Seminarium in 2011. It brought together 76 Sisters from 74 Provinces, all of whom were involved in initial formation.

Then, during the following years, we initiated four Spiritual and Vincentian Revitalization Sessions, one of which was reserved for Sisters 7 to 10 years vocation, as well as an International Retreat for Sister Servants. All of the General Councillors were personally involved in preparing one of the sessions, and we have excellent memories of the Sisters' level of participation. They had an incredible thirst for Vincentian spirituality, and the simplicity of their sharing was refreshing and full of hope. In all, these sessions brought together about 400 Sisters coming from all of the Provinces of the Company.

I would like to slip into this section about an interest in formation the publication of two Guides: *The Visitatrix and the Provincial Council* and *The Sister Servant in the Company of the Daughters of Charity*. Drafting them allowed us to have excellent times of reflection and discussion, and we think that they are practical tools to facilitate Provincial Councils' discernment before making decisions and to guide the formation that you provide on a Provincial level.

#### 4. A COMPANY MADE UP OF FAITH COMMUNITIES THAT PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

#### • Faith communities

Let's call to mind the 16,179 Sisters who make up the Company. Did you know that we have, at the two extremes, 65 centenarians and 493 Sisters under 30? We really are a large family, with every age group; above all, we have many saintly Sisters who serve the Lord and persons who are poor with all their heart and all their strength; we all know some of them! However, we also know that we are all on a path of ongoing conversion.

I would like, in fact, to reflect a little with you on the expression *faith community*. The year of Consecrated Life invites us to more deeply develop this reality that is so beautiful and sometimes very fragile. We must be communities modeled on the Holy Trinity, communities that offer the world "*a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion*"<sup>7</sup> who live according to the Beatitudes, who have but one heart and whose hearts and doors are open. Let's listen to Saint Louise: "*What [God] asks of you at the moment, my dear Sisters, is great union and great support for one another. He also asks that you labor together at God's work with great gentleness and humility, and that what goes on between you remain there so that everyone may be edified.*"<sup>8</sup>

Our Constitutions and Statutes define a clear framework to help us live community life for the mission, calling upon each Sister's participation and personal responsibility. My experience has shown me that a local community that is faithful to the practice of mutual forgiveness and sharing on the Word of God breathes out joy and reflects peace. All of us are also aware of the critical importance of appointing, accompanying, forming and supporting humble and solid Sister Servants.

Allow me to quote Pope Francis again: "*In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective*

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7. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 99

8. Saint Louise, to Sister Barbe Angiboust, June 11, 1652. L. 353. *Spiritual Writings*, p. 397

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gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.”<sup>9</sup> “You are called to be experts in communion.”<sup>10</sup>

### • Marian communities

“In their service, the Daughters of Charity strive to be faithful to the Marian character of the Company...” They “promote Marian devotion. They inculcate it through simple means such as the Miraculous Medal, a genuine summary of the history of salvation. They work for the development of Marian Associations and for their integration into the pastoral plan of the Church.”<sup>11</sup> I give thanks for the Marian devotion that is so much alive in the Company and for all the initiatives for formation and listening undertaken in so many of our chapels to which pilgrims eagerly stream... I am thinking of what I had the opportunity to see in Cali, Rio de Janeiro, Manila and elsewhere, not to mention this Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

### • Communities that participate fully in the mission of the Church

“The Company participates in the Church’s universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of its Founders...”<sup>12</sup> In his encyclical *Deus Caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned Saint Vincent and Saint Louise as ‘lasting models of social charity’; in the same way, we could say with Pope Francis that the Company places its charism at the service of a communion which evangelizes<sup>13</sup>; the Company has a specific place in this mission of the Church. The Daughters of Charity, today as in the past, are generally well-rooted, present and visible in their dioceses and parishes. They participate in the Church’s service of charity, with an interest in finding “new avenues..., new paths of creativity..., different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.”<sup>14</sup>

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9. Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, I, 2

10. cf. Ibid. II, 3

11. C. 26 and S. 14

12. C. 1a

13. Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 130

14. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 11

Participating fully in the mission of the Church also means participating in the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Avila (we know how impressed Saint Vincent was by the Spanish Carmelites and liked to give them as an example); it further means rejoicing in the upcoming beatification of Archbishop Romero, assassinated for defending persons who were poor and speaking on their behalf. We will soon enter into the Holy Year of Mercy, a great opportunity to bear witness to God’s infinite love for every person and to this virtue that our contemporaries sometimes confuse with weakness since our society is merciless toward those who are different.

### • Communities whose members are called to give the supreme witness, that of martyrdom

Several beatifications of Daughters of Charity have taken place since 2009. In June 2011, Sister Marguerite Rutan, guillotined in 1794, was elevated by the Church during a celebration that was as intense in prayer as in local color, extreme heat and lively music in the bullring of Dax. In 2013 in Tarragona, we had the joy of seeing the martyrdom of twenty-seven Daughters of Charity and a Child of Mary recognized by the Church; all were killed in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War for having refused to abandon their faith and their vocation as Daughters of Charity. In the city where Saint Fructueux and his companions were martyred in the third century, they were beatified with 15 Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, along with other religious men and women. The message of these martyrs is still relevant and a light for our lives... and we are all called to be ready to give this same witness. Think of our Sisters in Syria, Nigeria, Eritrea, Cameroon, etc. Let us listen to Saint Vincent: “The blood of our Sisters will bring others to the Company and will merit for those who remain the grace of God to sanctify themselves.”<sup>15</sup> Let us also consider the situations we must brave as the cost of fidelity to the faith. I am thinking of India, where persecutions against Christians are just below the surface. I am also referring to our Western countries where courage, I would almost say bravery, is needed to deal with much of society’s contempt for Christian values.

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15. Saint Vincent, *To Four Sisters being sent to Calais*, August 4, 1658. CCD X, p. 443

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Father Shijo, Postulator for the Congregation of the Mission, recently came to participate in one of our Council meetings in order to give us an update on the causes in progress. In the coming years, we will have the joy of celebrating more beatifications or canonizations!

### Conclusion

At the end of this presentation as a witness to God's action in the Company, allow me to add a personal note. I wish to give thanks to the Lord for these years lived here at the Mother House in the ministry that the Company entrusted to me. I am grateful for your support for and your patience with me, and I ask forgiveness of God and of all of you for the times I have been too slow or, on the contrary, have rushed into things and for my inconsistency that may have hurt you and harmed the Company. I also wish to pay tribute to the General Council, and in a very special way to the Assistant General, Treasurer General and Secretary General (Sister Rosa Maria, Sister Pia and Sister Ana Maria). Thank you to these twelve Sisters with whom I collaborated in a spirit of faith, joy and simplicity. If you'll allow me to go beyond the limits of 2009-2015, I would also like to give homage to the Sisters on the previous General Council and, of course, to Mother Elizondo, from whom I learned much when I was Treasurer General. I do not forget the other Sisters of the Secretariat, Treasurer General's Office, International Translation Center and International Missionary Center, and all the Sisters of the Mother House with whom I have daily shared prayer, the Word and Bread, the Eucharistic Bread and the bread of communal meals. We will remain united in prayer.

What a grace it is for us to celebrate this ninth General Assembly at the same time as our two hundred years of presence here at the rue du Bac, in our fifth Mother House! We gathered in the Chapel last Sunday to thank God for His fidelity and Mary for her protection. It seems to me that we were also all united in the desire to be worthy of the inheritance we have received and to take responsibility for passing on the passionate love Saint Vincent and Saint Louise had for Christ, recognized and served in persons who are poor.

I would like to quickly return to the theme with which we are going to work over these coming weeks: the boldness of Charity for a new

missionary momentum. The *Synthesis of Responses* is peppered with powerful phrases that express the Sisters' desire for concrete missionary steps forward in fidelity to our vocation and rootedness in Jesus Christ, recognized and served in the person of the poor: "*Having listened to the Word, we feel sent to walk alongside those who are on the margins of society, convinced that this is where Jesus awaits us to build the Kingdom.*"<sup>16</sup> "*An open and prophetic vision teaches us the necessity of the revision of works and giving them a new missionary face.*"<sup>17</sup> "*Live in a state of ongoing conversion in order to proclaim the Kingdom and be available for the calls of the Company, the Church and those who are poor.*"<sup>18</sup> "*Adopt a sisterly, simple, modest, supportive and joyful life style in proximity with those who are poor.*"<sup>19</sup>

And you surely noted that the Sisters from 7-10 years vocation also passed solid messages on to us: "*Be attentive to all forms of poverty, offer bold responses wherever the Daughters of Charity are present and risk going beyond where we are.*" "*Become involved in a dynamic way in vocation ministry; in order to do so, we need to develop a 'vocation culture'.*"<sup>20</sup> etc.

The numerous speeches and urgent calls from Pope Francis and documents from the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life bear witness that the theme of our Assembly and the Sisters' reflections are very much in line with the Church's thinking and its mission today:

*"Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries."*<sup>21</sup>

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16. *Synthesis of Responses*, p. 25

17. *Synthesis of Responses*, p. 28

18. *Synthesis of Responses*, p. 32

19. *Synthesis of Responses*, p. 35

20. *Synthesis of Responses*, p. 43

21. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 272



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“Consecrated life, nourished by the hope of the promise, is called to continue its journey without allowing itself to be influenced by what it leaves behind: ‘I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession... forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead’ (Phil 3:13). Hope is not built on the foundation of our strength or our numbers, but on the gifts of the Spirit: faith, communion, mission.”<sup>22</sup>

Let us entrust the coming weeks to the Virgin Mary, only Mother of the Company, and leave the final words to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise:

“To You, my God, I make this request, through the merits of Your Son Jesus Christ, that You will complete the work You have begun. Continue Your holy protection of this Little Company and all the blessings You have been pleased to shower on it until now and, if it pleases You, grant the grace of final perseverance to these good Sisters...”<sup>23</sup>

“... you must be strong women. In fact, since you are Daughters of Charity in name, and since you know that true charity loves and endures everything, even the worst contradictions and repugnances, I hope that all of you practice this.”<sup>24</sup>

Sister Evelyne FRANC  
Daughter of Charity

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22. CIVCSVA, *Scrutate*, 11

23. Saint Vincent, August 8, 1655. *CCD X*, p. 85

24. Saint Louise de Marillac, letter to Sister Jeanne Lepintre, August 1648, L. 319. *Spiritual Writings*, p. 252

## ELECTIONS

### Election of the Superioress General

Pentecost Monday, May 25, 2015

The members of the Assembly fervently implored the coming of the Holy Spirit, associating themselves in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room, during the day of reflection in preparation for this great event for the whole Company.

On Pentecost Monday, May 25, a concelebrated Eucharist, presided by Father Gregory Gay, opened the day. In his homily, commenting on the day's Gospel, the Superior General recalled the mission of the Superioress General in the reality of the Company, the Church and the world today.

The Assembly then proceeded to the election of the Superioress General:

### Sister Kathleen APPLER

was elected for a six-year term.



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Elections

Relying on the grace of God, the assistance of Father Gregory Gay and Father Bernard Schoepfer and all the Sisters' collaboration, Sister Kathleen expressed her availability to serve the Company.

The Mother House bell announced the news, and all the Sisters gathered in the garden surrounding the Conference Hall to express their affection and gratitude to our Superioress General and to assure her of their prayerful support. By telephone, fax and email, the news quickly spread in all the Provinces throughout the world.

## **Election of the Superioress General Homily by Father Gregory Gay**

Pentecost Monday, May 25, 2015

*“They were exceedingly astonished, and said among themselves, ‘Then who can be saved?’” (Mk 10:26)*

I open with these words from today's Gospel because they are sentiments we have all had at one time or another. At times, the challenge to live Gospel values, our vows, and the Vincentian charism we profess can seem overwhelming and astonishing. This life is not just about taking vows, reading the Constitutions, or adhering to provincial norms and statutes. That's the simple part. As our first reading states, your vocation as followers of Saints Vincent and Louise calls you to *“stand firm in the way set before you, in prayer to the Most High God”* (Sir 17:22).

However, ‘standing firm’ is not an easy path, as we know so well. Today, there are many competing voices calling out to overpower us. Perhaps that is why today's first reading has as its theme penitence and returning to God. We can identify with St. Paul's lament in Romans: *“I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want”* (Rom 7:19). Even if the word ‘evil’ seems too strong, St. Paul highlights a human truth: we all fall short of what is expected of us. Despite our ideals and resolutions, we can miss the mark in living Gospel and Vincentian values.

St. Louise told her first Daughters: *“In order for the service we render Him to be pleasing to Him, it must proceed from a good heart, that is to say, one that is accustomed to mortifying its own judgment and will and to denying satisfaction to its senses and passions”* (SW, L. 508, p. 536). I resonate with her phrase “good heart” because it is an apt description of her. The image of the heart is emblematic to our Vincentian heritage. The chapel contains the heart of St. Vincent to remind us of his love of God in the poor. On the seal of the Daughters of Charity is emblazoned a heart that unites

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us to Jesus and Mary, the animators of our apostolate and community life. The heart gives the body life, and it is the place where Scripture tells us that God's spirit dwells within us.

"Heartfulness" is a contemporary term used in discussing spirituality to denote a yearning for transcendence. In today's Gospel, the young man who approaches Jesus seems to have a heart for God, and he asks the right question. Yet, faced with the cost of discipleship, he cannot freely and fully make a true choice of the heart. He sees his life in terms of what he possesses. This Gospel is a lesson in detachment to attain attachment to God. Our Holy Founders also struggled with this issue. In his early years, Vincent set out to achieve clerical status and comfort. In her later years, Louise worried about the direction of her adult son was undertaking. Both learned to entrust the concerns of their hearts to God's loving mercy.

Jesus tells us that "*where your treasure is, there also will your heart be*" (Lk 12:34). We know that our true treasure is in Jesus Christ. Once Vincent and Louise allowed the person of Christ to take hold of their lives, they had a strength, support, and energy to accomplish great works they could never have done on their own. St. Vincent said, "*We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ*" (L. 1078, 4 December 1648, CCD III, p. 384).

The answer to the query of the young man, the disciples, Vincent and Louise, and for all of us gathered here today is stated simply and beautifully in the last line of today's Gospel: "*All things are possible with God*" (Mk 10:27). God gives us the strength and courage to be Jesus' disciples and to live our Vincentian charism. It is God who opens our hearts to his Word, present in this Eucharist, and who speaks to us in the depths of our hearts, and in this Assembly. The Triune God dwells within us, first through baptism, and then the sacraments and acts of faith, hope, and love we undertake throughout our lives of fidelity to the Father and loving service to the poor.

In a document circulated for discussion and reflection before this General Assembly, you were asked to prepare yourselves "to receive the boldness of charity from Christ." Behind our plans, documents, rules, and guidelines, it is the person of Jesus we must first prepare to seek if we want to find our true compass as individuals and a community.

This boldness of charity is the heart of the Gospel challenge today. Jesus tells the young man, "*You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me*" (Mk 10: 21). This was the boldest of challenges, one this earnest young man did not likely expect. It is also a challenge that we, as vowed people, must also continually encounter.

However, there is one thing we can miss in this compelling story: a key reaction of Jesus. While putting what seems like an impossible challenge to the young man, Mark says, "*Jesus, looking at him, loved him...*" (Mk 10:21) Imagine that! Knowing that this young man could choose a lesser path, Jesus still extended his love to him. What boldness and charity! Despite his "no" Jesus still loves him unconditionally and would give him another chance if he were to ask!

As we come to the Eucharist today, let us not be overwhelmed at the tasks the Lord sets before us. Embracing "*the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum*" demands we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit in whatever duties lie before us. Today, you will elect a new Superioress General. As you undertake this important task, let us give thanks to God for the witness of faith and devotion to duty that Sister Evelyne Franc has given over the past twelve years. May God bless you, Sister Evelyne, for your example and generous service to the Company.

Your Constitutions describe leadership in the Company as this: "*The Superioress General, successor to St. Louise de Marillac, imbued with the teachings of the Founders, exercises her authority in such a way as to "manifest to all the Sisters the love the Lord has for them"*" (C.66, cf., *Perfectae Caritatis*, No. 14).

Therefore, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of the Company, and by the prayers of our Holy Founders, Saints Vincent and Louise, let us pray the Triune God that the Holy Spirit will guide this Assembly to bring forth another successor to Saint Louise, one who like the Lord Jesus will be "*in your midst as one who serves*" (Lk 22:27).

Father Gregory Gay  
Superior General

**Election of the General Councillors  
and the Assistant General**

June 1 and 5, 2015

Monday, June 1, 2015, the General Assembly elected the General Councillors:

- Sister Raimunda Corina de Sousa BASTOS ..... Brazilian
- Sister Hanna CYBULA..... Polish
- Sister Neghesti MICHAEL – re-elected ..... Eritrean
- Sister Maria Teresa MUEDA..... Filipino
- Sister Carmen PEREZ GONZALEZ ..... Spanish
- Sister Françoise PETIT – re-elected ..... French
- Sister Mary RAW..... British
- Sister Iliana SUAREZ PEREZ – re-elected..... Cuban

June 5, 2015, the General Assembly elected  
**Sister Françoise PETIT**  
as the Assistant General of the Company.



**To Sister Kathleen APPLER,  
Superioress General  
of the Company  
of the Daughters of Charity  
of Saint Vincent de Paul**



Vatican, May 25, 2015

The day following the feast of Pentecost, you were elected Superioress General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. It is my pleasure to address to you, the new General Council and all Daughters of Charity my cordial wishes as well as the assurance of my prayer that your service of the poorest of the poor may bear great fruit.

During this *Year of Consecrated Life*, which I called in order to demonstrate its value in the Church and allow its beauty and holiness to shine forth, I invite all Daughters of Charity to ever more effectively implement the essential aspects of their consecrated life, in the light of their Founders' charism. To this end, and especially during your General Assembly, it falls to each of you to give thanks for her vocation and live the present with passion, with grateful remembrance of the past and attentive listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you today (cf. *Apostolic letter to all consecrated people*, I, 2).

*I*

*In  
Communion  
with the  
Church*

### *In Communion with the Church*

By choosing the theme, “*The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*,” you intend to deepen your personal relationship with God and your service of persons who are poor. In this way, your commitment will become more joyful and fruitful each day as you discern new paths in order to respond to the opportunities that arise for you to proclaim, with the boldness of Christ, the joy of the Gospel to persons who are poor. Indeed, “The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198). By constantly allowing persons who are poor, who are our brothers and sisters, to teach us, we will be able to embrace the mysterious wisdom of God that is made known in those who are weak and despised (cf. 1 Cor 1:27).

As you go out toward others in order to reach the peripheries of humanity, wherever you are sent, I invite you to “wake up the world” because “there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them” (*Evangelii gaudium*, n. 48). The *Jubilee Year of Mercy* responds to this desire God has to constantly show His closeness and tenderness, He who never tires of loving us and forgiving us, if only we ask Him.

May trusting dialogue among generations and sisterly communion bring each Sister comfort and perseverance in difficulties, boldness and patience to overcome obstacles and grateful praise for the wonders of grace accomplished in the secret of your hearts!

As I deeply thank Sister Evelyne Franc for her service and give thanks to God for all the good the Company is given to do in the service of the mission of the Church among those who are most poor, I entrust you to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary and to the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. I wholeheartedly impart my affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you as well as to all Daughters of Charity, especially to those who live in areas where there is conflict or great poverty. And I ask you to pray for me.

Pope Francis

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## IN COMMUNION WITH THE CHURCH

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### **Visit of Archbishop Luigi Ventura Apostolic Nuncio in France**

Homily by Archbishop Luigi Ventura  
Mother House, May 27, 2015

The Eucharist on May 27, 2015, was celebrated by Archbishop Luigi Ventura, the Apostolic Nuncio in France. Here is his homily.

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* Praised be Jesus Christ!

Sister, Superioress General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, dear Sister Visitatrixes and delegates, I am delighted that I could respond to your invitation and celebrate the Eucharist with you on the occasion of your General Assembly in this, the Mother House of your Company, which is so dear to you.

You represent such a beautiful face of the universal Church, you who come from 94 countries where your Company serves, and you have chosen an ambitious theme around which to prepare and hold your General Assembly: “*The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*”.

Indeed, you intend to seek together how to improve your response to the calls of those who suffer from the scandal of poverty and modern forms of slavery: refugees, persons who live on the margins, those victimized by human trafficking, men, women and children who are left behind... All this, of course, in fidelity to the Church and to your specific charism. God knows how the media constantly place the tragic consequences of these scandals before our eyes!

### In Communion with the Church

Here, in Europe, we see the tragedy of refugees forced to leave their countries, ravaged by war or suffering under dictators; elsewhere, we find the victims of natural disasters; we can think as well of all those who, in every corner of the globe, suffer from the tragic effects of what have been called the structures of sin.

This international meeting is obviously the opportunity to rediscover and study more deeply the message and the specific charism of your Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, who were able to become so acutely aware of the current needs of their time and to find appropriate responses.

Furthermore, this gathering finds its full meaning in the context of the Year of Consecrated Life desired by Pope Francis. We know, but it is good to be reminded, that consecrated life means living a covenant in the gift of self, and our society needs, more than ever, persons who consecrate themselves to others out of love of God.

The Gospel passage that we just heard brings to light especially well this necessity of the gift of self, bringing out in the open the secret desires that spring from the hearts of James and John. Let us not be too hasty in judging them, for these human desires are quite often our own; let us not give in too quickly, either, to a sense of guilt, for these are complex realities that divide our hearts. Consider what a modern commentator says about this text: *“Does Jesus call into question our professional needs, our scientific, cultural and even pastoral ambitions? The purpose of humility and a servant attitude is not to hold us back. On the contrary, it is really a question of putting things in their proper place... Being a servant of the Kingdom means knowing that everything comes from the Father and that it is the Son who allows us to receive what the Father gives us. Thus, only a deep faith life can make us humble servants.”*

In this statement, we recognize one of Saint Vincent’s primary great insights: *“We must first seek God... First, we must look to God... Seek the Kingdom of God, and the rest will be given you besides. If we see to God’s affairs, He’ll see to ours.”*

He gave the following pieces of advice to Louise de Marillac, the future first Daughter of Charity: *“Be cheerful, honor the inactivity and hidden life of the Son of God, acquiesce to troublesome events, love Providence, follow it, do not try to get ahead of it...”*

At the beginnings of your Company, he further said, “[You will have] *for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides, for cell a hired room, for chapel the parish church, for cloister the streets of the city, for enclosure obedience, with an obligation to go nowhere but to the homes of the sick or to places necessary for their service, for grill the fear of God, for veil holy modesty and making no other profession to ensure their vocation than their constant trust in Divine Providence*” (Conference of August 24, 1659, CCD X, p. 530).

We also know that Saint Vincent himself did not hesitate to sacrifice through his personal effort. Whether for the foundation of the work for the foundlings, relief efforts for the terrible affliction caused by wars, plague or famine in many provinces of France in those politically turbulent times, he proved his talent as an organizer.

But this ‘man of action’ was also a great spiritual figure, and here as well, he can revitalize us: we must begin by establishing the Kingdom of God in ourselves, and then in others. *“The interior life is essential; it has to be our aim; if we lack that, we lack everything.”* We understand his capacity to influence the formation of priests in his time...

One of the great biographers of Saint Vincent, Father André Dodin, wrote, *“The Christ whom Vincent contemplated and worshiped was not an image of an eternal truth but a historical being, the One sent by the Father to save humankind. His love of the Father committed Him to this undertaking that implied the emptying of the Incarnation, suffering and death. Christ the missionary sets everything in motion, and we must enter into His motion. Each individual must join in this mysterious adventure of the Incarnate Word. Quickly, but very resolutely, Vincent paints us an interior portrait of Jesus. Toward His Father, the Son of God has nothing but esteem, honor and love. This attitude draws Him to give Himself and is fundamentally opposed to the evil world that is, according to Saint John, concupiscence of the eyes, concupiscence of the flesh and human pride.”*

### *In Communion with the Church*

It goes without saying that we find here the foundations for a true imitation of Jesus Christ according to Saint Vincent. You should rely on this in order to go more deeply into the theme of your General Assembly.

**The boldness of charity!** You are attached to this beautiful Gospel word, sometimes disparaged in a condescending way in our time. Yet, how many Scripture passages refer to it, beginning with the famous “hymn to charity” in the first letter to the Corinthians, to cite but one.

Yes, charity demands great faith and boldness because it consists in walking in the footprints of Jesus Himself and, as a result, in following Him in all His paths, however difficult or rugged they may be. **Isn't Christ's gift of his life the pinnacle of His charity?**

This brings us back, as you clearly see, to today's Gospel: *“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* How demanding! This passage provides us with the key to Jesus' attitude toward the poor and the lowly, those who count for nothing in the eyes of the world.

Like Jesus, the Church, driven by the Spirit of God, must first and foremost focus on persons who are poor. Their presence invites us to adapt to them. By taking on Christ's attitude toward them, we form in ourselves the predispositions necessary for any evangelization: caring love has the face of poverty and humility. We can almost hear the echo of the Holy Father's cry, *“How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!”*

My dear consecrated friends, put passionate love for Christ to work. Continually ask yourselves the question: *“Is Jesus really my first and only love?”* But also have a passionate love for persons: *“Do I have the same love for all those whose paths I cross on a daily basis?”*

As Pope Francis invites us, *“Live the mysticism of encounter... do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength.”*

We are on a journey, and each one of us must become a little more Christian each day: here below, we can never say we've made it! Let us become missionary disciples, sent two-by-two, joyful Christians, well-versed in the Word of God and prayerful. If we live according to this spirit, we will grow in faith and be signs of the unity of the human race and of the union of humans with God through Christ and in the Spirit.

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, who never repeats history but renews it day after day. Let us not allow our hearts to harden, but rather pray with Sirach, *“Hear the prayer of your servants, according to your good will toward your people. Thus all the ends of the earth will know that you are the eternal God.”*

Let us also think of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, whom I know you hold dear to your heart as consecrated women. It was Blessed Pope Paul VI who expressed this conviction: *“Without this concrete sign [of consecrated life] there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold.”* Yes, the Church needs human warmth to fulfill its mission of drawing close to all persons.

We'll leave the conclusion to Monsieur Vincent, who wrote, *“When the Mother of God has been invoked and taken as patroness in important matters, everything can only go well and accrue to the glory of Jesus her Son.”*

Archbishop Luigi VENTURA  
*Apostolic Nuncio in France*

Members of the 2015 General Assembly





## Visit of Cardinal André Vingt-Trois Archbishop of Paris

Homily by Cardinal André Vingt-Trois  
Mother House, June 6, 2015

On June 6, 2015, the Eucharist was celebrated by Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris.

In his opening remarks, the Cardinal expressed how happy he was to meet the members of the Assembly. He recalled all the Sisters who have given Paris a wonderful witness of closeness to persons who are poor, specifically mentioning Sister Catherine Labouré and Sister Rosalie Rendu. He also brought to mind all those who serve those who are most poor in his diocese of Paris and invited those present to give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done through the Company and all that He continues to do through the life of each Sister in every country.

Here is his homily (Tb 12:1, 5-15, 20; Tb 13:2, 6, 7, 8; Mk 12:38-44)

Today in the cycle of liturgical readings, we finish the saga of the Book of Tobit, and the conclusion drawn for us invites us to bless the Lord for all that He has done. If Scripture has recorded the unusual story of Tobit and his family, it isn't because he was someone extraordinary but rather in order to show us, through the various episodes we have heard over these past days, how God intervenes in the life of men and women. The story is there to show how events that initially seem incomprehensible - we can't understand why the bird droppings fall on Tobit and blind him - are first of all an opportunity for those who believe in God to put their faith to the test, to see how they react to these events, and then for God to intervene to save them. Thus, through these events, starting with Tobit's ordeals after taking charge of the dead

man abandoned without burial, then his son's marriage, we gradually perceive a sort of story that intertwines events as they appear on the surface and the reality of the intervention of God, whom we do not see and whom we understand only through faith, even if He is present in His angel Raphael. The moral of this family saga and this story is that the wise person makes known God's action for humankind and not his or her own action before God. Judeo-Christian revelation records episodes of this type for our good, in order to help us understand how we are invited to recognize God's action, the fulfillment of God's will, through events in which we may play a certain role. They do not occur in order to advance our own history but to advance God's history. We sang this a few minutes ago with the psalm: "*Bless the Lord, my soul, blessed be God who lives forever*": this describes a faith perspective on events and human history.

In what you have just experienced during your Assembly, through your reflection, sharing and discussion, God's hand showed the way as well. As this Assembly comes toward a close, it is also an opportunity for you to recognize God's intervention throughout the history of your Company and discover how He directs history, not just yours, but the history of humanity, and how He leads it step by step with a father's patience. This has thus been a time of community life, sharing and review as well as discernment about the life of the whole Company, which is to say, of each of your local communities, where God also carries out His work through events that are beyond us, joyful events but sometimes misfortunes as well.

If Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac worked with all their strength and energy to gradually build their Company for the proclamation of the Gospel and the service of persons who are poor, it was precisely because both, in their human experience, were deeply touched by the tragedies, sufferings and dangers facing poor persons around them: wars, prisons, galley ships, abandonment of children, illness, etc. In short, despite being sheltered by their circumstances, they were affected by what happened to their brothers and sisters. It was with this loving and compassionate gaze that they assimilated and understood Christ's message about the poor: "*whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*"

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By sharing about the experiences of your local communities throughout the world, you have assembled, in a way, this experience of the service of Christ in all the poor persons to whom you are sent and with whom you live. The widow who came to the temple to offer all that she had, her livelihood, is a figure Christ presents in contrast with the scribes and Pharisees. We saw in Saint Mark's Gospel that this passage with Jesus in the temple, where he had come to teach, concludes an account of controversies on the content of Jesus' preaching and on his identity. This conclusion takes place by considering two attitudes. First, that of the Pharisee who takes pride in what he offers; in other words, he asks men to bless his actions rather than blessing God's action. Then there is the attitude of the widow who doesn't have much to give but gives all that she has. It isn't much of a stretch to remember how Saint Vincent de Paul considered the members of the Company of the Daughters of Charity not a group of women capable of changing the world, but a group of women capable of serving poor persons because they themselves had set off down the path of poverty by giving all that they had.

This ideal of a life given for the service of one's brothers and sisters is achieved in each one of your local communities, in your countries. It is a fruit of the grace of God for which we should thank the Lord, who did not necessarily choose the strongest, the richest or the most talented but chose those who could give everything, not simply from their surplus, but from what they needed to live.

Thus, as you come to the end of this General Assembly, you can give thanks to God for how He allowed you to review and gather the fruits of His love through your Sisters, for how He allowed you to enrich each other by sharing what God has given you and for the blessings He grants to your community by allowing it to place itself at the service of those who are poor in every situation of human suffering. Amen.

Cardinal André VINGT-TROIS  
*Archbishop of Paris*

## **The Faith Community, Place of the Boldness of Charity and Evangelizing Force**

Mother House, May 19, 2015

### Notes taken during the conference

Dear Sisters, I have often come to pray in your chapel and thank God there for your Foundress and your vocation. I enjoy seeing the diversity of people there, people from every continent. It is my pleasure to be among you today. That's because our relationship is longstanding: an extensive effort at collaboration developed between Sister Juana and Brother Roger and then myself with Sister Evelyne. I am very much aware that this dialogue is rather lopsided: you are almost 400 years old, and we have just made it to our 75th anniversary; you number 16,000, and we are barely 100!

Our collaboration takes the form of the service of a few of your Sisters in Taizé, among the young people. You hesitated to respond to our requests. I understand this since your priority is the service of persons who are poor. However, I was very touched when one of you spoke these words, which were perhaps decisive: "In our day, young people who are seeking God are also poor."

Recently, on the feast of the Annunciation, in the Romanesque church in the village of Taizé, I had the opportunity to participate in the Mass during which eleven of your Sisters renewed their commitment. It was a moment of shared celebration!

S

*Speakers*

### *The Faith Community, Place of the Boldness of Charity*

You asked me to speak about the faith community as a place of the boldness of charity and an evangelizing force. It is not difficult for me to speak about this theme because, even if the words we use are not the same, we also look in this direction for the meaning of our lives. So, very simply, I would like to speak with you based on what we live at Taizé.

In the first part, I will comment on an expression that is fundamental for us, the “parable of communion.” Then, in the second and third parts, I will invite you to go to the sources of communion. First, I will take a moment to consider what the New Testament says about love. Then I will speak about prayer life.

#### **1. Parable of communion**

At a young age, Brother Roger, our founder, considered that creating a community of men continually seeking reconciliation would serve as an essential sign. At the height of a world war, he saw that a life of fraternal community lived out by a few in the midst of Europe torn apart by violence would be a sign of peace and reconciliation. He wanted to begin to prepare for what would come after that war.

The vocation that he put forward for the brothers who would join him was to form what he called a “parable of communion”, a “parable of community”.

A parable is a simple, accessible story, but one that refers to a reality of a much higher order. The meaning of a parable is inexhaustible; a parable doesn't say things once and for all; it endlessly challenges those who listen and re-listen to it.

Any community based on Christ and the Gospel - ours as well as yours - can become a parable. In a world where many go along as if God did not exist, the fact that men or women commit forever to following Christ presents a challenge. If Christ weren't risen from the dead and present in them, these men or these women would not live in this way. Their lives become the concrete, visible reflection of a reality that is greater than themselves; they represent a sign of Christ mysteriously present in the world and very close to those around them.

The parable of a life consecrated to God and at the service of others doesn't impose anything, doesn't intend to prove anything; it opens a world closed in on itself; it opens a window for it out toward a beyond.

Life in community, isn't it first of all a life that creates such an openness toward the infinite? Those who live it do not allow themselves to become paralyzed by the complexity of difficulties and challenges presented to our societies. They have cast their anchor in Christ; from there they can enlarge an opening toward hope. Yes, casting the anchor in God in order to hold firm even when the storm arises.

Your Sisters in Cité Soleil in Port au Prince, Haiti, come to mind. I visited them last year and had already visited them a good number of years ago with Brother Roger. In this vast marginalized neighborhood, their presence produces an opening toward hope.

We, the Brothers of Taizé, seek to express through our lives that a community can be a laboratory for fraternity. This is true for us, but every community is called to this.

I would like to emphasize a particular aspect of this striving for communion and fraternity, that of inter-culturalism. I spoke about this in March during a Lenten conference at Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral; please excuse me for repeating something that some Sisters have perhaps already heard.

Among us Brothers, as with you, we have a wide variety of backgrounds. We come from every region of Europe and also from Africa, Asia and the two Americas.

Today, such cultural plurality is more and more present everywhere. And yet, globalization is also perceived as a threat. Unification of economic and political zones stirs up fear. Tensions or even violent conflicts can arise over questions of language and identity.

So, at Taizé, we want the harmony of our lives to be a sign of communion not only among Christian denominations, which is a very specific aspect of Taizé, but also a sign of fraternity among the varied faces of the human family that we represent.

### *The Faith Community, Place of the Boldness of Charity*

You know, as we do, that it is a difficult path and that, nonetheless, mutual enrichment is possible. This is because our identity is not only found in our national origin but in Christ, with whom we have all clothed ourselves.

We would like to share everything. However, I will not conceal the truth: despite the faith we share, despite rigor and clarity in our vocation, it can happen that we do not manage to avoid residual distances. In community life, there are differences in personality, obviously. We can be inconsiderate and even make mistakes; that's obvious as well. But there can be something even deeper that does not depend entirely on us: too great of a distance between the varied faces of humanity that we bear, a distance sometimes accentuated by the wounds of history between our countries and continents. In some of these situations, we are powerless and don't immediately manage to bridge the gap.

What are we to do with the sadness that can then overcome us? We should not stop at the sadness, but draw a conclusion from it. Despite it all, we want to live out the quest for unity and reconciliation. This sends us back to Christ: He alone can truly unite everything. In this, we want to follow Him, and to follow Him as far as possible. We are prepared to suffer for this.

Fraternal thoughtfulness can be shown with great simplicity. We can take steps to renew this: do not fear the other, do not judge, do not immediately feel that we are being judged, do not interpret things negatively, talk things over when there is a doubt. And above all, never refuse our fraternal communion.

We can discover that care for those who are poor, which is essential in our lives, is not expressed only in external actions. At a deeper level, it is an attitude of openness toward all those who are entrusted to us. Among ourselves in community as well, we remember that the other is, in a sense, a poor brother or sister who needs me, even if he or she is endowed with extraordinary gifts or exercises a leadership role.

Then, even weaknesses and imperfections become a door through which God enters into our lives. The thorns that impede our journey together feed a fire that gives light to the path. When, during our

prayer together, we look toward His light, it gradually enters into us. The mystery of Christ becomes the mystery of our lives. Our inner contradictions and our fears may remain. However, through the Holy Spirit, Christ comes to penetrate what worries us about ourselves, to the point that light is shed on what is obscure. Our human condition and our differences are not eliminated, but God takes them on and can bring them to their fulfillment.

What I just expressed may seem severe. However, it is also paradoxically the source of a deep joy, that of going all the way in the Gospel call to which we want to respond.

Through this example of inter-culturalism, I have explained a part of the title you gave me: community as the place of the boldness of charity, in other words, community as the laboratory of fraternity. What about the community as an evangelizing force? The expression "parable of communion" is valuable in this regard as well.

We observe in our day that in particular young people - because they are the majority of those whom we welcome at Taizé - are touched by the sign borne by community life, by this parable that I was describing. For them, life in common becomes a sign. Much more than persons considered individually, they look to the witness of the community.

The young people whom we receive participate in our common prayer three times a day. They share with each other their seeking for God as well as their daily life, meals and chores. Through this, they have their own experience of communion. Some might hesitate to use this term; they would more simply say that they experience friendship, sharing, mutual respect, or that they are together, or know each other... and other such expressions.

In reality, what they have is an experience of the Church; they discover the beauty of communion in the Church even if they do not yet use this word. Then hearts are surprised, open up and wonder what causes the connection that unites them: how can it be that a harmony is formed among persons who are so diverse, who belong to different denominations, very different cultures and even nations that may be strongly opposed?

### *The Faith Community, Place of the Boldness of Charity*

Some end up questioning themselves about faith. They come to find in God, in Christ, the source of a unity without borders or obstacles. To summarize in a single sentence, I would say that teaching about faith and the Church is important, but the experience of communion, the experience of fraternity, should be primary.

Living an experience of fraternity with those whom God entrusts to us is also a part of your vocation. Living such an experience of fraternity with them means helping them to grasp that each individual exists in order to build the human community with others and that happiness is not found in an “every man for himself” approach. It means helping them understand that those who love Christ - the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, the young and the old - all are invited to form one big community of friendship; it is helping them understand that this is their contribution to healing humanity’s wounds.

To contribute to shaping the face of tomorrow’s society, shouldn’t we Christians be on the front lines and seek to live out the fraternity initiated by Christ? Without any unnecessary pressure, Christians can promote a globalization of solidarity that doesn’t exclude any peoples or any person. Maybe we only can sow a few seeds of trust and peace. But, aren’t we called to live what appears impossible to human eyes? God was able to reveal Himself in history because a few individuals - like Abraham and Mary - believed that nothing was impossible to God.

## **2. Choosing to love**

Dear Sisters, you are looking for how to deepen your spirituality in its communal dimension and how to renew the boldness of charity in order to gain a new missionary momentum. In other words, you are searching for ways to better understand how community life and outward witness are related. In the first part, I tried to respond to this question through the expression “parable of communion”.

To sum up your quest, we could select two simple words that Brother Roger readily used in his advanced age: “choosing to love.” He even wanted to make this the title of his last book, which his death prevented him from writing. Choosing to love! How can this choice be nourished at the spring of Scripture? This is what I would like to develop now.

It must be said over and over: fraternity and love are at the heart of the message of the Gospel. Our faith is authentic to the extent that it takes flesh in fraternal communion.

Reconciliation with God implies reconciliation among ourselves. Christ went so far as to give His life in order to “gather into one the dispersed children of God”. He broke down all walls of separation. By His cross and resurrection, He established a new solidarity among all. Solidarity cannot be limited to a family or a nation; it goes beyond particularities.

In the Gospels, we find two ways of speaking about love. The synoptic Gospels and the Gospel according to Saint John express it in two slightly different ways.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke pass on the words Jesus used to call His disciples to a love that goes beyond all boundaries. It is not just a matter of loving our closest neighbor. The parable of the Good Samaritan invites us to become the neighbor of all and to serve anyone in need. Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke push this call to the extreme: love even your enemies.

The synoptic Gospels, especially Luke, recall the demand for justice proclaimed by John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. John the Baptist called for material solidarity: “*Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise*” (Lk 3:11). Jesus expresses the same thing in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. He speaks like an Old Testament prophet, demanding that persons who are rich share with the least fortunate (Lk 16). John the Baptist and Jesus both confirm what the Law and the prophets have always demanded.

But at other times, Jesus goes beyond what the prophets and even John the Baptist could require. When the person with two tunics gives one of them to the person who has none, this could be called fair. However, Jesus goes so far as to demand what is unfair: “*from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not*

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*demand it back*” (Lk 6:29-30). Giving your tunic when someone has already taken your cloak, this is no longer within the requirements of a law. Jesus calls His disciple to go beyond the demands of justice and to venture into the logic of the Kingdom of God.

Loving, then, is forgetting about the concept of reciprocity. There is an evangelical love that breaks open all closed inner circles, that always goes further. I continue to quote these words from the Sermon on the Mount that you know so well: *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them”* (Lk 6:32).

How radical this completely unconditional love is! On the other hand, when we open the Gospel of John, we find a call to reciprocal love: *“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another”* (John 13:34). For John, love seems at first glance to be reduced to reciprocal fraternal love. Isn't his insistence on reciprocity a step backward?

We have to recall the context in the Gospel of John. Jesus has just washed the feet of His disciples. This gesture symbolizes a love that becomes service and gift. Jesus calls His disciples to love *“as I have loved you”*. Their fraternal love asks no less of them than their total gift of self, following the example of Christ who Himself gave His life.

This helps us understand that the call to reciprocal love is not a step backward. Reciprocal love can be as demanding as unconditional love. It is sometimes even more difficult to build reciprocal community patiently with our Brothers or with our Sisters than to give ourselves generously to those who are poorer than ourselves.

Who would be against fraternity among all? Yet the concrete experience of our lives is where fraternity must first be lived out; it is in our everyday community living that we sometimes meet great resistance. In this regard, our life in community is a place of truth. It is in the relational life of a community, just like in a family, that the authenticity of love is proven. If resistances to fraternity cannot be overcome in the concrete experience of a community, how will they be overcome on a larger scale?

In a community, like in a family, we do not choose our brothers or sisters. Community is a place where we must work to overcome our resistances. This sometimes involves restrictions and sacrifices. However, reconciliation is not possible without sacrifice.

In the midst of the harshness of the world, fraternal love creates a different space. This space is like the beginning of the Kingdom of God where laws different from those of the world are in place. The Kingdom of God is a new world destined to come into being everywhere, but there are places where it begins as if in embryo. Reciprocal fraternal love is a sort of territory already won for the Kingdom of God. Where brothers and sister love each other in truth, God already reigns.

To conclude the comparison between Jesus' words in the synoptic Gospels and in John, I would say that unconditional love, unrestricted service that expects nothing in return, is a way of extending what is first lived out in reciprocal love of fraternal communion.

In order to drink from the source of love according to the Gospel, we must go even deeper. The reciprocal love of the Trinity is present on earth in the disciples' mutual love. One day Jesus says these words to them, which we can never meditate enough: *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you”* (Jn 14:20).

Jesus draws out this idea with the allegory of the vine (Jn 15). Jesus is the vine, the disciples are the branches and the Father is the vine-grower. *“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit”* (Jn 15:5). The fruit the vine bears is love for the world, unconditional love for all, in the likeness of God who *“so loved the world that he gave his only Son”* (Jn 3:16).

God is Himself communion. Fraternal love is the place where this life of God “dwells” on the earth, as in the past His presence dwelt in the Temple. I quote John, chapter 14: *“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him”* (Jn 14:23). As poor as our community life may be, it is important to consider it from this Gospel perspective.

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If we take another moment to look at a passage from the first letter of Saint John, we will find a somewhat surprising parallel there between the gift of one's life, as Jesus gave His, and the very practical sharing of material goods: "*Jesus laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?*" (1 Jn 3:16-17)

Here "the brother" is no longer only a member of the community, but every person in need. This is how fraternal and reciprocal love expands without stopping at boundaries. We find the logic of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

You are right, Sisters, to try to deepen the communal aspect of your spirituality. Your vocation leads you to give freely and to love unconditionally and boundlessly those who experience all sorts of poverty. So that this generous, expansive, radical love may not die but rather be ever renewed, it is important that the reciprocal love that unites you to each other be its support. This fraternal love in turn must be sustained and find its source in the mutual love of the Trinity, which we try to contemplate in prayer. This leads me to the last topic that I would like to take up with you in the third part on the contemplative life.

### **3. May heaven and earth unite in our lives!**

Like you, Sisters, we have a very demanding ministry. We must sustain it in the contemplative life so that heaven and earth always unite in our lives. Yes, may heaven and earth unite in our lives!

In order to be steadfast in our vocation, we must dare to remain in a posture of waiting. This waiting is not only directed toward the future, the Kingdom of God, but also vertically toward God in the present moment. Dare to believe that there is joy in waiting. This waiting is often lived out silently in God's presence.

At Taizé, we give a special place to silence. In communal prayer, it allows each person to be alone before God, even in a large assembly. Such silence prepares for worship. In long silences where nothing

seems to be happening, God is at work in us, without our knowing how. Saint Augustin wrote: "*The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire. God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the soul; by stretching, makes it more capacious... If you wish to see God, you already have faith.*"

Isn't this thirst within us a mark God has engraved on us so that we might turn to Him? It opens our hearts to the Holy Spirit who whispers in us: "You are loved forever and ever; even the trials of your life, sometimes very difficult ones, cannot take this love away."

Being able to wait... simply being there, unconditionally. Kneeling to acknowledge, even with our bodies, that God does not necessarily act as we would imagine. Opening our hands as a sign of acceptance. If we don't always manage to express this inner desire with words, keeping silence is already the expression of an openness to God.

The Virgin Mary is the model of silent but ardent waiting for God. From all eternity, she was loved by God and prepared for what He would ask of her. However, none of her neighbors who daily rubbed shoulders with her could guess the mystery that Mary of Nazareth bore within her. Don't the greatest mysteries always take place in a profound silence?

In order to enter into this silent waiting, having retreat days from time to time is a great support. Christ says to us: "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*" (Mk 6:31). It is as if he were telling us: rejoice in what you are experiencing in your ministry, yes, but rejoice in an even greater joy, "*Rejoice because your names are written in heaven*" (Lk 10:20).

The contemplative life leads us to a selfless gift of ourselves. When Christian de Chergé, prior of the monks of Tibirine, reflected on martyrdom, he was not thinking as much about violent death as about the 'martyrdom of love' accomplished in everyday life. He wrote, "We gave our heart 'wholesale', in general all at once, to God, but it costs us that He takes it from us 'retail', piece by piece in the details!"

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The contemplative life cannot fully develop without asceticism. I don't mean an asceticism that would be an end in and of itself, disassociated from love of God and neighbor, but an ongoing simplification of our lives. Today's context calls for clear and freely made signs of sacrifice.

One form of asceticism is celibacy. We intend to renew this commitment over and over, in the joy of belonging to Christ, who makes us available to those whom God entrusts to us.

May our affectivity be transformed into openness! We cannot speak of the commitment to celibacy without speaking of praise. If we sing Psalm 91, for example, "*You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High abide in the shade of the Almighty,*" then our yes to God is already renewed. Praise God for the life He has given us, for our entire being that is called to share in Christ's resurrection. Each reflection on our commitment should begin with praise for creation and for what we are.

We should even risk a poor, stammering praise. This praise should rise up from our being and sometimes even from the depths of our poverty. In this praise, it is not a question of trying to offer God something perfect but of offering Him our very being. We enter into the Kingdom of God like those who are lame. We are of the earth. Therefore, there is always something of the earth and something of heaven that unite in praise.

The attitude of freely offered sacrifice that we live out in celibacy also implies sacrifices in other domains. For example, we may have the temptation to seek compensation of a material nature. However, we cannot truly live celibacy out while wanting to have unlimited material means.

Similarly, we may have the temptation to consider our work as a realm that belongs to us as our own, and it may become like a little personal kingdom.

To live out celibacy well, let us also be attentive not to overlook being touched by beauty. For each individual, it means choosing what best suits us and answering this question: what helps me to remain attentive to beauty? There is nature, music, a book. Without gratuitous moments

of beauty, an unbalance settles in that does not help us to move forward. Sensitivity to beauty is part of the vocation of following the Risen Lord.

The spirit of praise helps to always maintain a space, even a tiny one, where we let the 'joy that lasts' resound within us, this joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. Isn't our joy based on our trust that we are loved by God, this trust that leads us through hardships?

To keep us in that state of joy, the Holy Spirit teaches us to follow Christ, meek and humble of heart. The Holy Spirit gives us Jesus' humility. He changes our inner indignation and our need to justify ourselves into a benevolent strength.

Of course, we also experience darkness. However, we should always try to choose anew to believe in God's love, to believe that God finds joy in each of us, to believe that He gives us the Holy Spirit unreservedly and to believe that His mercy is far greater than our faults. Whatever happens, the Risen Lord remains the 'compass magnet' who gives direction to our lives. So, in the storms of our lives, we should not be like the disciples who, in the boat, desperately tried to fight against the waves but didn't immediately think of waking Christ up.

We have chosen to believe that Christ is the master of our lives. God is not a backup to insure that our plans succeed, no, but God directs our lives as well as human history and the history of the entire universe. This trust paradoxically frees us from any form of fatalism. It makes us take responsibility.

This trust teaches us not to let our worries use up all our energy. This is where the tempter would like to lead us, trying to introduce division within us: God is put on the sidelines (not in reality, but in our thinking). The first monks knew this well. A desert father said, "Each time a man tries to pray, his enemies, the demons, try to keep him from it because they know that nothing gets in their way more than prayer to God."

Like Jesus' disciples, we learn that fulfillment according to our dreams is not what is going to occur, but something much greater, which encompasses happiness and suffering. Our journey forward leads us to an ever-greater renunciation of our own will, of our attachment to



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material goods and perhaps even of our spirituality. In this, we follow Jesus the Christ, who said to us, "*Blessed are the poor.*"

Yes, we trust in Christ again and again. This is so easy to say! But what a struggle to actually do it! Beyond the little deaths throughout our lives, believe that joy is offered us in communion with Him.

I will conclude with a final thought. For each one of us, the temptation can arise to stop, to settle in, to only go halfway. Brother Roger reminded us that there is a choice between mediocrity and holiness to be made over and over. There is joy in hearing the absolute nature of Christ's call: "Be holy!" Perhaps it is so difficult for us to achieve holiness not because it is far from us but because it is much closer than we think. God places holiness before us at every moment so that we might choose it.

So then, what growth is being asked of me now? It isn't necessarily a case of 'doing more', but of moving forward without delay on the path of love, in deeds. By attentive care for our neighbor, we can advance in this without even a minute's hesitation.

We go from beginning to beginning. Through Christ's life, we see that God never tires of setting off again on the path with us. We can never tire either of continually beginning over again so that, in each one of our lives, earth and heaven unite.

**Reflection questions**

- \* How does community life support service of those who are poor?
- \* What risks arise when community life is neglected?
- \* Does our service of those who are poor reflect on our community life?
- \* How do the quality of our community life and our care for each other hone our care for those who are poor?
- \* What is necessary in community life for local communities to become the places where God already reigns and from which His limitless love spreads?
- \* Through a contemplative life, can we renew our love for those who are most poor?
- \* What sources of charity become available to us in community life?

Brother Aloïs  
*Prior of Taizé*

## The Commitment of the Daughters of Charity in the Church and the World

Mother House, May 21, 2015

I must begin by honestly confessing that I was flattered when the Superioress General invited me to give this talk and even felt a little arrogant. After all, it's not every day that you are invited to address the members of a General Assembly. When I began to put my thoughts on paper, however, vanity and pride turned into fear and trembling.

Counting on your kind understanding, I will offer my simple reflections on a theme that is ever ancient and ever new: the type of commitment that the Company of the Daughters of Charity should be bringing to the Church and the world of today. I stress the word "today" because we must place ourselves in the context of the life of the Church and the world at this moment in time. Former days can inspire us, but they are now the past.

### POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN BEING AND DOING

In our meetings, conferences, workshops, assemblies and conversations, two perspectives on the Vincentian approach to "being" and "doing" constantly emerge. On the one hand, we agree that the charism, the "being", the identity, the characteristic mark of the followers of Vincent has been, is and always will be completely and totally relevant. On the other hand, we find that the way to live out and pass on this Vincentian way of "being", this Vincentian dimension, is not so clear. In essence, we are considering the struggle between our identity and our significance, between what we are and the practical, effective commitments we carry out. In this reflection I want to address a number of basic questions: What does effective Vincentian commitment look

like? How should followers of Vincent contribute to collaborating within the Church and to building a better world? Are Vincentians capable of cultivating our charism, spirituality and identity so they bear fruit in the new evangelization? What specifically Vincentian, effective contribution can we make to the world-wide new evangelization, above all in better holistic service of persons living in poverty? What characterizes an authentically Vincentian mission?

These questions get at the foundations of Vincentian commitment and therefore concern the Company of the Daughters of Charity. We can measure the level of fidelity, boldness and missionary momentum of the Company based on the response to these questions during this Assembly.

### SOME CLARIFICATIONS ABOUT THE TERM 'COMMITMENT'

I don't know if the word "commitment" has the same meaning in all languages and cultures, nor am I certain that all groups within the Church use this term in the same way and attach the same implications to it. I'm very concerned this is one of those words that each individual understands and uses as he or she pleases.

It is therefore helpful to be clearer and more precise about the nature of commitment for persons who have chosen to follow Vincent. The commitment of a Daughter of Charity must be absolutely and perfectly consistent with the Vincentian charism and spirituality. Furthermore, her commitment should be the real, effective and concrete manifestation of Vincentian "being". In Matthew's Gospel Jesus cautions: "*By their fruits you will know them...*" (Mt 7:16). Commitment is the tangible and measurable fruit of who we are and of our vocational choice in the Church and the world.

Anyone who has even minimal contact with the Vincentian charism should clearly see that Vincentian commitment is solely and exclusively about persons who are poor and marginalized. It is concerned with everything that affects the vast and terrible world of poverty and suffering and with anything that debases human dignity in all its diverse dimensions. It would take too long to list everything that Vincent de

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Paul had to say on this topic: from “*The poor are our lords and masters, and we are unworthy of rendering them our little services*” (CCD XI, 349), to “*Our inheritance is persons who are living in poverty*”, and “*We were to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire*” (CCD XI, p. 25).

Ultimately, when we speak about the Vincentian commitment, we include three inseparable dimensions: serving persons living in poverty, practicing solidarity and striving for justice. These three dimensions are united and supported by affective and effective love. Unless we clearly understand this specific character of Vincentian commitment, our mission in the Church and the world will be watered down and become a disincarnated spirituality that is unfaithful to the legacy of our Founders.

### **GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF COMMITMENT FOR THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY**

First of all, we must set out the backdrop or framework for our commitment. Saint Vincent himself did this for us on December 6, 1658, when he gave a conference to the Missionaries on “The Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission”: “*to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it’s for persons who are poor*” (CCD, XII, p. 71). This phrase was so important to Saint Vincent, yet the Priests of the Mission hardly ever quote or use these words. The Daughters of Charity, however, have incorporated this quote, though not word for word, into both the previous and revised texts of their Constitutions. You have made this quote the hallmark of your overall commitment (C. 10a).

This line from Saint Vincent is the best summary of what the Vincentian stamp on evangelization, on any activity, should be. It aligns with the major implications of Paul VI’s *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the most complete document on evangelization in the modern world. This overall framework should inspire and direct the evangelizing activity of the Daughters of Charity. Every aspect of your service — your approach, your availability and the choices you make — should be consistent with this Vincentian spirit.

### **COMMITMENT’S LIFE FORCE**

This framework outlines the essence of Vincentian life and the spirit which has shaped our “family history”. Furthermore, we discover in it the “life force” that sustains, energizes and brings vitality to the commitment of Daughters of Charity. Without this life force, commitment would remain mere altruistic strategizing. The three orientations on which the radical option made by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac was based must be the core of our Vincentian identity:

#### **1) The primacy of God**

God is absolutely first and foremost. We are channels of God’s goodness and mercy. But the God whom a Daughter of Charity must proclaim and reveal is God “*protector of the poor*”, as Vincent de Paul would say (CCD X, p. 411), the God of love, of mercy. God is the first to opt for those who are poor. Therefore, the cause of persons living in poverty is God’s cause, and the concerns of those who are poor are God’s concerns. We can thus say that the option for those who are poor, instead of being viewed as a commandment or a commitment, is a faith reality.

#### **2) The centrality of Christ**

Vincent de Paul’s entire life was centered on Christ, and his Christology was not theoretical, but alive and operative. Obviously, the identity of Daughters of Charity is likewise centered on Christ, and, therefore, your option for those who are poor makes sense only because the cause of poor persons is the cause of Christ. You follow and proclaim “*Jesus Christ, evangelizer and servant of those who are poor*”. In addition, a Daughter of Charity must fix her gaze on Jesus as depicted in Chapter 4 of Saint Luke’s Gospel: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor...*” This is the key to your option for those who are poor, your vocation and your mission in the Church and in society.

#### **3) Passion for those who are poor**

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We're not just speaking about being concerned for poor people or drawing close to them, but something deeper. It is a question of living what Vincent de Paul expressed when he said, "*The poor, who do not know where to go or what to do... and who increase daily, are my burden and my sorrow*" (CCD III, p. 492). It means that those who are poor are our overriding passion, and with such a passion, everything else becomes secondary. Impelled by this passion, Vincent de Paul went so far as to say: "*We should sell ourselves to rescue our brothers and sisters from destitution*" (CCD IX, p. 390).

### THE COMMON THREAD OF THE VINCENTIAN MISSION

Woven through the "overall Vincentian framework" is a kind of "common thread", which gives unity and consistency to the Vincentian mission. Otherwise, we run the risk that our specifically Vincentian spirituality may become watered down and lose its vitality since we are only one among numerous groups and spiritualities in the Church. That is why we must be mindful of this "common thread" that runs through and connects every expression of the Vincentian mission.

You don't have to look far to find this common thread. Any Daughter of Charity can find it spelled out perfectly in the Constitutions: "*For the Daughters of Charity, the service of Christ in those who are poor is an act of love — both affective and effective love — which directs their entire life and is the expression par excellence of the 'state of charity'*" (C. 24a).

This common thread is the "diakonal structure" of the Vincentian charism. I am referring to charity, the service of charity, the mission of charity, *diakonia* in its etymological sense of loving service.

Every action, thought and insight of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac drew its motivation, potency and focus from charity as mission and mission as charity, from which the urgency to action flows. They insistently counseled their sons and daughters to live in a "state of charity". Furthermore, the Christian perfection to which they expect their followers to aspire is "the perfection of charity".

Vincent de Paul joined affective love and effective love as two parts

of a whole, like the inseparable union of charity and mission (cf. CCD IX, p. 466, p. 467-468, p. 470-471). He warned that affective love without an effective expression — or charity without mission — is, at the very least, suspect: "*Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows; for very often many acts of love of God, of devotion, and of other similar affections and interior practices of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, very suspect if they don't translate into the practice of effective love... We have to be very careful about that; for there are many who, recollected exteriorly, and filled with lofty sentiments of God interiorly, stop at that, and when it comes to the point of doing something, and they have the opportunity to act, they come up short. They flatter themselves with their ardent imagination; they're satisfied with the sweet conversations they have with God in meditation and even speak of them like angels; but when they leave there, if there's a question of working for God, of suffering, of mortifying themselves, of instructing poor persons, of going in search of the lost sheep... alas! they're no longer around; their courage fails them. No, no, let's not fool ourselves: Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit [all our work consists in action]*" (CCD, XI, p. 32-33).

We can say, therefore, that the Vincentian charism is like a blazing fire that cannot be extinguished: the ardent flame of charity impels us and sets us on fire for the mission. If we do not live this diakonal dimension of the Vincentian charism, the inseparable union of charity and mission, we run the risk of falling into spiritualism, which causes us to lose our identity and waste our time and energy.

### THREE ABSOLUTE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE PRIORITIES

The Vincentian dimension of lived commitment brings us to three priorities which must be the basis for both the "being" and the "doing" of the members of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Daughters of Charity must not abandon them; these priorities must be indelibly imprinted on your mission.

When we turn to the Constitutions of both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission, which are the modern interpretation of the Founders' thinking, we see they persistently and insistently

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appealed for creative fidelity to these three priorities. Pope Francis also refers to them throughout chapter 4 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is permeated with the Vincentian spirit.

All of this emboldens me to spell out these three priorities.

#### **1) Have a specific and explicit preference for people who are truly poor**

Some people might consider this first Vincentian priority to be equivalent to the phrase “preferential option for those who are poor”. Although this latter expression, which applies to all Christians, is praiseworthy and demanding, it falls short of committed Vincentian mission.

This first absolute priority is neither theoretical nor abstract, neither a generalized assertion nor an expression of spiritualism — it is far from that. It is, in short, a radical choice to which we are committed. Pope Francis has unequivocally stated this with the greatest conviction: *“Without the preferential option for the poor, ‘the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications’ ” (Evangelii Gaudium, 199).*

I want, therefore, to emphasize the two powerful adjectives — “specific” and “explicit” — which express something which is very important: the preference for people who are poor is no longer optional; it has become an exclusive obligation. Our option for poor persons is not merely preferential; it is fundamental.

If there were any doubt, look to the adverb “truly”, which clearly spells out where the preference of Daughters of Charity lies and the lengths to which you must go to reach the margins of society. Saint Louise articulated this when she said: *“Oh, what a happiness, if, without offending God, the Company could be employed only in the service of those who are destitute in all things!” (Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, A. 100, p. 832)* Saint Vincent also urged his sons and daughters to seek out the poorest 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” (CCD XI, p. 349).*

Moreover, this specific and explicit preference for persons who are truly poor requires that your option for them become effective, visible and measurable. This priority cannot simply remain on paper, alive only in your good intentions.

#### **2) Deepen and revitalize your identity as servants**

The commitment of the Daughters of Charity always takes the shape of the service of Christ in those who are poor (cf. C. 7a, C. 10b). This is the purpose of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (cf. C. 8b). Beginning with the Founders and passed down through the Vincentian tradition, service has been, is and will be the all-encompassing expression of the identity of the Daughters of Charity. It is irrefutable proof of your authenticity and what gives meaning and significance to your existence in the Church and in the world. Saying “Daughter of Charity” is the same as saying “servant of persons who are poor”: *“You are poor Daughters of Charity who have given yourselves to God for the service of persons who are poor” (CCD IX, p. 432).*

“Servant” is the identity of the Daughters of Charity; it is your make-up and your character. This is non-negotiable. Back in 1982, Sister Lucie Rogé, who was then Superioress General, gave a conference on the attitudes needed to be able to serve, saying, *“We continually have to move from being Daughters of Charity toward being Daughters of Charity, Servants.”*

In this context, the Company must address its servant identity and meet the challenge of strengthening and deepening it. I know that there is no shortage of voices that campaign for the elimination of the word “servants” and argue that the term is obsolete. Some say that we live in a society that doesn’t look favorably on that word and that the title of “servant” isn’t consonant with women’s dignity and human rights.

Nevertheless, from a theological perspective or from the perspective of Vincentian spirituality, eliminating the word “servant” or letting it fall

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into disuse would undermine the identity of the Daughters of Charity. The Company of the Daughters of Charity would gradually turn into some sort of humanitarian and philanthropic organization, but it would cease to be the Company that God inspired Saint Vincent and Saint Louise to form and which the Church and the world need today.

### 3) Be evangelized by poor persons

*“They [poor persons] have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them”* (Evangelii gaudium, 198). Anyone might think that the previous paragraph is a quote from Vincent de Paul put into contemporary speech. It is hardly surprising that a document on evangelization includes an emphatic, explicit and challenging mention of poor persons evangelizing us. In short, this is what Vincent de Paul stressed: that persons who are poor, besides being our lords and masters, are also our “teachers”.

Daughters of Charity who are seeking to discover what God is asking of them must first look to the appeals of their suffering brothers and sisters living in poverty (cf. C. 11a). Poor persons show us God’s will for us and where our place is in Church and society. They draw us close to God, continuously send us to Jesus Christ, cry out to us in their suffering, invite us to live a more radical poverty and let us see the sharp sting of their poverty. Those who are poor evangelize us by their patience and capacity to welcome us. You might say that poor persons teach a Daughter of Charity how to live her commitment to loving service.

Saint Vincent said as much to the Priests of the Mission: *“What I retain from my experience of [simple peasants] is the discernment I’ve always made that true religion - true religion, Messieurs, true religion - is found among the poor. God enriches them with a lively*

*faith; they believe, they touch, they taste the words of life. You never see them in their illnesses, troubles, and food shortages get carried away with impatience, or murmur and complain; not at all - or rarely. They usually remain at peace during trials and tribulations. What’s the reason for that? It’s faith. And why? Because they’re simple, God gives them in abundance the graces He refuses the rich and wise of this world”* (CCD XII, p. 142).

### AN OPEN-EYED SPIRITUALITY THAT MAKES COMMITMENT FRUITFUL

Vincentian spirituality is like sap which brings nourishment and vitality to the commitment of Daughters of Charity. Commitment without spirituality ends up becoming bureaucracy, propaganda, or empty activism. But Vincentian spirituality has to be an open-eyed spirituality, as described in a quote from Johannes B. Metz. (“A biblically-inspired experience of God is not mysticism with eyes closed, but rather mysticism with open eyes; it is not a perspective which only references oneself, but one which is broadened and deepened by the suffering of others.”) I am going to highlight three characteristics of this open-eyed Vincentian spirituality, although there could be many more:

#### *It is an incarnational spirituality.*

Simply put, Vincentian spirituality has a dynamic downward movement. It is an expression of an element of Christology that Vincent de Paul embraced: the “kenosis” of Christ, that is to say, the way Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and humbled himself, as described in Paul’s letter in the Philippians (cf. Phil 2:5-11). This spirituality is lived on the underside of human history and is committed to those who are victims of the system.

#### *It is a missionary spirituality.*

It is an “outward” spirituality, propelling us toward holistic mission and evangelization of the poor. This is the context in which the specific virtues of the Daughter of Charity (humility, simplicity and charity) should be found; they are, according to the expression of Saint Vincent, “the soul of the Company.”

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***It is a spirituality based on the principle of mercy.***

Mercy must be the engine of commitment. I refer to the word “mercy” in its deepest sense: “to have one’s heart at the side of the unfortunate.” It is not a question of a mere sentiment of pity or compassion poorly understood. Nor is it reduced to what are traditionally called “works of mercy,” which run the risk of never getting at the causes of suffering and poverty.

Therefore, I do not speak only of a spirituality of mercy, but of a spirituality based on the principle of mercy. This principle of mercy should be understood as a specific love that is at the origin of a process, but that also remains present and active throughout it, giving it direction.

### **SOME CRITERIA FOR VINCENTIAN COMMITMENT**

The commitment of the Daughters of Charity – just like evangelization – has an immutable content and some forms that change and are revised according to the times, cultures and social reality. The Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity say that “*multiple are the forms of poverty and multiple the forms of service*” (C. 11a). For this reason, it is important to revise not only the “what,” but also the “how” of the commitment of service to the poor and with the poor.

I dare to enumerate, then, a series of criteria, attitudes and lines of action for a better service of persons who are poor today. I call them “Vincentian criteria” because they are in the spirit and letter of the Vincentian charism.

#### **1) Communion with the poor**

This implies real knowledge of the problems and needs of the poor, authentic meeting with them, profound welcome, real participation in their vicissitudes, sensitive respect of their rights, responsiveness to their demands and listening and dialogue in order to discover their values and help them become aware of their liberating potential.

#### **2) Integral evangelization in words and works**

*“With constant concern for the promotion of the whole person, the*

*Company does not separate corporal service from spiritual service, nor the work of humanization from that of evangelization”* (C. 14). Saint Vincent said to the Priests of the Mission: “*If there are any among us who think they’re in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others... To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that’s the most perfect way; it’s also what Our Lord did*” (CCD XII, p. 77-78).

#### **3) Cultivate sensitivity**

Vincent de Paul said that if we do not have a minimum of sensitivity before the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, the poor, we are “*a caricature of a Christian, inhuman, worse than animals*” (cf. CCD XII, p. 222). Without sensitivity, there is no openness and closeness to the poor. On the road that goes from Jerusalem to Jericho, and which represents our life, lack of sensitivity turns us into exploitive robbers or into heartless priests and Levites. Without sensitivity, the cruel world of the poor remains in books and in news that does not touch us. Without sensitivity, there can be no discovery of Jesus Christ in the person of the poor because faith would remain a set of doctrine learned and recited by memory.

#### **4) Read the signs of the times from the poor, with the poor and for the poor**

Vatican Council II urged us Christians to “scrutinize the signs of the times” (Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 4). But the practical question lies in knowing “from where” we scrutinize, read and analyze these signs of the times. The Daughters of Charity must read life from the position of their “lords and masters,” the poor. They must analyze reality from the situation of those victimized by an unjust and perverse system that is constantly generating more poor, more excluded, more marginalized, more “throwaway” persons. The commitment will be very different and there will be very different consequences depending on whether life is read with the eyes of the poor or the eyes of the rich, with the eyes of the powerful or the eyes of the fragile and vulnerable.

## 5) Promote the “shared mission”

We have spent many years since Vatican Council II speaking about the participation, collaboration and involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church. We have also spent many years speaking about the mission and commitment of the Vincentian Family. It is now time to take the “shared mission” seriously. More than 40 years ago, a great woman, Sister Suzanne Guillemin, wrote prophetically: “*A Daughter of Charity today is invited to go... from a position of authority to a position of collaboration*” (*Conférences et témoignages*, p. 33)

## 6) Witness to the boldness and creativity of charity

John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*, used an expression which summarizes this criterion well: “*Now is the time for a new ‘creativity’ in charity*” (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 50). The boldness to dare to break traditional structures that already are depleted and that hinder service of the poor comes into play here, along with the creativity to open new channels for committed service. Poor persons - “lords and masters” - demand of a Daughter of Charity new methods, new expressions and new ardor in her commitment on their behalf. Otherwise, the commitment will lose efficiency, significance and momentum.

## 7) Organize an intelligent charity

Some years ago, in his encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made popular an expression very infrequently used in ecclesial language: “intelligent charity.” He said: “*The individual who is animated by true charity labors skillfully to discover the causes of misery, to find the means to combat it, to overcome it resolutely*’ (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 75)... *Intelligence and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love*” (*Caritas in veritate*, 30). Vincent de Paul, 400 years earlier, had already said that “*love is inventive to infinity*” (*CCD XI*, p. 131). This intelligent charity and this inventive love have to guide the Daughter of Charity in her commitment in favor of persons who are poor with the goal of the organization of charity.

## 8) Form ourselves in the Social Doctrine of the Church

Without doubt, the Vincentian charism is very much at ease with and in the Social Doctrine of the Church. Certainly the Social Doctrine of the Church has a dimension that intensifies, strengthens and updates the Vincentian charism. Because if charity is the heart of the Vincentian charism, we should not forget that charity is also the heart of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Father Robert Maloney, Superior General from 1992 to 2004, said that all Vincentian formation programs in the 21st century should impart a healthy dose of this teaching.

## CONCLUSION

I assume that the Daughter of Charity has to carry out her commitment of humanization, promotion and evangelization of all the poor in two concrete areas: in the Church and in today’s world. I also assume that all Daughters of Charity know and sense the new image of Church that Pope Francis wants: a poor Church and for the poor, a merciful Church, a Church that is a field hospital, a hopeful and encouraging Church, a Church of dialogue, a servant Church and a Church that bears witness to the kindness and the love of the good God.

I also assume that Daughters of Charity are not indifferent to the situation of today’s world, in which persons who are poor feel rejected, manipulated and forgotten. You strive within the Church to incarnate this preferential love for persons who are poor.

Let us conclude this presentation with a few questions:

- Is it the poor who determine our commitment, our service and our mission?
- Is it the poor who shape our mentality and our criteria?
- Are our structures adapted for the service of the poor?
- Does Christ’s love truly urge us and do we approach the poor out of this love?

Father Celestino FERNÁNDEZ, CM



**Address by Sister Kathleen Appler**

Mother House, June 12, 2015

C

*Closing of  
the Assembly*

“... *May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; may you be rooted and grounded in love, may you have the strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*” (cf. Eph 3:17-19).

Good morning, Sisters – and Happy Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus! As I prayed with and reflected on the Scripture readings for this day, I realized how blessed we are to be concluding our General Assembly with this feast which so vividly reflects the theological virtue that is our life-blood as Daughters of Charity: namely, love. How appropriate for us that this gift of God’s abiding presence should be the focus of our liturgical day as we bring to closure these days which have challenged us to strive to choose love more fully and live more authentically with Christ as our Rule (C.8).

Encouraged by, grounded in, and enriched by this love, we pray that our lives will genuinely reflect the joy of following Him – as well as the radicality of our response that will be asked of us as we seek to move boldly and trustingly where God leads us. Joy and radical life choices -- a grateful heart and an intense desire to grow, to be challenged, to be more -- truly call forth a mixture of emotions but also the perfect impetus for going forth, don’t you think?

I would imagine that you also may be experiencing a variety of emotions as we reach this point in the journey of our 9th General Assembly. You have each worked very hard, you have prayed well, you have discerned both individually and as a group, and I have no doubt that you have developed relationships among yourselves, the bonds of which will continue to be strengthened in the years ahead. I would imagine that you also must be anticipating the joy of returning home to your Provinces, of greeting your Sisters who have accompanied you so faithfully in prayer and spirit during these past six weeks, of re-connecting with the daily rhythms - again the joys as well as the struggles of your particular experience. Truly these are blessed moments for each of us – and an opportunity to open ourselves to our Lord’s many graces!

As I reflect on all that we have shared together here at the Motherhouse, I am filled with gratitude and with awe. We have been blessed with quality encounters – framed by the inspiration contained within our Charter and enriched by the thoughts of those inside and outside the Little Company. Our sharings embraced the wisdom of Brother Aloïs of Taizé and Sister Sujita of India, of Fr. Celestino Fernandez – our own brother in the Vincentian Family, of Mrs. Laurence de la Brosse of the AIC, of Cardinal Robert Sarah of Rome, of Cardinal André Vingt-Trois of Paris, and of the many Vincentian priests who gifted us with their presence by celebrating the Eucharist with us daily.

Those who are poor have been brought respectfully and reverently before us – and they have indeed accompanied us in our deliberations here... As the sharing of our Missionary Experiences unfolded, we entered into their worlds and were touched by situations on every continent on which we serve. We heard of the realities of modern day slaveries, exclusion, extreme poverty, isolation, violence, insecurities... We also were privileged to hear – and to experience in our prayer - how much those who are poor teach us and call us to be more... We were treated to vibrant glimpses of hope emerging as a direct result of our Sisters’ daily presence in the lives of those who are poor, as well as of the encouragements born of well-organized and creative networking and collaboration endeavors.

My heart was touched daily by the witness of the bold, energizing and very engaging manner that each of you - 150 united hearts and

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souls - entered into this experience of attentive listening and sharing. You offered yourselves totally to every aspect of our Assembly. Your example has been truly edifying to me. This unique experience of oneness offers me much to praise and thank our Lord for... It has been a sacred opportunity to live our spirit of communion.

It is my hope – and indeed my expectation - that the theme of our Assembly, *“The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum”*, will continue to be the wind beneath our wings and will lead us forward throughout these upcoming six years. I am confident that your Sisters await your sharing in each of your Provinces - and that with them - indeed with all of them – you will help us to ever more deeply center our lives on Christ. You will take us forth to the peripheries.

I am also confident that these explorations will be prepared for and undertaken with genuine discernment and with radical courage and boldness! May we heed once again the words of Brother Aloïs who encouraged us to “move forward on the path of love” as well as the advice of Sister Sujita who assured us that “rooted in Christ, we become fruitful in Mission”.

Our choice to dare to live simply and radically, to dare to live united in communion and to dare to live the compassion of Jesus will illumine our paths with a guiding light that will extinguish the darkness and will minimize the shadows that risk holding us back... I believe that our authentic living as servants of those who are poor will enable something **new and bold** to continue to unfold! Let us dare to fully live the richness of the universality of our charism, finding Christ in those who are poor and finding those who are poor in Christ! (cf. C.10)

And now, it is with a deep joy that in your name I give thanks to the Lord for the many people who made this Assembly such a sacred and memorable experience for us:

First of all, I thank Father Gregory for giving us so much of his time. I am conscious of the multiple responsibilities he carries – and the extensiveness of his daily schedule. Father Gregory, thank you for taking so seriously St. Louise’s desire that the Vincentian Priests be our spiritual guides and collaborators in formation. We appreciate the

way you model this commitment to us. We also thank Father Bernard for beginning us on this journey with your Retreat conferences – and for your daily presence here among us, as well as your total availability to our needs.

I also wish to thank the Sisters who offered themselves in order that all would be well with our program:

- The Sisters of the Mother House, who have facilitated our work by being so available to us and continually meeting all of our needs – from our dining rooms to our meeting rooms, to the bedroom areas, indeed to the far corners of this - our home
- The interpreters and the translators
- The team in the Secretariat including those of you who helped us daily here in the Hall
- and without a doubt Sister Ana María Olmeda, our Secretary General, and Sister Pia Humbel, our Treasurer General.

I also want to thank you – the Members of the Assembly. These past six weeks would not have been the experience they were had you not given of yourselves fully – as we worked together in work groups, and at our forums and plenary sessions – as well as at times of prayer and relaxation. In addition, I offer special thanks to those of you who assisted us by serving as facilitators and secretaries in your work and language groups.

Likewise, my gratitude extends to the members of the various committees - the Liturgy Committee, the Ambiance Committee, the Welcoming Committee, the Communications Committee, and the Editing Commission. I am sorry that I cannot name you all individually, but please allow me to name our two very faithful and competent Secretaries: Sister Marie-Françoise Crépin and Sister Anne Prévost.

No words could adequately express our gratitude to the Members of the Coordinating Commission. They began long before the opening of this Assembly – and have not ceased to work through this very moment! Sister Micheline Tremblay, who served as our Facilitator, and Sister Rosa

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María Miro, Sister Françoise Petit, Sister Marie Odile Herbet, Sister Marjory Ann Baez, Sister María del Carmen Polo Brazo, Sister Marie Zenaïde Rahelinirina. We have been touched by your wisdom, your total availability and your never-ending flexibility - always accomplishing each of your tasks with a smile and an assuring sense of calm!

Sisters, I believe that you have seen first-hand and have understood well what a fully engaged member, tremendous support and affirming presence Sister Evelyne has been to us – especially to me – as we journeyed through these days. I have no words to adequately express my gratitude – but I pray that I will be able to simply and humbly follow her example and be for each of you the servant leader that she models daily for us!

In your presence and in the name of the Company, I thank in a very special way the six General Councillors who will be returning to their Provinces: again, Sister Rosa María Miro, Sister Marlene Terezinha Rosa, Sister Christa Bauer, Sister Rosa Maria Napolitano, Sister Madeline Hara and Sister Zofia Daniscakova. I thank and praise God for the gifts that they have so generously shared among us as well as personally for the joy I have been blessed to experience by having lived and worked with each of them as a member of our “quasi” local community here at the Motherhouse.

My thanks as well to those who are continuing this service with me – Sister Françoise Petit, Sister Neghesti Michael, and Sister Iliana Suarez Perez. Finally, I thank those who have generously agreed to leave their Provinces and boldly journey with us as General Councillors: Sister Raimunda Corina Sousa Bastos, Sister Hanna Cybula, Sister Maria Teresa Mueda, Sister Carmen Perez Gonzalez, and Sister Marie Raw. On behalf of our new General Council, I thank you all – the Members of this General Assembly - for entrusting us with our service for the next six years. You can be sure that we will give you our best in order to serve you as servants - striving to move forward boldly with our new missionary momentum. We ask for your prayers and promise you our devotedness and open communication. We also promise to do our best with the work that you have entrusted to us regarding the finalization of our Assembly Document - anticipating and praying that in reality ***each of you will be the Living Documents of this General Assembly!***

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May we now go forth filled with gratitude for all that has been, and may we live in joyful anticipation of all that is yet to fill our days as Daughters of Charity – humble servants of those who are poor believing with confidence that “*all shall be well!*” (Julian of Norwich)

Please allow me to conclude by again inviting Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith, and by calling upon the intercession of St. Vincent and St. Louise whom I am confident are smiling on their Daughters at this very moment. May our Holy Founders continue to encourage each of us to learn from and seek to imitate Mary, who welcomed Christ so totally in her life. In simplicity I echo the prayer of Pope Francis:

Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own “yes”  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus...

Obtain for us now a new ardor born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.  
Give a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman...

Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of those who are poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel – and the boldness of our charity –  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of the world!

Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us.  
Amen, Alleluia!

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 288)

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
Daughter of Charity

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No. 3 May - June 2015

## Closing Eucharist

Homily by Father Gregory Gay

June 12, 2015

Today on this Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our time together comes to an end. It is fitting because, as I noted in an earlier homily, the heart is an image very familiar to all gathered here. The chapel contains the heart of St. Vincent de Paul. The seal of the Company is that of a heart with the cross in its center. Indeed, from the heart of Christ's love and the intercessory heart of Mary, Mother of the Church and of the Company, we find the energy and strength to live the Vincentian charism. So while it seems a coincidence, having this Assembly end on the Feast of the Sacred Heart is truly providential. It is a final graced moment in our time together.

As you prepare to conclude this Assembly, you take with you the "boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum." After much reflection, prayer, and what I call the **'three D's': discernment, discussion, and decision**, you return to your Provinces renewed. Your hearts are full with excitement and readiness to return and "*proclaim what you have seen and heard*" (1 Jn 1:3).

In the first reading from Hosea, the prophet reveals a God who loves and cares for his errant people. Although the Israelites have often broken their covenant with God, the Lord tells the prophet that "*my heart is overwhelmed, my pity stirred*" (Hos 11:8). Using the image of a parent caring for a little child, Hosea tells us that God's relationship to Israel is as a "*child I loved... I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks*" (Hos 11:1, 3-4). This is a God whose heart is set on salvation, not condemnation!

In this time together as an Assembly of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, you have fulfilled your duties. Now, you must go forth and show your Sisters and the Vincentian Family how to engage in the "boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum." Remember that true boldness creates a lasting momentum, and real charity strengthens and clarifies the mission.

What are some of the components needed to bring forth the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum? While this is not the time for an exhaustive discourse, I believe there are some tangible items you can share with your Province and help the Sisters there to undertake. They include: a willingness to take risks; being innovative by thinking outside the conventional ways of engaging in the apostolate; exercising the principle of subsidiarity, both in community life and the apostolate; and developing and implementing clear objectives with measurable goals.

As we have begun the "*Year of Collaboration for the Vincentian Family*," your "boldness" can extend to reaching out to the religious and laity in the Family in the various branches that share our charism. We have great groups in the Family who enthusiastically embrace our Vincentian vision, and they can both learn from the Company and in turn can assist you in living out the "boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum."

As an example, recall that it was through a Daughter of Charity, namely Rosalie Rendu, that Blessed Frederic Ozanam learned the art of serving the poor in the Vincentian way. Today, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is known and recognized worldwide for compassionate, competent service to the poor, with the help of her first efforts. Our Vincentian Family offers many other opportunities for collaboration and mutual enrichment in our charism. So let this be a time when you strengthen and expand the "ties that bind" between the Daughters of Charity and the various branches of the Vincentian Family.

### Closing of the Assembly

Along with the Vincentian Family, let this Assembly be the one where the Company extended its outreach to young people, so they experience the bold beauty of how *“the charity of Christ urges (you) on”* (2 Cor 5:14). While this occurs in many Provinces, let this Assembly be one in which you find new ways to be energized by young people whose ideals and aspirations will resound with the witness of faith and the charism of charity that so characterizes the Company.

In many provinces, the Sisters assist in Vincentian Marian Youth and MISEVI, our lay groups explicitly for young people. It would be a wonderful testimony to your boldness and desire for a missionary momentum if, by the next General Assembly in 2021, every Province of the Company had Sisters and an apostolate working with Vincentian Marian Youth and MISEVI. If you think this is difficult or unlikely, I urge you to investigate how religious in other branches of the Family have made inroads in working with young people. It is very exciting... and possible!

The word **‘renewal’** surfaces often in a General Assembly. Perhaps you are a bit tired of hearing it by now! Yet, the question remains: what type of renewal will best bring the boldness of charity for a new missionary millennium?

As you know, it starts with personal conversion; humble, open hearts willing to seek and extend forgiveness as did Jesus from his own Sacred Heart. Only then can we bring renewal to the apostolate and community life. We must learn to accept one another and those we serve for who they are, not who we want them to be.

In the reading from Ephesians, Paul admits that although he was the *“very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ”* (Eph 3:8). Once a proud, arrogant man, Paul had to re-learn what he believed and did after his renewal in Christ.

As we come to the Eucharist this final time together, let us unite our hearts with the heart of Jesus and his Mother, Mary, the Mother of the Company. Today’s Gospel describes the broken body of the lifeless Lord after his crucifixion. However, we know this simple, sad passage was not the end of Jesus’ story. His resurrection is his gift to us, given from a heart filled with love. So, let this last Eucharist together as an Assembly be one that gives us strength for the journey home to bring the boldness of charity for a new missionary momentum. May the lives of Our Holy Founders, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, continue to inspire us, and may their prayers unite us in greater love of God and more fervent service to those living in poverty.

Father Gregory GAY, CM  
*Superior General*

Mary,

the Mother who cared for Jesus,  
now cares with maternal affection and pain  
for this wounded world.

Just as her pierced heart  
mourned the death of Jesus,  
so now she grieves  
for the sufferings  
of the crucified poor and  
for the creatures of this world  
laid waste by human power...

Carried up into heaven,  
she is the Mother and Queen  
of all creation...

Hence, we can ask her  
to enable us to look at this world  
with eyes of wisdom.

*Laudato si'*, no. 241  
Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis

