

# *E*choes of the Company

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Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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# 1617-2017 400th Anniversary of the Charism

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Letter of February 2, 2017

Dear Sisters,

“... [Simeon] took Him into his arms...” Luke 2:28

As the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord resonates in our prayer, I invite you to reflect on Simeon’s words as he took Jesus into his arms. You will recall that this holy man in the Temple of Jerusalem expressed both his joy and his predictions for this child and His mother. We know that Simeon’s prophecies came true. Mary and Joseph didn’t fully understand this insightful wisdom at the time. Later, they would come to realize that their love would ask much of them. The same is true of every engagement that demands a response of love. Without a doubt, such love leads to much rejoicing, but there may also be pain. Mary heard Simeon; thankfully she didn’t choose to abandon her love and her commitment to her Son. She stayed with Jesus, accompanied Him as He matured, grew in union with Him, and was transformed by His example and His teachings. Many years later, Mary would find herself at the foot of the cross, still offering her unwavering presence and compassion in His vulnerability. Strikingly portrayed by Michelangelo in his sculpture of the Pietà, Jesus’ body would ultimately be placed in her arms, a powerful representation of Mary’s unconditional love and commitment to her Son.

Carrying this prayer in my heart, I had the privilege on February 2 of presenting to Father Tomaž Mavric our desire to give ourselves totally to God and to renew our vows of service of the poor, poverty, chastity, and



Spiritual  
Life

## Letter of February 2, 2017

obedience as Daughters of Charity on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 2017. As you know, this was the first time Father Tomaž received our request and responded to it. Our conversation was very simple and sacred. I was able to relate to him our genuine longing to be faithful to our vocation. I shared with him that at times our human frailty causes our responses to be less than what we would hope, but that we sincerely want to completely give ourselves to God. Father Tomaž granted our request for the renovation, and he assured me of his support for each of us. He also spoke of his gratitude to witness the blessings that come to those who are poor through our deep love of Jesus and our service of Him in them. May we, like Mary as she stood beside Simeon, be open to the graces of this moment. May we also, like Mary, have the strength to offer our steadfast “yes” to all that being a faithful follower of Christ will ask of us!

Our participation in the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism should lead us to reflect in a particular way on the demanding nature of this year. Truly, renewed awareness of the Vincentian charism and its ability to change the world creates a time ripe with graces for responding radically with vision and hope. Celebrating as a Vincentian Family opens up even further the possibilities for giving life to our theme of welcoming the stranger and thereby improving the lives of those who are poor. St. Vincent has bequeathed to us a heritage that we are called to dare to live. Our charism challenges us to reflect the tenderness of God, respectfully and consistently bringing the love of Jesus to the least among us. Through an incarnational spirituality, we are invited to live the mystique of charity. We are called to go out to those who are poor as well as to learn from them. Deeper two-way relationships will enrich us all and improve the network of Christ’s Charity.

As consecrated women and daughters of the Church, we are drawn to examine specifically how we can grow in our gift of self to God and to those whom we serve. The teaching of the Church affirms the value of the vows: *“The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly ‘visible’ in the midst of the world and the*

*eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven” (Vita Consecrata, 1).*

Echoing our choice to *“live totally and radically the evangelical counsels”* (C. 8), we hear Pope Francis constantly call us to elect to live more radically: to leave our comfort zones and to come out of ourselves. We are invited to a new way of being present with compassion, sensitivity, and authentic listening.

In the Company St. Louise’s own words witness to her personal desire to be totally given to the Lord. She wrote, *“May the desire for holy poverty always live in my heart in such a manner that, freed from all bonds, I may follow Jesus Christ and serve my neighbor with great humility and gentleness, living under obedience and in chastity all my life and honoring the poverty that Jesus Christ practiced so perfectly”* (Saint Louise, *Spiritual Writings*, A.1, p. 689). Writings such as these reveal the foundations for the discernment of St. Louise and St. Vincent about the way of life that would assist our first Sisters in their response to God and their commitment of service to those who were poor.

Nearly four hundred years later, we are privileged to make four vows: service of those who are poor, chastity, poverty, and obedience. Lived as a free response, they ratify our total gift of self to God in the reality of our ever-changing world. Since we do not live in a vacuum, our vows challenge us to offer ourselves entirely, continually, and ever anew. For us as Daughters of Charity, our vows favor our service of those who are poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity. Our formation and our lived experiences confirm that the evangelical counsels are not ends in and of themselves. Rather, they are means for achieving our mission – that is, for serving corporally and spiritually those who are poor. The vows offer us the opportunity to joyfully respond to the call to a life of total consecration to Christ in selfless service of our sisters and our brothers. I invite you to reflect with me in order to more authentically put into practice what we promise each year on the feast of the Annunciation. Drawing on inspiration from our Founders in the past and Pope Francis and Father Tomaž in our day, let us explore how we can dare to more deeply live out the Vincentian commitments we profess in the renewal of our vows this year.

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We are called to take on the fullness of our vows' spiritual dynamism. Our renovation is not simply a confined moment when we pronounce sacred words. These vows need to have concrete consequences on our lives daily. They must renew us, re-create us, and bring us life. Our vows should lead us to further enter into the world of those who are poor. In order for this to happen, we have to be fully present to each moment. We cannot just repeat last year's responses to the calls before us today. We are challenged to respond with insightful creativity. We must respond as we are today and give ourselves wholeheartedly and completely. Our vows are a priceless gift that we can offer to God, who in turn offers us as a gift to those who are poor.

This personal response demands that we be honest, simple, and bold. God wants us as His own, with all our qualities and strengths as well as with all of our limits and weaknesses. He challenges us to rid ourselves of anything that holds us back. He desires that we seek Him alone. We must examine our heart and ask if we are willing to enter fully into this relationship. Will we truly love God with all that we are - our heart, soul, strength and mind - quite aware that this takes significant effort and focus? Will we decide this year to *do* what we *say* in the vow formula? Will we make this a deliberate and conscious response for this entire year? The Constitutions indicate that the vows are a "source of strength"; they bring energy to our service. How does this happen? How do the vows nourish us? In what way do they impact our day-to-day living?

Our Constitutions use precise language which lays out high expectations for behavior. The description of the vows indicates that our response must be all or nothing. We are challenged to shift the focus away from ourselves and turn completely to God.

For us as Daughters of Charity, it is our *vow of service of Christ in those who are poor* which directs our entire life (C. 24a). The way we serve provides the context for our understanding of the practice of the evangelical counsels, and the evangelical counsels color the way we ought to carry out our service. Our primary mission of service then enriches the meaning of our chastity, poverty, and obedience. It focuses the reason for each vow. Service of those who are poor can be considered a prism through which we regard the evangelical counsels.

Serving our sisters and brothers who are poor as our lords and masters is much more than a quaint expression. Our commitment involves our resources, our talents, and our time, to which those who are poor have a right. With respect, discernment, and dialogue, the person who is poor must be given the dignity and the option of deciding how, when, and where a service will be provided. It is not about us. We are called to be true companions of those who are poor. The service we offer must be rendered as a servant and guided by the values of listening and attentiveness.

The primacy of service of those who are poor, stressed by the Founders, is given concrete expression in this fourth vow. The commitment focuses our response of affective and effective love through service and obliges us to proclaim the Gospel humbly, simply, and charitably to those whom we encounter. It also calls us to be evangelized by those whom we serve.

*Our vow of chastity, "a response of love to a call of Love"* (C. 29b), allows us to personally embrace both the Pascal Mystery and the responsibility we have for one another. It expands the dimensions of our heart, enabling us to extend ourselves to all. This vow presumes a respect for self and our dignity as a result of being created in the image and likeness of God.

The Constitutions encourage us to imitate the heart of the Lord as well as to acknowledge a certain loneliness of our own heart (C. 29b) implied in living out this vow for the Kingdom of God. The *Instructions on the Vows* speaks of "*loneliness for fullness*" in an honest description of the reality of this gift. It explains that "*with God's grace this loneliness opens the heart to the fullness of Love*" (*Instructions on the Vows*, p. 48). We give ourselves to God, and He gives us to others. The longing and the uncertainty that may creep in need not be suppressed but rather can be used as a means of uniting ourselves to God. As Mother Rogé wrote in the past, "*The love God expects from us in chastity is not a love exempt from struggle or unobstructed by weakness, but a love that accepts having to grow through trials that purify it*" (Mother Lucie Rogé, February 2, 1977). God wants to open the door of our heart. We must offer ourselves to Him unconditionally in order for this to happen. It is necessary that we truthfully and simply acknowledge the



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ache and the emptiness that we may feel. Being honest with ourselves and in our relationships with God and others is a lifelong conversion. Our adoption of the vow of chastity takes form moment by moment, day by day, year by year, if we are faithful to offering our hearts to the Lord. This growth entails both ongoing vigilance and discernment (cf. *Instructions on the Vows*, p. 49).

*Our vow of poverty* challenges us to model ourselves on Christ's abandonment to the Father. "*Find[ing] its fullness in poverty of spirit*" (C. 30a) and holding the potential to be completely transforming, it, too, is lived on a continuum. It takes a lifetime to achieve our goal, one day at a time. In the context of the service of the poor, we find that this vow is not about what we have, do not have, or deny ourselves. No, the vow of poverty is about how we are called to give ourselves to God. C. 30a explicitly states that we are "*happy to have no other treasure than God...*" This implies that the only treasure we have to give is ourselves. As we stand beside those who are poor, we are totally dependent on God. It further compels us to go out among those who are poor and discover who they are and what their needs may be. We must give ourselves to God so that He can give us to those who are poor. You know well that "going out" is one of our founding principles, reflected so clearly in our Charter, and it is also advocated by Pope Francis who today urges us to incarnate the culture of encounter, offering ourselves to those who are poor. This will be sufficient if we believe in faith that our sole treasure is God and that He will give us all that is needed. It may seem that we have little to offer – perhaps almost nothing – similar to the widow with her two small coins in the Gospel, but God assures us that it will be enough. Are we willing to give out of our poverty?

*Our vow of obedience* commits us to offer nothing less than what Jesus offered in the Garden of Gethsemane when He agreed to do the will of His Father and not His own. God asks nothing more – but more importantly, He asks nothing less! This impels us to live faith and trust absolutely. If we are to serve those who are poor as Jesus asks us to serve them, we must give our all – everything that we say and do. Our responses must mirror the attitude of the Son of God; therefore, we need to be attentive to God for direction. His will is made known through the voice of Superiors, "*the cries of those who are poor, the calls of the Church, the signs of the times, and the Constitutions and*

*Statutes*" (C. 31b). To hear and then faithfully respond to them, we must also be completely honest with ourselves. It is necessary for us to be conscious of our downfalls and our instinct to rationalize our incomplete responses. External points of reference will help us: the Word of God, guidance of the Company, the Church, and the real world of those who are poor. Openness to these sources of wisdom will allow us to "*transcend [our] own opinions and interests for the common good*" (C. 31c). Eventually all of these voices, recognized in our prayer and experiences, will emerge as one. This is not easy... It involves giving up our will, accepting the decisions of others, and offering forgiveness as needed. We live obedience in service of Christ in those who are poor by giving ourselves as servants to them.

These vows are lived out in community and strengthened by it, first of all in a community that prays together. We believe that "*God's word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life*" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 174). As Daughters of Charity, we strive to center ourselves on Christ. May we unceasingly foster our intimate relationship with Him and together deepen our spirituality based on the Vincentian charism, the Church's sacramental life, and sacred Scripture. This spirituality provides the lens through which we view the world and reach out to the most abandoned, especially migrants, refugees, and victims of modern forms of slavery.

We remember well St. Louise's dying wish that we "*live together in great union and cordiality*" in order to offer a prophetic witness of love and hope. May our life, "*united in the same 'yes', united in the Holy Spirit,*" allow us to "*discover every day that... following Christ, obedient, poor and chaste, is lived in fraternity, as was the case with the disciples who followed Jesus in his ministry.*" We are "*united with Christ and therefore called to be united*" among ourselves (cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 44). May we reflect deeply on the communal dimension of our consecrated life and courageously take the steps necessary to deepen the bonds in our local communities so that they become visible signs of our communion in Christ.

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Let us have the courage to respond to Pope Francis' urgent appeal for "*spiritual conversion, intense love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, and the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty*" (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 201). Furthermore, let us strive "*to be true experts of communion and practice the spirituality of communion as witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design*" (*Vita Consecrata*, 46). May the upcoming year be a graced opportunity for each of us to take steps forward, offering a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. If we live in collaborative trust as a Company held in the arms of God, our Lord will lead us forward in the mission He has entrusted to us for the good of those who are poor. Today more than ever, *may the Charity of Jesus crucified urge us!*

Let us unite our voices with Mary as we sing the Magnificat. May we more fully recognize the great things that God has done for us and for those who are poor whom He loves so deeply. Allowing God to take us into His arms as Simeon took Jesus into his in the temple, and as Mary did throughout her life, let us once again implore our Lord for the grace to give ourselves totally to Him. Let us present Him our unwavering love and our gratitude for this opportunity to become more fully His own. In word and action, may we be "*poor Daughters of Charity who have given [ourselves] to God for the service of persons who are poor*" (Saint Vincent, October 22, 1650, CCD IX, p. 432).

Sisters, please allow me to offer in your name our gratitude and the assurance of our prayers for Father Tomaž Mavric, Father Bernard Schoepfer, Father Robert Maloney, Father Gregory Gay, Father Fernando Quintano, Father Javier Alvarez, and Father Patrick Griffin. Each continues to bless us with his gifts of wisdom and brotherly support.

I offer as well our deep gratitude and the promise of prayers for Sister Juana Elizondo and Sister Evelyne Franc who have so faithfully and competently led us in the past, and who assure me that they continue daily to hold us in prayer before God. Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, may the Lord bless them with the graces they need at this time.

Let us enter into these weeks of preparation for Renovation 2017 as humble Daughters of Charity ever ready to give ourselves totally to God and to respond boldly with availability to the needs of those who are poor.

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
*Daughter of Charity*

## Lent 2017

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

My dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

Let me take the opportunity, at the beginning of this letter, to thank each one of you wholeheartedly for your many Christmas and New Year's greetings, which I received by regular mail, e-mail, or through different social media! I admire the heroic witness and service of your ministering in difficult times and in remote areas of the globe. My heart is with each one of you as I accompany you daily with my thoughts and prayers.

The season of Lent is near at hand!

In my Advent letter, I reflected on "the Incarnation" as one of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality. In this year's Lenten letter, I would like to reflect on the mystery of the "Holy Trinity" as another of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent's spirituality.

Saint Vincent writes in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission:

*"According to the Bull which established our Congregation, we are bound to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, mysteries beyond words. We should therefore try to carry this out most faithfully and, if possible, in every way, but especially in these three ways: (1) frequently honoring these mysteries by a prayer of faith and adoration, coming from our inmost heart; (2) dedicating certain prayers and good works each day to their honor and, above*

*all, celebrating their feast days with special dignity, and the greatest possible personal devotion; (3) trying constantly, by our teaching and example, to get other people to know these mysteries and to honor and worship them" (Common Rules X, 2; CCD XIII A, 454-455).*

In the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, we find the following words:

*"As witnesses and heralds of the love of God, we ought to show special honor and devotion to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation" (Constitutions, IV, 48).*

What is the message of the Holy Trinity for me personally, for the community where I live, the congregation or group to which I belong, for my family, for the people Jesus is sending me to serve?

Jesus helps us understand the Holy Trinity: the identity, mission, and purpose of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus helps us to understand the relationship among the three Persons, the inner connectivity among them, and the influence of the Trinity on each individual person as well as on society as a whole.

As we discover and develop, with God's grace, an unbreakable bond between the Trinity and the individual person, between the Trinity and the community, between the Trinity and humanity, we will get ever closer to the ideal model of "relationships," basic components of our lives. We were created not as islands, separated from one another, but as social beings and as a family, where, in the depth of our being, we are one with God, which means, with the Trinity and with each other.

The Trinity remains a mystery for us. Jesus communicated to us what we know about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus presented the Trinity to us as the ideal model of "relationships."

Our reflection on the Trinity needs to be accompanied by the wish and goal of incarnating that ideal model of "relationships" in the concrete life situation in which I find myself, in the community where I live and the congregation or group to which I belong, in my family, with the people to whom Jesus is sending me to serve.



## Lent 2017

The Holy Trinity is the ideal model of “relationships”! Jesus shows us the ideal.

- The mutual relationship between the Father and the Son.
- The mutual relationship between the Father and the Spirit.
- The mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit.
- The relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit.

What can we see in these “relationships”?

- 1) We can see that the attention is always directed to the other person and not to oneself.
- 2) We can see that the priority is always given to the other person and not to oneself.
- 3) We can see that praise, thankfulness, admiration are always given to the other person and not to oneself.
- 4) We can see that each one of the three Persons of the Trinity always expresses the need for collaboration with the other Person to fulfill the mission.
- 5) We can see that each of the three Persons of the Trinity always clearly expresses that it would be insufficient and ineffective for each of them to act alone.

What does the model of relationships in the Trinity say to me about my own life in:

- a) my relationship with God,
- b) my relationship to the community,
- c) my relationship with my family,
- d) my relationship with those to whom Jesus is sending me to serve?

Because we are not islands, but beings belonging to the human family, “relationships” are an inseparable part of our mission. The ideal model of the Trinity, that Jesus left us, is the model to follow.

Saint Vincent de Paul made the ideal model of the Holy Trinity one of the foundations of his spirituality. In this year’s Lenten Season, we are invited to take new steps toward the ideal model of “relationships” given to us through Jesus.

If each of us would put the other person first, put him or her before oneself, before one’s own desires, before one’s own interests, before one’s own personal wishes; if each one would give attention to the other person, share time, thoughts, experiences, hardships, doubts, sufferings, joys, etc. by following the ideal model of “the Trinity’s relationships,” then someone would do the same for each of us. In this way, a wonderful and miraculous set of relationships will take shape, where we together, in the best and most effective way possible, will accomplish the mission entrusted to us by Jesus.

To help us reflect on this ideal model of “relationships,” let us use two more passages from Saint Vincent on the Trinity, as well as a short reflection by Father Getúlio Mota Grossi, CM:

*“If we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity and a holy relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let’s establish ourselves in this spirit. What creates unity and single-mindedness in God, if not equality and the distinction of the Three Persons? And what creates Their love if not Their resemblance? And if there were no love among Them, what would be loveable in Them, said the Blessed Bishop of Geneva? So then, there’s uniformity in the Blessed Trinity: what the Father wants, the Son wants; what the Holy Spirit does, the Father and the Son do and act the same way; They have only one power and one way of acting. That’s the source of holiness and our model. Let’s make ourselves uniform; we’ll be many as if we were only one, and we’ll have holy union in plurality. If we already have a little, but not enough, let’s ask God for what we lack, and see in what we differ from one another in order to try to resemble one another and be equal; for resemblance and equality engender love, and love tends toward unity. So then, let’s all strive to have the same likings and to be in agreement regarding the things that are done or are allowed to be done among us”* (Conference 206 of 23 May 1659 on Uniformity; CCD XII, 210-211).

*“Live together as having but one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)) so that by this union of spirit you may be a true image of the unity of God, since your number represents the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.*

## Lent 2017

*I pray for this to the Holy Spirit, who is the union of the Father and the Son, that He may be yours likewise and give you profound peace in the midst of contradictions and difficulties, which can only be frequent among the poor. But remember also that this is your cross, by which Our Lord calls you to Himself and to His peace. Everyone has a high opinion of your work, and good people acknowledge that there is no other work on earth more honorable or holy, when it is performed faithfully” (Letter of 30 July 1651 to Sister Anne Hardemont, in Hennebont; CCD IV, 238-239).*

Saint Vincent’s devotion to the Trinity was not an intellectual exercise but a search from his heart. It led him and leads us, as a Congregation still living the charism of the Founder, to a two-fold experience:

**To imitate the mutual relations of the three Persons.** *The Church finds the ultimate source of its life and action in the Trinity. The Congregation, within the Church, does the same (Constitutions II, 20).* We are called to be an image of the Trinity, the merciful and compassionate God of Love (cf. Conference 152 of 6 August [1656] on “The Spirit of Mercy and Compassion”; CCD XI, 308-309.), the God of the Poor, the least, the weakest, to whom we are destined by our charism. This is true for us, the Daughters of Charity, and the whole Vincentian Family.

Called to union in love; uniformity in plurality; communion of life; unity in the diversity of gifts; animated by the Holy Spirit; sent, like Jesus, for the missionary charity of evangelizing the poor, a charism inspired by the Spirit in Saint Vincent, given to the Company and inherited by us, we are challenged to creative fidelity to the charism of following Jesus, evangelizer of the poor.

Therefore, our devotion to the Trinity, like that of Saint Vincent, **must be connected to the Mission** (cf. Conference 118 of 23 May 1655, Repetition of Prayer; CCD XI, 172-174), to the proclamation of the mystery of God’s love for the poor, for their salvation (cf. *ibid*, 173). The Word was incarnated, sent out of love by the Father (cf. John 3:16), conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 1:35) in the womb of Mary, and anointed by the same Spirit to bring the good news to the poor. In the Incarnate Word, present in the poor, Saint Vincent saw the most perfect manifestation of the love of God (cf. John 3:16,

14:9), the preferential love of the Triune God for the least of this world (Getúlio Mota Grossi, CM).

We are celebrating the 400th Anniversary of Saint Vincent de Paul’s charism. May this Jubilee Year bring us abundant fruit. With total trust in Providence, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family, we continue the path inward toward our own self, and outward to our communities, family, and to the people Jesus is sending us to serve, to those who may not know the charism yet or to those places where the charism has still to take root.

I hope and pray that this year’s Holy Week, Easter, and Easter Season celebrations will bring additional joy and meaning to us and our life’s mission as we reflect on the Trinity and take new steps toward the ideal model of “relationships.”

May we continue praying for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaz MAVRIC, CM  
*Superior General*

## Letter of March 25, 2017

“May it be done to me according to Your word”

Dear Sisters,

“... *May it be done to me according to Your word*” (Luke 1:38).

I rejoice with you in the celebration of the Annunciation, so dramatic yet so simple. Mary received astonishing news, and because she was open, she accepted in faith what God asked of her. God calls us by vocation to honor and serve Christ in the person of those who are poor. Today we are once again blessed to renew our vows of service of the poor, poverty, chastity, and obedience. With the Blessed Mother as our model of trust in God and humble acceptance and following of His will, joy and gratitude fill our hearts as we offer our response. May the graces of this day enable us to say “Yes” ever more fully!

I would like to share several pieces of information regarding our Vincentian Family and specifically the Little Company. After consultation Father Tomaž Mavric with his Council reappointed Father Bernard Schoepfer as Director General of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term. I have expressed my gratitude to Father Bernard for his willingness to accompany us. I assured him of your prayers and support in his continued service.

On March 15, I had the joy of officially creating of the Province of España Norte, after much prayer and active participation on the part of the Sisters of the Provinces of Gijon and San Sebastian. The event culminated in a solemn and joyful celebration. Please join me in praying for the Sisters and the future of this new Province.

At the beginning of this month, the International Association of Charity (AIC) celebrated 400 years of fidelity to the Vincentian charism. The commemoration included a Eucharistic celebration on March 8 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris at which many members of the AIC, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, priests of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity gathered to pray in gratitude for these years of dedicated service. The reliquary containing the heart of St. Vincent de Paul was reverently carried in the entrance procession. At the end of the liturgy, the reliquary was placed in St. Vincent’s Chapel in the Cathedral where it remained for the day. The AIC then held its International Assembly of Delegates in Châtillon March 12 - 15. Several Daughters of Charity were present to accompany them in their reflection and offer encouragement.

I have also been receiving summaries of your local celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of our charism. It is evident that the Vincentian spirit is very present in the world. Your prayer and your activities express your heartfelt gratitude for the wisdom which St. Vincent and St. Louise have offered us. Please continue to inform us of these special events throughout the year. I also encourage you to read the articles about this historic anniversary on the International Website of the Company.

While we delight in joyful events of the Vincentian Family, we also lament with the many who suffer in our world. I think especially of the inhabitants of Peru affected by torrential rains. We have already sent emergency assistance. Our Sisters, who themselves suffered material damages, have established an action plan in collaboration with other members of the Vincentian Family in order to corporally and spiritually support and assist the people affected by the flooding. I also draw your attention to migrants and refugees and the Sisters and their collaborators who serve them. As you are well aware, our Inter-Assemblies Document calls us to “*dare courageously... to increase networking at all levels... in order to facilitate collaborative service with the Vincentian Family and others for the defense and integration of migrants, refugees and victims of modern forms of slavery*” (IAD pp. 17-18). Let us remember in prayer those impacted by these forms of poverty. Every continent is touched by forced departures and the need to welcome the stranger, and I can see that you are educating yourselves

Letter of March 25, 2017

and offering material, emotional, and spiritual assistance. I am very grateful for your sensitivity and your desire to be united as a Company around this concern. I am convinced that your innovative and Christ-centered services are bringing our Inter-Assemblies Document to life.

On this feast day, let us unceasingly unite our hearts in prayer with our Blessed Mother. Like Mary in her Magnificat, let us present to God our unwavering love and our gratitude for this opportunity to become more fully His own. May we truly be humble Daughters of Charity responding with boldness and unrestricted readiness by the total gift of self to God and to those who are poor.

Affectionately and with the assurance of my prayers,

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
*Daughter of Charity*

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FATHER B. SCHOEPFER, DIRECTOR GENERAL

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Preparatory retreat for the Renovation

**With humility and simplicity,  
let us live as children of light!**

The time has come to strengthen your heart!

Now is the time to wait for the Lord!

He is very close, He calls you. He promises you new life.

Live as children of light along the paths where the Spirit leads us:

May the name of the Father live in us!<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

We entered into Lent with this song during the Ash Wednesday celebration. Living as children of light means accepting ourselves, personally and as community, as a gift from the Father. In our everyday life, we see ourselves as children of a Father who loves us.

To better live this mystery, I suggest that we reflect on the virtues of humility and simplicity during this preparatory retreat for the renewal of vows. In his Lenten letter, Father Tomaž invited us to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity. I share this passage with you:

Because we are not islands, but beings belonging to the human family, “relationships” are an inseparable part of our mission. The ideal model of the Trinity, that Jesus left us, is the model to follow.

Saint Vincent de Paul made the ideal model of the Holy Trinity one of the foundations of his spirituality. In this year’s Lenten Season, we are invited to take new steps toward the ideal model of “relationships” given to us through Jesus.

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1. Song number SECLI : G14-57-1, words by J. Berthier

### *With humility and simplicity, let us live as children of light*

*If each of us would put the other person first, put him or her before oneself, before one's own desires, before one's own interests, before one's own personal wishes; if each one would give attention to the other person, share time, thoughts, experiences, hardships, doubts, sufferings, joys, etc. by following the ideal model of "the Trinity's relationships," then someone would do the same for each of us. In this way, a wonderful and miraculous set of relationships will take shape, where we together, in the best and most effective way possible, will accomplish the mission entrusted to us by Jesus.*

The virtues of humility and simplicity will help us to live more fully as children of light, loved by the Trinity. I would like to read this passage from the Constitutions:

*"To depend on the Holy Spirit is to allow oneself to be molded into a resemblance to Christ, gentle and humble of heart. According to Saint Vincent, this evangelical spirit must animate the Company: "It is God's will that the Daughters of Charity devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, simplicity, and charity" (C. 18).*

## **I. HUMILITY<sup>2</sup>**

### **WORRY**

The opposite of humility is pride (self-exaltation). We could also say that the opposite of humility is worry. In fact, all proud people are worried, anxious. In the etymological sense of the word French word for worried, we find *inquietus*, that is, without rest. A proud person is without rest because always in a state of competition. He is relentlessly compelled to compare himself to others. As his primordial concern is being first, the most brilliant, the most noticed, the most appreciated, he never has a second of rest. This can lead to living in a competitive way since others are possible rivals. This competitive spirit comes from a fundamental insecurity about one's own value. Am I worth as much or more than others?

### **SELF-CONTEMPT**

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2. <http://www.abbayedemaylis.org/2015/01/23/humilite-douceur-patience/>

Note that we are particularly disordered: our 'inner radio' often goes haywire. Over the course of one day, we go several times from self-exaltation – "I really am quite exceptional!" – to self-contempt – "I'm such a nobody!" Now, self-contempt is not humility. Humility is the truth about oneself, and we are not 'nobodies'. God has placed qualities within us and looks on us with love. Denying our own worth is also denying God's love.

*"For a very long time, I considered low self-esteem to be some kind of virtue. I had been warned so often against pride and conceit that I came to consider it a good thing to deprecate myself. But now I realize that the real sin is to deny God's first love for me, to ignore my original goodness. Because without claiming that first love and that original goodness for myself, I lose touch with my true self and embark on the destructive search..."<sup>3</sup>*

Nouwen offers us an important secret for growing in humility: welcoming God's first love for me. God loves me, so I am loveable. There is good within me.

### **SEEING THE GOOD THAT IS IN US**

The idea may initially seem strange, but it is very wise: in order to be humble, we must start by seeing the good that is in us, in other words, the gifts that God has placed in us. If I do not notice the good in me, I will be jealous of others. This will awaken my competitive spirit. Indeed, the qualities of others attract us, and the successes of others do not leave us indifferent. If we focus on them, forgetting the good that is in us, we will foolishly seek to compensate for this apparent failing by showing off in one way or another.

Humble people recognize the good within. Because they see this clearly, they are able to put it to use for the good of others. If God gave us qualities and talents, it is so they will bear fruit in the service of others. Humble people dare to throw themselves into an undertaking, into a new project. We must therefore be attentive to the good within us.

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3. Henri Nouwen, *The return of the Prodigal Son: A story of homecoming*. Doubleday (1994), p. 107.



*With humility and simplicity, let us live as children of light*

## **BEING ATTENTIVE TO OUR WAY OF PUTTING OURSELVES FORWARD**

This said, we must not distort my words: in the area of virtue, it is always a question of balance and nuance. Recognizing the good that is in me is not synonymous with constantly showing off. There are people who have received many gifts and who brag about them. It is obvious that they are far from true humility because they do evaluate themselves justly. The knowledge that they have of themselves remains erroneous. They forget that their qualities are gifts received from God: *“What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?”* (1 Cor 4:7). Pride is always a bit ridiculous. People who brag about their qualities seem to imagine they created themselves. If they are children, we smile; if they are adults, we smile as well... And if we catch ourselves bragging, let us still smile! It's better than growing depressed.

### **A GIFT FROM GOD**

Humility is really a virtue that is beyond our grasp. It can only be a gift from God. It is a highly valuable gift from God, which He cannot sow in uncultivated ground. He must first work the ground at length; otherwise, the seed will die. We must first ask God for His help, ask Him to give us humility, to give us this wonderful inner strength that makes relationships with others truly harmonious. We all know that it is a great grace to live with a humble person. It is pleasant to live with someone who is humble. Just as the proud person is in constant competition and stressed by the pursuit of success, the humble person is peaceful and happy with whatever happens.

*Lord, my heart is not proud; nor are my eyes haughty.*

*I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me.*

*Rather, I have stilled my soul,  
Like a weaned child to its mother,  
weaned is my soul.*

*Israel, hope in the Lord, now and forever.*

(Psalm 131:1-3)

### **For reflection, Constitution 18a:**

Humility prompts them:

- to be aware of the gifts received from God, to be grateful for them and to place them at the service of others,
- to acknowledge their own limitations and their need for conversion,
- to remain close and available to their Sisters and to those who are poor, in an attitude of servant.

## **II. SIMPLICITY<sup>4</sup>**

### **IN A COMPLEX WORLD, FOCUS ON WHAT IS ESSENTIAL**

In a world governed by complexity, nothing seems more difficult than simplicity. People almost consider simplicity naivety, if not foolishness; simplicity seems very flimsy. Giving ourselves as we are, without guile and directly, may have a certain charm but is not enough to make us virtuous.

While simplicity is opposed to calculating thoughts, duplicity and pretention, it can only become an intellectual, moral and spiritual virtue to the extent that it joins with other forces of the spirit, directing them to what is essential. Joined to intelligence, simplicity becomes an art of picking out from complex reality clear ideas understandable for all. Joined to justice, simplicity untangles conflictual situations in which a more rigid person would easily get bogged down.

### **ABILITY TO PAY ATTENTION**

Simplicity is related to this ability to pay attention, dear to Simone Weil,<sup>5</sup> this skill for seeing and listening, this presence to the world that is sufficiently self-detached to be able to cause, seemingly without effort, real little revolutions in the domain of thought, art or everyday life by calling those paralyzed in fear back to life. Simplicity as a virtue is the fact of being “a soul that opens itself” as Henri Bergson<sup>6</sup> would say, a soul that doesn't cling to its wounds, possessions or reputation because it no longer feels obligated to resolve everything or support problems alone and accepts leaving them up to another.

4. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-2010-9-page-235.htm#no6>

5. Simone Weil is a French philosopher, humanist, writer and political activist (1909-1943).

6. Henri Bergson is a French philosopher (1859-1941).

*With humility and simplicity, let us live as children of light*

### **AS SIMPLE AS ABC**

Simplicity is opposed to duplicity, complication, artifice and pretention. It is happiest with what goes without saying or what is said without thinking too much about it. Don't we say, "It's as simple as ABC?" It's not as easy to talk about it. Scholars tell us that the word comes from an Indo-European root that means 'folded once'.

Once, not twice: one fold that covers the noisy surface of the things of the world with the interiority of the soul, the one fold that covers conformity with spontaneity and covers the overly serious with the spirit of a child.

### **ONE SINGLE FOLD**

Why one fold? Perhaps to remind us that real unity, absolute spontaneity or pure transparency are not of this world, and to pretend to this rather risks turning them into a caricature. The wonder of simplicity is precisely making oneness out of multiplicity, spontaneity out of reflection, visibility out of invisibility, light out of twilight. Like those very sophisticated technical devices whose use is so simple that children work them better than we do, truly simple ideas are the prerogative of the genius, and a truly simple soul is the privilege of the saint.

### **EVANGELICAL SIMPLICITY**

Evangelical simplicity is a virtue of the eyes: "*If your eye is sound [simple], your whole body will be filled with light*", we read in Mt 6:22 and Lk 11:34. For Saint Paul, it is a virtue of the hands: "*if one contributes, in generosity [simplicity]*" (Rom 12:8). Simplicity according to God takes flesh in our flesh, with pure eyes and open hands. Such is the lesson of the saints. God is simple, and we can only become so through contact with Him. In the prayer of the Church, doesn't the *Veni Sancte* ask the Holy Spirit to "bend the stubborn heart and will" and "guide the steps that go astray", to give us His divine simplicity? For the spirit of stubborn inflexibility is incapable of simply welcoming the spontaneous grace of the present moment, the freshness of the dawn and the flowers of the fields without being weighed down by prejudices or principles, burdened with regrets or anticipation. What separates us from simplicity is not the complexity of the world and of situations, but rather the hidden compromises that obscure our vision and distort the heart.

When the heart become simple under the gentle influence of the Spirit, there is no longer any difference between our most difficult and easiest tasks, between picking up a pin out of love and setting off on a boat to the other end of the world. "*Putting on an apron like Jesus, this can be as serious and solemn as giving one's life... and vice versa, giving one's life can be as simple as putting on an apron,*" wrote Christian de Chergé.<sup>7</sup>

### **THE ENEMY OF SIMPLICITY IS NOT SO MUCH COMPLEXITY AS CALCULATION.**

There is a place for calculation in the Christian life. Jesus Christ explains to His disciples that they should be "*shrewd as serpents*" (Mt 10:16). He also tells them that they should reflect carefully before acting so they not be like the foolish man who chooses to build his house on sand (cf. Mt 7:24-27), or like someone who decides to construct a tower without "calculating the cost" (Lk 14:28). Jesus also mentions a king who would march into battle without determining whether he can win. Calculation therefore seems to be part of the life of a Christian. How can it be the enemy of any sort of simplicity?

In the context of Christian faith, the most basic simplicity consists in recognizing that we are not at the origin of our own salvation. We too easily forget that Jesus' words on the importance of 'calculation' concern the way of fulfilling the mission God has entrusted to us. He does not invite us to calculate what must be done to be saved, to please God, to earn God's love.

Calculation is the enemy of simplicity of those who know that all comes from God, even if it can be very useful in the effort that each person makes to live by Christ and to "love others as God has loved us," to use Saint John's words. On the other hand, it can become a source of error for those who are too attached to that effort. It is true that we are called to accomplish even greater works than those of Christ Himself: "*Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father*" (Jn 14:12). Boldness should thus characterize a Christian's life. However, we shouldn't imagine that the greatness of our works

7. Christian de Chergé, *L'invincible / Espérance*, Bayard - Centurion.

*With humility and simplicity, let us live as children of light*

depends primarily on us because that is how boldness turns into pride. We must always have the lucidity to recognize that this greatness comes from the action of the Holy Spirit who works in us.

This lucidity, always rooted in the basic simplicity described above, keeps us from impeding the movement of the Spirit, of reducing it to our calculations, of confusing our will with the will of God. Those who can integrate all this in their lives will be able to maintain the right balance between simplicity and calculation, thus allowing them to work with great flexibility and boldness so that the name of God might be hallowed, His kingdom come and His will be done.

*The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.*

*The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.*

*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.*

*The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.*

(Ps 19:8-9)

**For reflection, Constitution 18b:**

The simplicity that leads them directly to God, helps them:

- to seek and love the truth and to defend it in situations of injustice,
- to be transparent, authentic, and consistent in their words and in the way they live.

**SENDING FORTH**

On this retreat day in preparation for the renovation of vows, I quote some reflections from Sister Kathleen in her February 2nd letter in this year of the Vincentian charism:

*For us as Daughters of Charity, our vows favor our service of those who are poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity. Our formation and our lived experiences confirm that the evangelical counsels are not ends in and of themselves. Rather, they are means for achieving our mission – that is, for serving corporally and spiritually those who are poor.*

*The vows offer us the opportunity to joyfully respond to the call to a life of total consecration to Christ in selfless service of our sisters and our brothers. I invite you to reflect with me in order to more authentically put into practice what we promise each year on the feast of the Annunciation.*

*We are called to take on the fullness of our vows' spiritual dynamism. Our renovation is not simply a confined moment when we pronounce sacred words. These vows need to have concrete consequences on our lives daily. They must renew us, re-create us, and bring us life.*

*Our vows should lead us to further enter into the world of those who are poor. In order for this to happen, we have to be fully present to each moment. We cannot just repeat last year's responses to the calls before us today. We are challenged to respond with insightful creativity.*

*We must respond as we are today and give ourselves wholeheartedly and completely. Our vows are a priceless gift that we can offer to God, who in turn offers us as a gift to those who are poor.*

*Will we truly love God with all that we are - our heart, soul, strength and mind - quite aware that this takes significant effort and focus? Will we decide this year to do what we say in the vow formula? Will we make this a deliberate and conscious response for this entire year?*

*The Constitutions indicate that the vows are a "source of strength"; they bring energy to our service. How does this happen? How do the vows nourish us? In what way do they impact our day-to-day living?*

*May the upcoming year be a graced opportunity for each of us to take steps forward, offering a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. If we live in collaborative trust as a Company held in the arms of God, our Lord will lead us forward in the mission He has entrusted to us for the good of those who are poor. Today more than ever, may the Charity of Jesus crucified urge us!*

*With humility and simplicity, let us live as children of light*

The time has come to run toward life!  
Now is the time to find Jesus Christ!  
He is present among the poor.  
He goes before you into His Kingdom.

**Live as children of light along the paths where the Spirit leads us:  
May the name of the Father live in us!<sup>8</sup>**

Father Bernard SCHOEPPER, CM  
*Director General*

SISTER B. INARRA, SMNDA

**Session for European Sisters  
in the service of migrants**

*“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”*

**Mobility in the world**

## **I – GENERAL FACTS ABOUT GLOBAL MIGRATION**

The world is in constant movement as an interdependent space of global mobility affecting all countries: countries of origin, host countries and countries through which migrants pass. In reality, migration has been a constant throughout the history of the world. We are all children of migration; migration built the major countries of today, sometimes by eliminating the native peoples.

Today, migration is worldwide; it is also generalized. The causes for departure have become more numerous, based on economic, ecological or religious situations, or because of wars, natural disasters or a desire to know the world.

We are experiencing record high levels of movement. More than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes, including 21 million refugees (those fearing persecution because of race, religion, nationality or political opinions). Ten million stateless people are deprived of a nationality and access to fundamental rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement. Currently in our world, conflicts or persecutions uproot nearly 34,000 people daily (statistics from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees).

J

*Jubilee of the  
Vincentian  
Family*

8. Song number SECLI : G14-57-1, words by J. Berthier

## Mobility in the World

According to United Nations statistics, the number of international migrants in 2015 was 244 million; their number increased faster than the global population. As a result, the share of migrants in the world rose from 2.8% in 2000 to 3.3% in 2015.

There are significant difference, however, from country to country. In Europe, North America and Oceania, international migrants make up at least 10% of the total population. In contrast, they are less than 2% of the population in Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean.

In 2015, two out of three international migrants lived in Asia or in Europe. Nearly half of international migrants worldwide were born in Asia. Among the major regions of the world, North America receives the third most international migrants, followed by Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania.

In many parts of the world, however, migration takes place primarily among countries in the same geographical area. In 2015, the majority of international migrants living in Africa, or 87%, came from another African country. In contrast, a significant majority of international migrants living in North America (98%) and in Oceania (87%) were born in another region than the one where they currently live.

In 2015, two-thirds of international migrants lived in just twenty countries, with the most in the United States, followed by Germany, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates. India has the largest diaspora in the world, followed by Mexico, Russia, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Ukraine. There are 30 million Indians and 50 million Chinese who live outside of their country. Strong migratory connections break down borders, tying those who left and those who remained in their country.

The number of international migrants has thus risen from 82 million in 1970 to 244 million in 2015 (both those with legal and illegal status). Migration increased beginning in the early twenty-first century while global poverty decreased. This proves that poverty is not the only factor driving migration. In September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly held a high-level summit on refugees and migrants.

## **Migratory movement**

The majority of migrants come from countries with moderate income, and 59% of them moved to developed regions. Currently, many migrants go to Asia and Europe. Women make up 48% of all international migrants. In Europe and North America, the majority of migrants are women, whereas in Africa and western Asia, most of them are men. About 15% of international migrants are under 19 years of age.

## **Departure of migrants**

In our day, more and more people aspire to mobility in this world, now in movement. In many countries in the global south, immigration is considered the only way for personal fulfillment and taking charge of one's life. Migrants are young (under 25) but have limited opportunities for prosperity because of unemployment.

Today, in most of the countries in the world, except for highly qualified people, these personal aspirations run up against tighter borders in western countries where they would like to go (visas, digital systems identifying those traveling without papers and with criminal histories, collaboration among international police forces...).

Given the toughening of policies controlling migratory flows with laws aiming to limit illegal immigration, illegality has become a common modern profile of migrants on a global scale. Illegal immigration now is part of the "migratory plan" of those wishing to leave their country. Migrants organize their route and acquire knowledge of the rules, allowing them to adapt to norms and develop strategies to settle in. The goal is to obtain papers, and they see illegal status as risk to run that should be reduced or managed.

The significant demand for underground workers in many countries receiving migrants, whether in the west or the global south (South Africa, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, etc.), makes it possible to "survive". Obtaining legal documents, a synonym for free movement, is the symbol of social success.

Marriage, used more and more as a strategy for obtaining legal status, is also a good example of the interplay of negotiating between what is legal and illegal. Migrants seek to obtain the right to free movement



## Mobility in the World

and to establish themselves outside their national borders, not only by force but also by choice. Modern migrants are individuals who react, personally and collectively, to a loss of the right to mobility, a deprivation that concerns two-thirds of the world's population.

### **Regions of departure**

The countries of Central America, eastern and southern Asia and parts of Africa, especially North Africa, have the highest levels of emigration. For example, Mexicans have primarily settled in the United States for decades now. Nearly half of migrants in the world come from Asia (104 million). Some regions of Europe also have rather high emigration levels.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, emigration rates remain rather low for poor countries and are higher for moderate-income countries. In the poorest countries, in fact, incentives for migration are high, but its cost is a real obstacle preventing many potential migrants from leaving. In the rich countries, the cost of migration seems more modest, but the incentives for migration (mainly differences in income) are weak, resulting in low levels of migration as well. Finally, in countries with moderate levels of income, people have the desire and the means to migrate, resulting in higher levels of emigration. Thus the poorest countries bear the harshest burden of the brain drain.

### **Destination regions**

The destination regions are generally the richest regions, some of which have historically developed open immigration policies. Among developed countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States have the highest levels of immigration.

When people leave their country, most frequently, it is to settle in a neighboring country: 4 million Syrians live in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan; Afghans go to Pakistan and Iran; Sudanese are in Ethiopia and Uganda, etc. Developing countries currently host 86% of refugees in the world.

North America has 54 million migrants, or 15% of its population; Europe, 76 million, or 10% of its population; Asia, 75 million, or 2% of its population; Latin America, 9 million, or 2% of its population;

Oceania, 8 million, or 21%. New regions are attracting immigrants, such as southern Europe and east Asia: China, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan as well as oil-producing countries in the Middle East with a significant demand for labor.

Some host regions have an inter-regional profile of immigration or south-to-south migration; for example, South Africa receives south-to-south migrants.

## **II - EVOLUTION OF MIGRATION AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT**

International migration is a subject of daily debate. Considering migration as a problem to be resolved boils down to denying the fundamental freedom of movement, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that, as such, should be defended and accessible to all.

International migration has become an integral part of the economy and society today. Well-managed migration brings significant benefits to the countries of origin and of destination, as well as to the migrants themselves and to their families. Globalization allows for free circulation of goods, and a body of studies show migration's positive contribution to the economy of the host country.

### **Migrants help their country of origin**

Despite the restrictions weighing on them, international migration plays a decisive role for the countries of origin. For example, in the countries in the global south, migrants' remittances represent about three times the public assistance for development. These remittances account for 10% of the GNP in Morocco, 12% in Mali, 18% in the Philippines and 30% in El Salvador. A whole list of developing countries thus depend on remittances from migrants.

### **Migrants' socio-economic contribution to wealthy countries**

The arrival of women migrants has created new professions such as services for individuals (babysitting, care for the elderly, domestic workers, health aides, etc.). These women migrants allow others to work, so their work has a multiplier effect. This promotes employment for immigrants and natives.

### Mobility in the World

In many European countries, immigration offers a solution to the aging of the population due to lower birth rates. Migrants without residency permits are “illegal” and do not have the right to work; they are at risk of exploitation by some employers who hire them for low wages. The sectors that profit the most from this cheap workforce are those connected to the local situation (fishing, seasonal farm work, tourism, sewing, construction, infrastructure...). The women who care for elderly persons, restaurant workers and Senegalese street hawkers peddling their counterfeit merchandise are part of the ordinary migratory landscape. Many of these migrants without papers have received them over the years.

This activity helps the national economy while illegally exploiting an inexpensive workforce that must work under difficult conditions in order to survive.

#### **Misguided development assistance**

The idea of developing poor countries to reduce emigration and stabilize populations is often put forward as a solution to the migratory “problem”. But this connection between “development” and “migration” is mainly a political construct to legitimize the choice of welcoming those coming from countries with incomes equal to their own and rejecting poorer people. Studies show that development and free trade promote migration. This is why the poorest countries, which participate least in global trade, have the lowest levels of emigration.

Rich countries exploit public development assistance by making it dependent on the cooperation of neighboring countries and countries of origin to reduce ‘illegal’ immigration. However, development assistance should not be tied to preventing migration.

### **III - CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD MIGRATION**

Because of the tightening of policies controlling migration with laws aiming to limit illegal immigration since 1980, illegality has become a lasting modern profile of the migrant on a global scale, especially in Europe, the United States and Australia.

In the West, the economic recession and the technological revolution decrease the need for immigrant labor. Today, a segment of public opinion perceives migrants as a burden for society. Fewer and fewer migrants arrive with a work contract in hand, and these undocumented migrants often work without authorization. Working underground is now part of the “migratory plan” of those who wish to leave their country.

Appreciated in the past for their flexibility, undocumented immigrants (and those who help them to cross the borders) have become a threat to public safety in current political discourse. In this context, the new distinction between legal and illegal immigration, which scarcely concerned decision makers in years of growth when the work force was insufficient, now justifies government actions regarding immigration.

#### **Welcome by the population against societal and governmental isolationism**

In all countries in the world, faced with nationalist isolation, closing of borders and increasingly restrictive laws concerning refugees and “economic” migrants, local peoples are getting involved to do what the government does not do: respect migrants’ human rights. Charitable organizations are springing up all over with the goal of supporting migrants: distribution of meals and tents, help with administrative procedures, language classes, hosting them in villages and with families. The media, however, speak little of this.

A poll conducted by Amnesty International on welcoming migrants produced an unexpected response. To the question, “How far would you be willing to go to welcome people fleeing war and persecution?”, 82% of those polled answered that they are ready to welcome them in France, 65% in their city and even 9% in their homes, representing 6 million French adults.

#### **IV – MIGRATION POLICIES OF RICH COUNTRIES, AN OBSTACLE TO MIGRATION?**

The policies of western countries are particularly ill adapted to what is happening with migration: selective policies worsen the brain drain for countries of departure, and policies restricting less-qualified workers

### Mobility in the World

result in a reduction in remittances and the deterioration of living conditions in the countries of departure.

The major lines of immigration policies in western countries have many points in common.

#### **Outsourcing of border management**

Border controls in countries that migrants are leaving or through which they pass hold migrants back or prevent them from leaving. Funding facilitates expulsions with neighboring countries, those of origin and those through which they pass. For example, by placing this in the hands of neighboring countries, Europe does not assume its international obligations and clears itself of its responsibility in the case of violation of rights. Australia has built camps for asylum seekers in Papua-New Guinea, Micronesia and Melanesia. The residents of destination countries no longer know what happens in these more distant countries and remain more passive in the face of policies violating human rights.

#### **Militarization of borders**

In order to discourage migrants, the number of border walls has increased dramatically: from about ten during the Cold War, to sixty-five, which often stretch many kilometers. These walls are separation barriers equipped with acoustic sensors, motion-detection cables and thermal cameras; all these devices have maintenance costs of over 11 million dollars a year.

The cost of border surveillance, then, is huge. The sea, as well, is a place of military operations, on the one hand to come to the assistance of those in danger (Operation Mare Nostrum), but also to intercept boats and identify the network of traffickers.

#### **Refugee detention camps**

There are an estimated one thousand detention centers in the world, including 250 holding and transit areas in airports. These camps exacerbate the existing clash between human rights and security plans.

#### **Confinement and expulsion**

Procedures allowing confinement followed by expulsion of individuals have also been strengthened. As we can see in a good number of refugee camps in the world, what is presented as temporary can become lasting.

#### **Criminalization of migrants**

Politicians have developed a security approach to migration through the fight against illegal immigration and lump it together with the fight against terrorism. These measures tend to criminalize migrants and legitimize the means deployed to isolate them. This is one of the issues in this vast subject.

### **V. CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN BORDERS AND HUMAN MOBILITY**

The closing of borders is a recent phenomenon in history, which loses sight of the fact that migration has always existed.

Borders are an obstacle to freedom of movement and human mobility. The closing of borders does not prevent people from moving nor from needing to flee. It does oblige them to take longer and more dangerous routes, requiring recourse to very expensive traffickers who respond to the massive demand of potential immigrants. Unaccompanied minors have added to the wave of newcomers.

The colossal means deployed to stop illegal migration are ineffective and have deadly consequences. Migration increases, and illegal entries fluctuate depending on political events (the Arab Spring in 2011, the Syrian crisis since 2014) and not on migration policies.

Since 2000, more than 46,000 people globally have died while trying to cross borders. Across the world in 2014, more than 7,000 migrants died, including 5,000 in the Mediterranean Sea.

The closing of borders acts against mobility because the more borders are closed, the more migrants stay put; the more open they are, the more they move. Laws restricting access to countries increase illegal migration.

## **VI. INFLUENCE OF GEOPOLITICAL SITUATIONS ON MOBILITY**

Geopolitical events (essentially armed conflicts) have a considerable impact on migratory flows. For example, at the end of the Vietnam War (1978-1980), 2 million Vietnamese left their country by any means possible, including 800,000 in overcrowded boats (boat people). Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1990), 4 or 5 million people had to leave the Gulf region. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria have displaced millions of people... In Africa, the wars in Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, etc., the repressive regime in Eritrea, the new civil war in South Sudan... have displaced millions of people to neighboring countries. In Latin America, the guerrillas in Colombia, various wars in Central America, the situation in Cuba and Venezuela, the economic crisis in Argentina and Brazil... In the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict; in Asia, the suffering in Burma are all events that led residents to flee their countries.

Recent economic recessions also have an impact on migration and migration policies.

## **VII. CATEGORIES OF MIGRANTS AND LEGAL PROTECTION**

Different from the category of refugees, the category of migrants has several subdivisions, producing differences in the rights granted them.

Being a migrant is not a single legal situation. Motivations for departure and the legal status of the person are the basis for classification. Some categories are specifically protected by national and international laws. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights guarantees "everyone... the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (article 13). However, some countries, such as Algeria, punish illegal emigration with prison sentences. The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and the additional 1967 Protocol are exceptions because only 148 countries out of the 193 member states of the United Nations have signed them. Many countries assign refugee status in a very limited way and grant the economic and social rights associated with this status only with difficulty. In addition, securing borders limits asylum seekers' access to the territory.

Governments and legal texts constantly make distinctions among migrants on the sole basis of the causes and conditions of their departure. These distinctions are made to legitimize the choice of those whom the destination country will welcome: on the one hand, so-called economic migrants who have left their country "by choice"; on the other hand, "refugees forced into exile". Little is said about highly skilled migrants who are an advantage for the host country. This obscures the complexity of motivations for leaving, which are often interconnected. Refugees and asylum seekers are considered to have more legitimate reasons for moving than so-called economic migrants.

### **Migrant or climate refugee?**

When a person is forced to leave his region or country because of environmental degradation or a natural disaster tied to climate change, should we label this person an "economic migrant" or a "refugee"? This migrant/refugee distinction seems inappropriate. The United Nations predicts 250 million climate refugees worldwide in 2050.

### **Migration for work**

One major category of factors driving migration is connect to supply and demand for labor. When an employer obtains a work permit for a future employee with specific skills, this is contracted labor migration.

### **Migratory waves of increasingly qualified people**

Southern countries enter into globalization primarily through international migration, especially of qualified people, despite considerable restrictions that impede the mobility of unskilled workers.

The poorer a country, the more the rate of expatriation of skilled people increases, reaching very high levels. The "brain drain" tends to accelerate and severely handicap development of the poorest countries.

The regions of Central America, Sub-Saharan Africa, south and east Asia are the most effected by the brain drain.

### **Migration's increasingly feminine face**

We observe an increasing feminine face of migration throughout the world. Women represent almost half the global migrant population.

### Mobility in the World

In the past, we mostly spoke of women migrants for family reunification. With their children, they followed their husband who had left to work abroad. Today, it is the opposite. More and more frequently, the woman is the first family member sent abroad to work because the most pronounced shortage of workers is in the fields of household workers and personal care. More vulnerable, women are more likely to be victims of the danger of migratory routes, yet few of them dare to speak about the abuses they have faced, and even less denounce them to authorities.

We also see that the brain drain is greater for women than men. In many countries of origin, the proportion of women with university diplomas living outside of their country of birth is higher than the percentage for men. We see this difference depending on the level of education. Men with a higher level of education are less likely to migrate compared with women with the same level of education.

### **VIII. FOR A MORE EQUITABLE APPROACH TO MIGRATION**

The right to mobility is respected in differing degrees depending on people's nationality and alleged migratory risk. Given the deeply inequitable character of restrictive policies, might not we consider freedom of circulation and of settling as an alternative?

Sister Begoña INARRA  
*Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa*

### **Province of Curitiba (Brazil)**

### **Saint Joseph Center**

Attentive to the calls of those who are poor, the Province began a new mission in order to welcome the most destitute in society, people whose rights are not recognized, people who are homeless and whose faces reveal the abuse inflicted upon them.

### **The beginnings of the mission**

For some years now, homeless persons have been arriving daily at the Provincial House of Curitiba to ask for food. Because of insufficient space, they had to eat the food given them on the sidewalk across the street. To resolve this situation, the Province sought to establish a location to host them with dignity and in an organized way.

In 2009, a group of Sisters working with persons living on the street and a specialized commission of the Province's social services developed a project.

In 2010, the Province providentially acquired a house beside the Provincial House where meals could be served in dignity. Renovations were undertaken to outfit this new space. In 2012, the Saint Joseph Center opened its doors in order to offer people of all ages and even families who found themselves on the streets a quality reception, a place to eat and assistance for administrative procedures for obtaining documents and gaining access to health care.

Today, several rooms in that house make it possible to receive people individually; others are reserved for

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*Works of  
Mercy*



## Works of Mercy

collective activities, and two others serve as a luggage room and dining room. Monday through Saturday mornings, the house welcomes about 60-70 people who are able to enjoy breakfast, a shower and the use of a laundry room.

In order to offer an effective service to homeless persons and to work for their social and economic promotion, we collaborate with the social service network of the city so that they might have access to the rights granted them by law. The offices of legal protection and defense of rights receive about a hundred people monthly. They provide assistance with administrative procedures with public services to reintegrate them into the workforce according to their possibilities.

We hold group activities to develop friendly relationships, self-esteem and respect of others and to promote integration for reinsertion into society, respecting its rules. We offer training sessions to explain citizens' rights and duties so they might choose realistic goals.

Our work is focused particularly on advocating with the government for the rights of these homeless people. Because of our real investment in their service, we obtained the right to sit as an official member on the city's committee for oversight of national government policy for homeless persons. We also have the possibility to join the working group on social inclusion for homeless persons. In 2015, we received 1,660 homeless persons monthly, totaling 11,827 over the course of the year.

*"Love those who are poor, don't blame them too much... remember that the poor are even more sensitive to your behavior than to help"* (Sister Rosalie Rendu). We strive to offer all those who come to the Saint Joseph Center a joyful welcome, attentive listening and a response to their needs, especially to those with a drug or alcohol addiction and who want to be freed from it.

For us as Daughters of Charity, this work is the expression of the presence and will of God. Aware of our own weaknesses, we learn to recognize the signs of God in their lives, as brought out in the document *Keep Watch*: *"Consecrated life finds its fruitfulness not only in bearing witness to the good, but in recognizing it and being able to point it out, especially where it is not usually seen, amongst 'non-citizens', 'half-*

*citizens', 'urban remnants', those without dignity. We must move from words of solidarity to actions that welcome and heal: consecrated life is called to this truth"* (*Keep Watch*, 16). We unite corporal and spiritual service, humanization and evangelization. Together, we celebrate events in their lives, popular celebrations and religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

*"So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people's hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love"* (CCD XII, 215). In this service of welcome and accompaniment, we recognize the presence of God sometimes as a "light silent sound" (1 Kings 1:12); sometimes "the voice of the LORD makes the deer dance and strips the forests bare..." (Ps 2:9)! All - youth, men, women, elderly persons - are welcomed as children of God, and we do everything possible so they feel "like a weaned child to its mother" (Ps 131:2), each one according to his or her personal needs.

Feeling respected and loved, the homeless persons discover the presence of God as well. Here are some testimonies:

*"Saint Joseph Center is my house. I find love and tenderness there. It is my support, my point of reference. I can drink a coffee, take a shower, do my laundry. Finally, I am proud to say that I am part of Saint Joseph Center. I thank all of you for all the good that I receive in my life."* (A.C. - 39 years old)

*"I have already fired a gun at people several times and been shot at. I have lived on the margins all my life; however, after being received here with respect and love, I realized that life is worth my becoming better, becoming a good man because you take care of me."* (A.A.B. - 42 years old)

*"In my life and in the life of all those who live in the streets, this center represents the rock of our lives. Without this space, we are nothing. Thank you for this center. I thank all the Sisters."* (R.A.F. - 39 years old)

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*“This center is a place that speaks to me of God, of Jesus. Here I can eat, take a shower, receive clean clothes, do my laundry and have a little dignity because I receive love from the Sisters. All this makes me think that the effort to change my life might be worthwhile.”* (L.B.G. - 48 years old)

*“Not only in my life, but in the life of many people, this center represents a possibility to start anew. Here, we find the support of social services to help us in the process of obtaining our papers. For us, it is a new opportunity for a fresh start.”* (L.E.M. - 27 years old)

*“This center is important for me and for many others who have access to this service. It helps me to keep clean and eat a meal in dignity. It helps me to get off the streets and to live with others.”* (J.P. - 34 years old)

*“In this center, I have stopped ‘using a lot of things’. I go out to look for a school so that I can finish my studies. I thank you for all that you have done for me!”* (X.P. - 17 years old)

### **Persons who are poor evangelize us**

Saint Joseph Center offers us the opportunity to wonderfully unite affective and effective love of God and our brothers and sisters. The daily encounter with persons who are poor, daily service, attention and mutual respect illustrate our Vincentian charism well. Persons who are poor refer us back to our vow of service: we strive to be for them *“a milestone where they can set down their heavy burden,”* and we learn to let ourselves be evangelized by them.

Saint Joseph Center

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## WORKS OF MERCY

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### **Province of Graz-Central Europe**

### **Saint Vincent, a model for relationships with prisoners**

Vincent de Paul was a contemplative in action; he described the secret of his life: *“Take my word for it, my dear confreres [my Sisters], take my word for it... as soon as a heart is empty of self, God fills it. God remains and acts in it...”* (CCD XI, 281).

#### **People with faith see differently**

Accompanying prisoners, their loved ones and victims is very demanding work. Christ and Saint Vincent teach us much in this area.

For 15 years, I served as a registered nurse in the large Graz/Karla prison where 500-600 men are detained. Being in contact with them, their guards and the staff all day long is a major challenge for my entire being, for me as a Daughter of Charity. Quite often, I no longer understood God or the world. Nonetheless, today I can say that I received much more than I gave.

I now cooperate with “Vincent-Hope”, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul conference specialized in accompanying prisoners as well as freed prisoners and their loved ones. This ministry’s primary purpose is to visit those detained in prison.

Of course, we cannot understand what it means for a person to live in a prison behind locked doors for three, five, ten or twenty years, even forever. We understand even less the suffering of their loved ones. A mother told me one day, “I no longer dare to go out since this happened to my son. I always feel guilty for everything. It’s as if I committed that crime myself. The hardest thing is that what is done, is done.”

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I often ask myself the question: “What is the appropriate response to crime victims? Is there a response?” I often think that human beings are always in danger, at risk, and that we should all ask ourselves if we, too, might fall into such a situation. In reality, who are the so-called vulnerable people? Who is not at risk of illness, accidents of all sorts, difficulties and worries? What is this danger? Is it the danger of not being able to continue our ordinary lives? Is it the danger of going totally astray?

Prisoners who have experienced extreme and complicated situations have a life that is often shocking because it is completely different from what we imagine, perhaps also because the life of a person went wrong from birth. They had a difficult childhood and were passed around from place to place, from caregiver to caregiver, like you kick about a football. How, then, could they have a solid structure from which to face life?

A person who has made the effort to look attentively at these persons' life will be more reluctant to accuse and will not explain the fault only in a one-sided way. During our visits with prisoners, we note that there are people with unimaginable misfortune, a fate inevitably passed on from generation to generation. Anyone who has grown up in an alcoholic family where violence is a daily occurrence will have difficulty getting out of this environment. This person knows almost no other means of resolving conflicts. Essentially, life writes these stories and these fates. Often there is a mixture of fate and personal guilt, of a person's good will and his inability to act. Are these reflections on a simply social level useful for the visitation of prisoners?

Whatever the case may be, Saint Vincent invites us to look to Jesus because Jesus certainly worked with people whose behavior wasn't exactly respectable. He accepted invitations to meals with very diverse people, and Saint Vincent tells us, “*In serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ*” (CCD IX, 199). With this conviction, we will never abandon anyone. For me, it is a crucial reference point that always gives me hope.

### **People who hope see farther...**

It has been more than thirty years since I began to visit prisoners with another Sister. We gradually understood their need to receive visits from

outside. Many of them, in fact, no longer have any contact with their families, and if they do, the ties diminish with time. Many prisoners never have an opportunity for a visit. We contacted several parishes to present this problem to them and call for visits to prisoners. At the beginning, a group of five to seven people worked with us; now the group numbers about thirty people. We hold gatherings two or three times a year for this group of visitors to review and discuss situations with the pastoral team and the prison administrators. The group also receives ongoing formation. Thanks to this group, prisoners receive regular visits: once a month or every two weeks, sometimes more frequently. The other Sister also works as a volunteer in the prison chaplaincy service. At their request, she weekly visits twelve to fifteen prisoners and participates in their prayer group, faith sharing and a “Cursillo” group.

Taking an interest in what happens behind the walls of a prison is very enriching. Thanks to these visits from outside, the prisoners no longer feel forgotten or abandoned. Visits clearly say to them, “You're important to me!” The prisoner should learn that he still has value, even if he considers himself less because of his crime. It is essential to show him that people value him and that God does not value people only because of their acts but because they are His beloved creatures. One day a prisoner who participates in the prayer group said, “I read the Bible, I prayed and I believe that God has forgiven me. But is the same true of other people?”

I have also learned a lot about the conditions of released prisoners. After having paid for their crime through their prison sentence, they are freed but always labeled as ex-convicts. It is very difficult for them to recover their dignity in society. To tell the truth, this painful situation is the reason that many of them “return” to prison after a rather short period of freedom.

Visiting prisoners is a ministry that requires a great deal of patience and perseverance: there is nothing to expect, but we can accompany.

I currently visit a prisoner who has been incarcerated for 36 years for a triple murder; he therefore has no possibility of release. Each one of my visits is a joy for him: I show interest in his everyday life and listen

### Works of Mercy

to his concerns. I think, “I who receive Christ each morning in the little host, He is with me during this visit,” and I am convinced that the Lord is also leading this man toward his destiny. It is really a pleasure to be an instrument in God’s hands.

In a prison, the world seems like a bubble; that is why these contacts across the walls are so important. They need people of good will to help them get back on their feet. We, too, need each other because everyday life is not always easy to bear. During our visitation ministry, we are often in a position to offer the right response, especially if we firmly believe that, in this world, Good with a capital G, God, exists deep within each person. Often, however, it is as if everything is cemented, and it is difficult to remove the stones that block off the source in order to let it spring forth.

One thing is certain: thanks to this ministry, God’s mercy can pass through us. The more united we are to God, the more tangible mercy can become. The opposite is also true: the more we are merciful, the more united we are to God. In this, Saint Vincent is a shining model for us. People who love really do see more deeply.

Sister Leopoldine KRENN  
*Daughter of Charity*

### Province of Ecuador

## The Galapagos Islands

### REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR

Located in the northwest of South America, Ecuador borders Colombia to the north and Peru to the south and east. The west coast borders the Pacific Ocean, and the Galapagos Islands are located 1000 kilometers west. The mainland has three natural regions: the coast, the mountains and the eastern region, producing great cultural diversity.

With an area of 283,561 km<sup>2</sup>, Ecuador is the fourth smallest country in South America. Its population numbers more than 16 million, making it the eighth most populous country of Latin America. The country has the most rivers per square kilometer in the world and therefore great biodiversity, with almost infinite numbers of animal and plant species.

Quito is the capital and Guayaquil the largest city. The official language, spoken by 98% of the population, is Spanish; thirteen other indigenous languages are recognized, such as Quechua and Shuar; others are for the “official use of indigenous peoples”. The Republic of Ecuador has 24 provinces led by a prefect.

### A PRESENCE OF MERCY

The Daughters of Charity have been present in Ecuador since 1870, soon after the country became an independent and democratic nation. The first Sisters came from France in response to the request made by the Ecuadorian government to meet the urgent needs of poor persons in the health care, educational and social service fields.

It is moving to recall the history of the Company on Ecuadorian soil, so many services of persons who are poor carried out with joy, dedication and sacrifice.

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With time, the work of God extended to the entire country as vocations made it possible to open homes for children, retirement homes, residences for adolescents, schools and hospitals. Trusting in Providence, the Sisters found the means to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and prisoners and bury the dead.

In newspaper articles, speeches and ceremonies in 1970 marking the centenary of the Sisters' arrival, we can read, *"It's not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor doesn't love Him"* (CCD XII, 215). A man on the street recounts, *"A Sister in Saint John of God Hospital in Quito cared for my grandfather wounded by a bullet during a political clash. He was sought by the police during the four-day war in Quito in 1934, but the Sister took him in, cared for his wounds and hid him so he wouldn't be handed over to those who were looking for him."* This act of courage and love had left a lasting impression on his entire family.

### **TODAY'S CHALLENGES: PRACTICING MERCY**

*"All of these spiritual sons and daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul learned from Christ, with His assistance, to travel the evangelical path that goes through the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the merciful"* (John Paul II, homily of September 27, 1987). One hundred forty-seven years later, the Province of Ecuador remains. As in all human institutions, there are lights and shadows, years of simple survival. Those who are poor have new faces that are more and more marred.

### **OVERALL STRATEGIC PLAN**

Begin in 2012, the overall strategic plan is a methodical Interprovincial and inter-congregational process that consists in a revision of works in order to spread our charism more broadly. The revision does not consist only in closing certain works but asking ourselves if our current works correspond well to our charism. This process of personal and community discernment is difficult, but it has begun to bear fruit.

The Province currently has 45 local communities and 303 Sisters to perform works of mercy: to help, encourage, console and support children, young people, families, elderly persons and collaborators to take their lives in their own hands and to guide them toward Jesus Christ so that they might make good decisions, etc. *"In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea..."* (MV 6).

Local Community Plans include the intention to visit young people, parents, teachers and sick collaborators in order to bring them encouragement and hope. For the poorest families, in collaboration with the Vincentian Family, we offer meal and clothing distributions, as well as funerals for those who die.

### ***"I CANNOT BE RICH MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES."***

Born in 1964 in Licto, Province of Chimborazo, Maria is an indigenous volunteer who has dedicated her life to serving those who are poor, to defending them and to looking for assistance for them. Here is her story. Her parents, both alcoholics, abandoned all six of their children at birth, entrusting them to a neighbor in exchange for a bottle of liquor. Abused from a young age, Maria received neither affection nor protection and thus never went to school. No one protected her as a poor orphan. Following multiple abuses by her foster family, Maria ran away.

She arrived in Quito at the age of nine and lived in the streets. A woman doctor who noticed Maria in the streets decided to take her home and care for her. A little later, setting off again to find her parents, she discovered that her mother had died after a beating by her husband. Her father put her to work, and at the end of the week, he went to collect her pay. She had no news of her siblings. At the age of twelve, her bosses took advantage of her and raped her. She married at age fifteen and returned to live in her old neighborhood in Licto. From the first days of her marriage, however, her husband began to beat her. He did not work. She lived in this way for seven years. She had two sons. In a situation of great suffering, Maria did as her parents had done and abandoned her first two children. She left her husband and starting living with another man. There, too, she had to endure physical and emotional abuse. Despondent because of abandoning her first children, her heart filled with hatred for her father and life, she fell ill.

Receiving no compassion from anyone, she wanted to die and attempted suicide by throwing herself in front of a car. This stage would be decisive, and a miracle would take place. The driver took her to his home and, with his wife, took responsibility for her and helped her to find meaning in her life again by offering her a picture of the Virgin Mary, which would be the sign of a new life. Once back home, Maria saw a "beautiful lady" in a dream who dressed her wounds and taught



## Works of Mercy

her to extract floral essences.

After two months of convalescence, Maria healed and met the Daughters of Charity by chance. With them, Maria learned to pray, to love God and to get to know Saint Vincent, the father of the poor. She became involved in serving persons who are poor in the soup kitchen of the Provincial House. *“I was no one, I had known scorn and life on the streets and now I discover what happiness is and want to help young people lost to drugs.”* She got involved working with children living in the streets, elderly disabled persons and divorced mothers. As soon as she has a little money, she gives it to poor persons. In her own words, *“I can't be rich more than five minutes.”*

She now lives in a house with a little garden where she grows several species of flowers; she has even set up a little workshop for extracting essences from flowers. She lives alone, but her children visit her.

These acts of mercy reveal the love of Jesus who *“seeing the crowds of people who followed him... felt deep compassion for them... he healed the sick who were presented to him, and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd...”* (MV 8).

## **A SYSTEMATIC PROCESS FOR THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION**

The Province is striving to move from a management of social service works to projects with a systematic process in favor of indigenous populations. From 2008 to 2015, a Projects Commission began activities in order to share with other Provinces. Forty-nine projects have the goal of responding to the problems affecting excluded populations with whom the Sisters carry out their pastoral ministry.

The office of project management provides better organization and management of resources on a national and international level. We observe that *“Mercy encourages us to look to the present, and to trust what is healthy and good beating in every heart”* (Pope Francis, homily of February 17, 2016).

## **RESIDENCE FOR ELDERLY PERSONS**

In Latacunga, as in other cities in the country, many elderly persons, considered a burden, are abandoned by their families and society; for example, elderly domestic workers who never contributed to Social Security and are no longer taken care of by those for whom they worked.

In the Estupinan Residence, the Daughters of Charity receive 70 elderly residents who have no close relatives, 22 elderly persons during the day and, on an exceptional basis, disabled persons abandoned or abused by their families. The housing and medical, psychological and social services as well as physical therapy offer a quality of life. In 2009, thanks to financial assistance from the Company, it was possible to establish a project for occupational therapy.

## **LA IMMACULADA CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

La Immaculada School is located in El Corazón in the province of Cotopaxi. The main economic activity is farming beans and sugar cane. Because of limited support for production and marketing, the farming families do not have a steady income and live in poverty.

The level of schooling is low. There are just two educational institutions serving the rural and urban areas of the district. The roads are poor, and means of transportation are scarce. Certified teachers prefer to go work in the cities. Absenteeism is frequent because of family breakdown and changes in residence. Many children find themselves in the care of grandparents or uncles; others remain alone or even locked in a room while their parents look for work in Latacunga, Quito or other coastal cities.

Four hundred forty-five children, aged 3½ to 16, receive schooling in La Immaculada School, administered by the Company and jointly financed by it and the government. They receive an education based on human and Christian values. The Sisters accompany the families and support the children and adolescents so they continue their studies. In 2008, in order to offer supplemental income to the families, they began a project to raise hens, pigs and cows that continues to expand thanks to parents' participation.

## Works of Mercy

### **SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIAL SERVICES CENTER**

In Ambato, Saint Vincent de Paul Social Services Center nightly hosts about forty to fifty men and women seeking a place to sleep and food, hygiene and spiritual assistance. These people without professional training come to the city hoping to find jobs as seasonal workers in the markets or as shoe shiners. Unfortunately, if they do not find work, they find themselves with nothing and lose confidence. This situation only grows. Families or struggling youth also come to the social services center to ask for assistance and housing. The Diocese of Ambato, charitable institutions and benefactors support this center financially.

In 2011, with the intention of improving working conditions of dockworkers, the center supported the formation of the Association of Dockworkers. They developed a project for tricycles in order to facilitate the loading and transport of products for the market. This project, funded thanks to the assistance of the Company, has improved the quality of life for many people.

### **SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL SCHOOL**

In the city of Riobamba, Saint Vincent de Paul School offers 1,540 students, aged 3 to 17, holistic formation based on the Vincentian charism. Children and adolescents come from households of the middle and lower socio-economic class. The parents, small shopkeepers or employees, generally have a revenue below the minimum wage. The majority of students live in the county seat, but a good number live in neighboring districts.

In this province of Chimborazo, the social reality of families has become complex because of the increasing number of divorces, single and migrant mothers. Children and adolescents end up living alone or with grandparents, aunts and uncles or neighbors. These difficult circumstances affect the students and lead to pregnancy at an early age, drug use or bullying. The teachers and psychologists work to prevent these problems.

To deal with the families' economic difficulties, which endanger their children's schooling, the local community set up two projects thanks to help from the Company:

In 2012, the Project "*Sweetness of sharing in solidarity*" allowed the students to make fruit-flavored ice creams and sell them; they share the income to pay their school expenses: transportation, school supplies, outings, etc.

In 2014, the Project "*Helping by building solidarity with our hands*" set up a craft workshop to sell accessories and wooden souvenirs. The students participate in these projects as part of their formation and to cover the costs of their school-related needs.

### **FLORES RURAL AREA**

In 2011, in the Flores rural area in the district of Riobamba, the Daughters of Charity began a project for raising hens with the indigenous population in order to improve families' nutrition, especially for the children. The surplus, which is sold, made it possible to expand the project and establish a bakery.

Sisters of the Province

**Bless the Lord, my soul;  
and do not forget all his gifts (Ps 103:2)**

Lord Jesus, I thank you for my life.  
Thank you for the life and love that you give me each day.  
Thank you for my hands and my feet that allow me to work.  
Thank you for my mind that allows me to reflect.  
Thank you for my heart with which I can love you and my brothers and sisters.

Thank you for my vocation as a Christian; I am happy to belong to you.  
Thank you, too, for teaching me to recognize you in those who are poor,  
even if this remains and will always remain a great mystery  
that I will never totally understand.

Thank you for having called me to the Mother House  
where the Blessed Virgin walked in 1830  
to give the world this beautiful message of the Medal.  
Thank you for offering me the opportunity to live in an international  
community.  
Here I receive many wonderful experiences,  
and despite our different languages, cultures and ways of thinking,  
I realize that we have but one heart.

God, rich in mercy, you are the source of my peace.  
You know that I am weak and deserve nothing.  
However, you criticize me neither for my infidelities nor my betrayals,  
on the contrary, you say to me, "I do not condemn you, go, and sin no more."  
You embrace me and call me "my friend".

You, God of tenderness, mercy and forgiveness,  
you forget my sins.  
You simply take me in your arms.  
And I love you with all my heart!  
Each day of my life, I will repeat my "thanks" to you.

Sister C.  
Daughter of Charity

Consecrated because more exposed.  
Consecrated to reach all people...

**"PROFESSION"**

*"Here now is the third reason or motive to induce us  
to advance in the love of our vocation, and that is its  
excellence and grandeur, for it's such, dear Sisters, that  
I know of none greater in the entire Church. You declare  
that you're devoting your life to the service of your  
neighbor for the love of God.*

*Is there any act of love to surpass that? No, for it's an  
acknowledged fact that the greatest proof of love is to give  
one's life for what is loved. You are giving your entire life  
to the practice of charity and, therefore, you're giving it  
for God.*

*It follows that there's no ministry on earth concerned  
with the service of God that's greater than yours. I make  
exception of the nuns at the Hotel-Dieu, who profess to  
do the same, and who work day and night for the service  
of God in the person of the poor. So, Sisters, I don't see  
anyone to equal you, except those who do what you do.  
And then you're going to love something contrary to your  
vocation that might tarnish its beauty? Far from that,  
Sisters, I hope you who already have this love will continue  
to grow in it, and that those who might not experience it  
will strive to acquire it; for, take my word, Sisters, our  
whole perfection depends on this.*

*If a religious - male or female - a Carthusian, a Capuchin,  
a Missionary, doesn't have the spirit and love of their*

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vocation, everything they do is worthless and they spoil everything because the spirit of a Carthusian, a Capuchin, and a Missionary is different for each, and the spirit of a nun is different from that of a Daughter of Charity.

To do things right, each one must work so diligently at acquiring his or her spirit that it's impossible to confuse another with it; for however good and holy in itself a spirit may be in those who profess it, it would be harmful and contrary to the man or woman who should have a different one" (Conference of December 25, 1648, *Love of our vocation*, CCD IX, 306-361).

### REFLECTIONS

***"You declare that you're devoting your life to the service of your neighbor for the love of God."***

One hundred years after the First World War, during this 70th anniversary of D-Day, the website of the Diocese of Lyon posted the response of Cardinal Philippe Barbarin to the question posed by *Radio France*: "For whom, for what are you ready to risk or to give your life today?"

*"In these times, it is not unusual to hear the same old song: 'Individualism reigns; people only think of themselves...' This statement is harsh and unjust. Everywhere I go, I find men and women who have given their life or who are giving it for their family, for a child or a sick relative, for their spouse, for the growth of a charitable organization or the success of their business.*

*In this sense, the question is not to know for whom or for what I would be ready to give my life, but for whom have I already given it? The answer for myself is simple: I give it to Jesus Christ. I tremble as I write this phrase, for I want it to be true. "I know him in whom I have believed," as Saint Paul said, and He first gave His life for each one of us, spilling 'so many drops of blood' for me, as Pascal has written.*

*"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life" (John 12:25): no one other than Jesus could speak these words because they had to be lived, that is, He had to die, for it to be a credible call. It is one thing to want to give one's life and another thing to actually give it, as Saint Peter's life illustrates: we*

*know how his assertions of courage were transformed into denial and tears. The Dialogues of the Carmelites would magnificently illustrate this disparity some centuries later...*

*Giving one's life for Christ does not necessarily mean the radical offering of the monks of Tibhirine, for example, but it does mean accepting to experience those everyday little renunciations, like a fire that burns us from within without ever destroying us.*

*Giving one's life for Christ means giving one's life for the truth, no matter the cost, as John the Baptist, Joan of Arc and Thomas More did. Was it not also for truth that Rabbi Aqiba died, flayed, invoking "Ehad", which is to say professing his faith in the One Lord?*

*Giving one's life for Christ means giving it for the least, for the poorest people, because God is present in each one of them, as Francis of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, Frédéric Ozanam or Mother Teresa discovered...*

*Giving one's life for Jesus means offering oneself in one's testimony: "This is my Body, given up for you," Jesus said at the Last Supper. At each Mass, my offering and His become one, in a word of love that renews the world.*

*Giving one's life for Christ, finally, means giving it for freedom as did Bishop Polycarpe of Smyrna, ready to swear allegiance to Caesar but naturally incapable of denying Christ when the emperor's representative asked this of him. His only response was the following: "I have served Him for eighty-six years, and He has done me no wrong. How could I blaspheme my king who saved me?" He died as a result.*

*All of these deaths bring us back to the original question. What are, in fact, the reasons for which you don't want to give your life? I leave the answer to Gustave Thibon: "Everything in you that refuses to die is unworthy to live."<sup>1</sup>*

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1. Gustave Thibon, *L'échelle de Jacob [Jacob's Ladder]*, Fayard, 1975.

## *The Charter of the Daughters of Charity*

For Pope Francis, it is even a “profound law of reality: life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***“Accepting the kingdom of God like a child” or “constant trust in divine Providence”***

One day people brought children to Jesus for Him to bless them. The disciples were opposed. Jesus was upset and ordered them to let the children come to Him. Then He told them, “*whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it*” (Mark 10:13-16).

It is useful to recall that, earlier, it was to those same disciples that Jesus had said, “*The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you*” (Mark 4:11). They had left everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God in order to follow Jesus. They sought the presence of God. They wanted to be part of His kingdom. And now Jesus warns them that by turning away the children, they are in fact closing the only entrance to this so-desired Kingdom of God!

What, now, does “accepting the kingdom of God like a child” mean? Generally, we understand: accepting the Kingdom of God like a child accepts it. This corresponds to something Jesus said in Matthew: “*Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3). A child trusts instinctively. A child cannot live without trusting those around him. His trust is in no way virtuous, it is a question of life and death. To encounter God, the best that we have is our heart of a child that is naturally open, dares to ask simply and wants to be loved.

On the other hand, we can also understand: accepting the Kingdom of God as you accept a child. The verb accept has a practical meaning of receiving someone, as we can see a few verses earlier when Jesus speaks of “receiving a child” (Mark 9:37). In this case, Jesus compares accepting the presence of God to accepting or receiving a child. There is a mysterious complicity between the kingdom of God and a child.

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2. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 10.

Accepting a child implies accepting weakness and a promise. A child grows and develops. Likewise, the Kingdom of God is never an accomplished reality on earth, but a promise, a process and unfinished growth. Children are unpredictable. In the Gospel account, they come when they come and, apparently, it isn’t the right time, in the disciple’s opinion. However, Jesus insists on receiving them because they are there. Similarly, we must accept God’s presence as it comes, whether at a good or a bad moment. You must jump in. Accepting the Kingdom of God as you accept a child means keeping watch and praying in order to receive it when it comes, always unexpectedly, in season or out of season.

### **Why did Jesus pay so much attention to children?**

One day, the twelve Apostles were discussing who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus, who guessed their thoughts, spoke very troubling words that upend and undermine their categories: “*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.*”

Jesus adds an action to these words. He finds a child. Is this a child whom He finds abandoned on a street corner of Capernaum? He brings him, “places him in their midst,” in the middle of this gathering of future leaders of the Church and tells them: “*Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.*” Jesus identifies with the child whom He has just taken in His arms. He states that a “child such as this” represents Him best, so much so that receiving such a child is equivalent to welcoming Himself, Christ.

Just a little earlier, Jesus had said these enigmatic words: “*The Son of Man is to be handed over to men*” (Mark 9:31). “The Son of Man” is Jesus Himself, and at the same time all the sons of men, in other words, all people. Jesus’ words can be understood to mean: humans are handed over to the power of their fellow men. The arrest and abuse inflicted on Jesus will demonstrate yet again that humans will do anything to their defenseless fellow men. The fact that Jesus recognizes Himself in a child whom He sought out is therefore not astonishing since defenseless children are often handed over to those who have power over them.



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Jesus paid such special attention to children because He wants His followers to prioritize the destitute. Until the end of time, they will be His representatives on earth. What we will do unto them, we do to Christ (Matthew 25:40). The least of His brothers and sisters, those who count for little and whom we treat as we please because they have neither power nor prestige, they are the way, the obligatory passage for living in communion with Him.

If Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples gathered around Him, it is also so that they accept being little or least. He explains this to them in the teaching that follows: *“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward”* (Mark 9:41). Setting out to proclaim the reign of God, the Apostles will also be ‘handed over to men’, ‘exposed’. They will never know ahead of time how they will be received. Yet, those who receive them with a simple cup of fresh water, even without taking them too seriously, will have supported a presence of God.

### **PROVOCATIONS FROM POPE FRANCIS**

*“To embrace the future with hope should be the third aim of this Year. We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members, particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance... But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: “Be not afraid... for I am with you” (Jer 1:8).*

*This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.*

*So do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert. Together with Benedict XVI, I urge you not to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armor of light – as Saint Paul urged (cf. Rom 13:11-14) – keeping awake and watchful”. Let us constantly set out anew, with trust in the Lord.”*

### **QUESTION**

Recall Jesus’ promise to His disciples who left everything to follow Him that they would receive a hundred times more (Mark 10:28-30). What *“houses, brothers and sisters, mothers, children and lands”* have we received since we have ‘consecrated’ our lives, given them to God?

Father Jérôme DELSINNE, CM

## Migration Ministry Prayer

**Lord, God of the Universe,  
You are the Father  
of all the children of the earth.**

**You know each one.**

**You look at us  
not as anonymous beings  
but as people  
with a face and a history.**

**Each one is a beloved child for you!**

**Teach us to look  
at each other  
as you look at us.**

**Teach us to dare  
to look each other in the eyes.**

**Open our eyes to meet you  
in our brothers and sisters...**

**Grant us an attentive and compassionate heart.**

**Make us grow in humanity,  
in word and deed.**

**Teach us the way to life.**

**Amen.**

