

# *E*choes of the Company

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Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**NOVEMBER**

**DECEMBER**

**2019**

**No. 6**



**The boldness  
of holiness  
for a new  
missionary  
momentum**

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## Letter of November 27, 2019

Dear Sisters,

“... we are asked to open our eyes and take a moment to experience fully and with gratitude every one of life’s little gifts.”

(Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, 146)

Encouraged by this advice from Pope Francis, I wish each of you a “Happy Triduum” of Community celebrations. May our Lord and His Blessed Mother help us to *experience fully and with gratitude* these special days and their rich message of the love of God in concrete circumstances. We admire the Virgin Mary’s revelation of her identity as the Immaculate One and invitation to pray for graces through her, St. Catherine’s unwavering confidence in the Blessed Virgin and humble service to the most abandoned at Reuilly, and St. Vincent and St. Louise’s bold decision to gather together women whose hearts were on fire with the desire to serve those who were poor. These holy people were determined to share and spread the love of God through their humanity illuminated by His grace. Our reflection should help us become more appreciative of the precious treasures embedded in our history. In this time when each of us is striving to welcome the call to *Ephata* and *break through the gate* in order to *go toward* and *encounter*, let us risk witnessing the presence of God to others, grounded

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Spiritual  
Life

in Him and relying on Mary's intercession.

The accounts that I have received during these past few weeks of your preparations for the Domestic Assemblies and of your first sessions have touched me. I am pleased with how seriously you have entered into this graced time that is leading us to the General Assembly. Thank you for your exploration of the responsibilities that are in accordance with our charism and the directives of the Church.

My reflection on recent ecclesial events has helped me grow in my understanding of what it means to be "missionary". The Extraordinary Missionary Month and the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon have given each of us the opportunity to examine this subject and reinforce our conviction that "the missionary spirit must animate all the Sisters" (C. 25b). In particular, the International Missionary Center, newly placed under the protection of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, is preparing Sisters from around the world for the mission *Ad Gentes* through extensive study and prayer. I invite you to help these Sisters by your prayers, your sacrifices, and your sisterly and moral support (cf. S. 13d) and to call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit for each of the Sisters as well as for those who have responsibility for their formation. Just as their specific vocation and intentionality inspire me, so do other initiatives at the Motherhouse: Sisters' testimonies on their missions during Provincial Days and the Missionary Days last weekend, which mobilized all the Sisters to inform pilgrims about our mission and raise funds for two projects. At the same time, I hold in prayer the many countries where political, social, or economic turmoil and natural disasters cause much suffering, particularly for those who are poor. I give thanks for your unstinting responses and your closeness to the people, sign and proclamation of God's presence.

I would like to share some events scheduled for 2020 that will benefit from your prayer. In January, Sister Françoise and I will

join other members of the Vincentian Family who serve in leadership roles to deepen our understanding of who we are as family and how we can collaborate more effectively with one another in our service of those who are poor. The theme is: “FamVin 2020: the Vincentian Family Moving Forward”. The meeting in Rome includes presentations, panels, and group work.

In March, the Province of Australia plans to integrate with the Province of Great Britain. As you can imagine, this integration is unique due to the distance between the two countries. I admire the courage and creativity that both of these Provinces demonstrate in their conscientious work to ensure the best possible service of the needs of those who are poor and the vitality of the Little Company for years to come in these two countries.

Also in March, the AIC will hold its International Assembly in Bogota, Columbia. With the theme “Peace and liberty in a sustainable world”, its objective is to reflect on the Vincentian response to current forms of poverty and evaluate its integral ecology projects. I know that its members will be grateful for your prayers in their preparation and experience of this international event.

At the beginning of this month, we celebrated the Communion of Saints, whose exemplary faithfulness gives us hope. They remind us that holiness is possible in our ordinary, daily life and encourage us to embrace and put into practice the Assemblies’ theme. Following Pope Francis’ call to “open our eyes and take a moment to experience fully and with gratitude every one of life’s little gifts” will help us in this. Surely God will be with us!

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER  
*Daughter of Charity*

2019 Advent Letter  
*Ode to Providence*

Rome, 21 November 2019

My very sisters and brothers in Saint Vincent,

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

For all of us, life is a pilgrimage. We are constantly in motion. This pilgrimage is not so much a physical movement from one place to another, but an inner movement of our thoughts, reflections, sensory perceptions, and prayer.

The Church offers us special times of the year, pauses along the way, to help us deepen our understanding of our life's pilgrimage and find meaning in every single day, even minute, that makes up that path. We learn to be more and more attentive to daily events, people whom we meet, thoughts and emotions that arise, and the nature – trees, flowers, rivers, mountains, animals, sun, moon, etc. – that surrounds us. Through our attention and care, we progressively embrace all humanity and the whole universe.

One of these special moments is Advent. In this privileged time of year, we continue our reflection on the elements that shaped Vincentian spirituality and led Saint Vincent de Paul to become a Mystic of Charity. In addition to those on which we reflected over the past three years, another foundation of Vincentian spirituality is **Providence**.



The following terms could express **the essence of Providence**: **“Jesus’s vision for my life,” “Jesus’s project for my life,” “Jesus’s recipe for a meaningful life.”**

Providence works its way into our being, our mind, and our heart on one condition: **trust**. Trust in “Jesus’s vision for my life,” “Jesus’s project for my life,” “Jesus’s recipe for a meaningful life.” We put ourselves in Jesus’ hands, trusting that His vision for our life is the best possible vision, His project for our life is the best possible project, and His recipe is the best possible model for a meaningful life.

**Providence will be effective in our lives according to the depth of our trust in Jesus.** The deeper our trust in Jesus, the more we will allow Providence to perform miracles in lives. The more we place ourselves in the hands of Jesus, the more we are able to read daily events, encounters, and places as means through which Jesus communicates to us. The more we come to trust in Jesus’s plan for us even if what is happening may be somewhat incomprehensible or even very painful, the more we will rely on Providence. What helps us to let Providence work in us in all life’s circumstances is placing ourselves in Jesus’s hands, **trusting Him to the fullest**.

This way of **“abandoning” ourselves into Jesus’s hands** in all situations changes our perspective. We will not evaluate life events as good times or bad times, but will look at them through Jesus’s person, **trusting Him totally, and recognize them as “the right times.”** This choice will make two terms, “fate” and “chance,” disappear from our vocabulary. We will realize that they are not compatible with our way of understanding the Gospel and Jesus.

Total abandonment into Jesus’s hands, total trust in Jesus’s plan, and total trust in Providence help us discover or rediscover the beauty, the positive, and the meaning behind every event. This contrasts with looking at events through just our human eyes,

### 2019 Advent Letter

mind, and feelings. In that case, the mentality of fate and chance points to the negative and conceals the beauty, the positive, and the meaning of all that touches and shapes us.

A wonderful expression of this trust in Providence is found in a beautiful prayer written by Blessed Charles de Foucauld after his deep personal conversion that led him down surprising paths on which he could trust in God alone. Often called the prayer of “Abandonment”, it conveys his total desire to put himself in the hands of the Father in accordance with the model of Jesus’s abandonment into His Father’s hands and make himself a tool to allow the Father to do whatever He wants with him. He is ready for all, accepts all, and places his soul into the Father’s hands, without reserve and with boundless confidence:

Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands;  
Do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures –  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul:  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
For you are my Father.

Three hundred years earlier, Providence became one of the pillars of Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality. In going through his letters and conferences, we are struck by how often Saint Vincent speaks of Providence. Providence was one of the key factors that shaped Vincent into the person, the saint whom we know. His

path of conversion, from the Vincent of his childhood, youth, and early years as a priest, to the Vincent who embraced Providence and whom we call saint, was not an easy road for him.

He had his own plans and understanding of the role of a priest, his own ambitions, and selfish goals. However, he came to renounce his own will, put Jesus first, place all his trust in Jesus's plans and not his own, and "sing" often and in varied ways what we might call an "Ode to Providence." This radical change was, in fact, itself a miracle. **Saint Vincent, trusting totally in Providence, became himself Providence for others, for the poor.** This was the climax of **a mystical union, not an abstract mystical union, but a mystical union that brought about an affective and effective response.**

I would like to offer for your meditation a portion of **Vincent's composition of an "Ode to Providence," the fruit of his reflection on his life's experiences.**

"...what great hidden treasures there are in holy Providence and how marvelously Our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not try to get ahead of it!"<sup>1</sup>

"... let us abandon ourselves to Divine Providence. It will know quite well how to procure what we need."<sup>2</sup>

"... reflecting on all the principal events that have taken place in this Company, it seems to me, and this is quite evident, that, if they had taken place before they did, they would not have been successful. I say that of all of them, without excepting a single one. That is why I have a par-

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1. *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume I, p. 59; letter 31 to Saint Louise. Future references to this work will be use the initials *CCD*, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, *CCD* I, 59.

2. *CCD* I, 346; letter 245 to Robert de Sergis.

ticular devotion to following the adorable Providence of God step by step. And my only consolation is that I think Our Lord alone has carried on and is constantly carrying on the business of the Little Company.”<sup>3</sup>

“... let us leave it to the guidance of the wise Providence of God. I have a special devotion to following it, and experience has shown me that it has accomplished everything in the Company, and that our acts of foresightedness hinder it.”<sup>4</sup>

“Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and be on our guard against anticipating it. If Our Lord is pleased to give me any consolation in our vocation, it is this: I think it seems to me that we have tried to follow Divine Providence in all things and to put our feet only in the place It has marked out for us.”<sup>5</sup>

“The consolation Our Lord gives me is to believe that, by the grace of God, we have always tried to follow and not to anticipate Providence which knows how to conduct all things so wisely to the end Our Lord destines for them.”<sup>6</sup>

“We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

“Let us be submissive to Providence; He will see to our affairs in His own time and in His own way.”<sup>8</sup>

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3. *CCD* II, 237; letter 559 to Bernard Codoing.

4. *CCD* II, 462; letter 678 to Bernard Codoing.

5. *CCD* II, 499; letter 704 to Bernard Codoing.

6. *CCD* II, 502; letter 707 to Bernard Codoing.

7. *CCD* III, 384; letter 1078 to Jean Barreau.

8. *CCD* III, 449; letter 1109 to René Alméras.

“Ah, Messieurs! Let’s all ask God fervently for this spirit for the whole Company, a spirit that will take us everywhere, with the result that, when someone sees one or two Missioners, they can say, ‘Those are apostolic persons ready to go to the four corners of the world carrying the word of God.’ Let’s ask God to grant us a heart like that; there are some who have it, by the grace of God, and all are servants of God, but to go there and not to be deterred! *O Sauveur!* That’s really something! We must have a heart like that, everyone having the same heart, detached from all things, so that we may have perfect trust in the mercy of God, without wondering, or worrying, or losing courage. ‘Will I have this item in that country? How will I get it?’ *O Sauveur!* God will never fail us! Ah, Messieurs! *O Dieu!* When we hear talk of the glorious death of those who are there, who wouldn’t want to be in their place? Who wouldn’t want to die like them, to be assured of an eternal reward! *O Sauveur!* Is there anything more desirable! So then, let’s not be bound to this or that; let’s be courageous! Let’s go wherever God may call us, He will be our provider, let’s not fear anything. *Or sus*, blessed be God!<sup>9</sup>

As we enter this Advent season, let us be inspired by Blessed Charles de Foucauld’s prayer of Abandonment. Our Holy Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the other Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family embodied total trust in Jesus in their own lives and, in their own time and place, composed an “Ode to Providence.” May each one of us compose our own “Ode to Providence.”

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM  
*Superior General*

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9. CCD XI, 264-265; conference 135, Repetition of Prayer.

## Prayer, the compass of our lives

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I am happy to spend today with you focused on the theme, “Prayer, the compass of our lives.” It is a dynamic theme that touches us all and is essential for fully living our vocation as Daughters of Charity with joy and enthusiasm, whatever our personal vocation journey.

*Session for  
Sisters*

*11-24 Years*

*Vocation*

Indeed, this topic influences our entire life and concerns our everyday reality. This preliminary remark helps contextualize the style for our day, which will take the form of sisterly mutual sharing. As your Sister, I will simply and very humbly share my inner self with you, what constantly gives me life and energy. You, too, will be invited to do this among yourselves. What I will share with you will surely connect with some of your convictions. The goal of today is to give each other new energy for the greater depth to which our Superiors regularly call us.

Today’s schedule will offer different times for personal reflection, in small groups and in the hall. As the Holy Spirit is the “project manager” in our lives and especially for this day, He will guide us in our “coming and going” with Him and among ourselves. *Yes, come Holy Spirit into our hearts and send rays of light from heaven. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the inmost being of your servants gathered here and give them*

*the joy of marveling at your action in and around them and at having contributed to it for the glory of the Father and the happiness of all, especially those who are poor, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!*

## I. “DON’T LOSE OUR BEARINGS!”

I chose this title for the first part of our day because I was asked to speak about prayer as “a compass for our lives”. In reality, I would be more inclined to say that Christ is our compass; He helps us to keep on track in the choices we make.

Therefore, the **bearings, the direction, in our lives is Christ**; more specifically, as indicated in Constitution 8, it is Jesus, Adorer of the Father, Servant of His loving plan and Evangelizer of those who are poor (C. 8). He alone is the guide for our lives; He is the way; He is the door.

When we are lost in the forest, all sorts of feelings make us lose our bearings: panic, fear of not making it out, anger over the absurdity of being lost, weariness, a desire to make it thanks to a sense of direction...

In the account of Jesus’ temptations, we see how He comes through them and the compass that allows Him to keep on track. Because the Father is Jesus’ compass, He does not get off track.

If I manage to keep on track in my life as a Daughter of Charity, it is because Christ is there. I lean on Him who does not judge me but helps me to get back up again. To avoid losing my bearings, there is prayer, like the compass needle that turns me in the right direction.

## Prayer, the compass of our lives

I would like to divide this presentation into three parts.

- The first part, a quick reminder of different forms of the same prayer;
- the second part, some orientations for the prayer that we call meditation;
- the third part, some of the human and spiritual issues in prayer.

## **DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE SAME PRAYER**

When the apostles ask the Lord, “*Teach us to pray,*” He does not tell them to remain silent; He gives them words, just as a mother teaches her child to speak. He offers them the language of His own prayer. Our hearts should feed on these words as our daily bread. In other words, we do not make up prayer; we receive it from the Lord and from His Body, the Church, and should attune our hearts to it.

### **Vocal prayer**

There are types of prayer that have a universal value, for example, the Our Father, a Eucharistic prayer with its broad intentions for the Church or the Hail Mary. By paying full attention to them, we chew on, gnaw on, and ruminate the words of the prayer, as when we pray the rosary. In a heart to heart with Mary, we can focus more on one particular joyful, luminous, sorrowful or glorious mystery of the life of Christ.

### **Liturgical prayer**

Vocal prayer takes on a special value when it is liturgical prayer. It unites us to the priests, religious and all Christians who constantly call upon the Lord throughout the world. Whatever its style, it is a celebration of love, of God’s covenant with humankind. It is an unconditional time.



## **The liturgical cycle**

The liturgical cycle involves beginning anew in this celebration but not repeating it because we are always advancing. Each year, we penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ. We might have a personal preference for one feast or another such as Christmas, Easter or Pentecost, but our belonging to the Church sweeps us up in the dance of the liturgical year to expand our hearts to become even more Christ-like, ecclesial and universal.

## **The sacraments, especially the Eucharist**

Another form of prayer is that of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. *“The Eucharist is the center of [our] life and mission and an indispensable meeting each day with Christ and [our] brothers and sisters,”* says Constitution 19. Constitution 33 adds that we *“draw [our] strength... from the Eucharist.”*

## **Meditation**

We could continue listing different types of prayer, but this morning I will focus at greater length on a form specific to us, meditation. The Superior General reminded us of the method in his 2018 Advent Letter. This morning I will indicate some orientations for entering into this beautiful and profound prayer, an intimate and personal experience of our relationship with God.

## **SOME ORIENTATIONS FOR MEDITATION**

### **Five orientations**

#### **Praying is first placing ourselves in Someone’s presence.**

Praying is placing ourselves in God’s sight, allowing Him to look at us and love us.

### *Prayer, the compass of our lives*

Placing ourselves in God's presence means paying attention to Him. An authentic encounter between two people builds on their quality attention to each other.

Nonetheless, when we place ourselves in the presence of God, we know that He is the first to be full of loving attention for us. We make ourselves available to God and open ourselves to the work of His Spirit.

### **Praying is listening to God.**

The essence of meditation is listening to God. Prayer is one of the best methods for learning to listen if we really make our heart available and if we sincerely express to the Lord our desire to receive what He wants to say to us. This is why recollection is a prerequisite for prayer. It takes effort to actively listen to God. God speaks to us in many ways, but especially through Scripture. The Word of God is a map that indicates the road for us to follow, a sure path. We thus need to be explorers of the Gospel, of this Word of God that will guide us along the paths that we trace out through our life choices.

God speaks to us, but our difficulty can be our deafness to God's Word. In our society today, perhaps more than ever, images and noise bombard us. Everything intends to make us live on a superficial level. In particular, internet use is a huge issue for our inner life. I do not mean to deny its benefits, but we should remain vigilant to avoid becoming slaves to it. It is a question of a healthy lifestyle in order to live in God's presence.

### **Praying is deciding to take the path the compass indicates.**

Prayer is a privileged time to place ourselves at the school of Jesus and learn from Him the gentleness and humility of His heart. By placing ourselves at the school of Jesus meek and humble of heart, we will purify our heart and simplify our mind since our

lives manufacture a certain ‘fog’... If we look at the compass, we will see what is not consistent.

It is not a matter of trying to free ourselves of a fault at all costs because then we make it an even greater fixation; we grow tense and no longer go forward but stop along our path. Goliath was sure of himself and only relied on himself. In contrast, David, frail and weak, opposed him in the name of the living God. Situations of weakness, particularly those in which we can only advance by leaning on Christ and Him alone, are especially favorable for experiencing the power of God. “*God, be merciful to me a sinner*” (Lk 18:13). It involves allowing the Holy Spirit to gradually transform our hearts, purify us, heal us, renew us and enlighten us so that our hearts change and become meek and humble, capable of loving as Jesus loves.

### **Praying is speaking with God about our lives and those of persons who are poor.**

Remaining in Jesus’ company, we can speak to Him very simply about our personal, community and apostolic life. We lay out for Him our joys and difficulties; we present Him what makes up our lives: a joy or a difficulty with a Sister, a painful situation experienced by someone who is poor. As Constitution 19 invites us, “*In praising God, listening to God’s Word, entreating God, [we] act not only in [our] own name but in the name of all humanity, whose joys, hopes, sadness, and anguish [we] bear*” (C. 19).

In her February 2, 1963, letter, Mother Guillemin called us to pray with this same spiritual attitude. “*Our prayer should be united every day to the prayer of the poor, our brothers; we have to supply for those who do not pray, as well as offering to God the immense riches of the sufferings, the work, and the lives of those who do not think of offering themselves.*”

Standing in the presence of God, we make present before God all those whom we hold in our hearts.

**To conclude meditation, we give thanks to God for having helped us to regain our bearings, and we assert our desire to follow the path indicated.**

Once we better understand the mystery of God's love, the Holy Spirit produces a desire in us to enter into this loving plan and participate in it. It is the time of mission: to show His infinite love to all and especially to those who are poor.

Mediation is thus an essential element of our spirituality as the Superior General reminded us in quoting Saint Vincent who called it the "*soul of our souls*" (CCD IX, 327). Given the difficulties inherent to our service of the most abandoned, we could never persevere without it.

## **SOME OF THE HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN PRAYER**

In prayer, significant values are at play such as:

- the primacy given to God;
- a certain disinterestedness in our life;
- the anticipation of the life of the world to come and of the happiness that we can find in God.
- However, I would like to take a few moments to speak about fidelity to meditation.

### **1 – FIDELITY TO PRAYER IS VERY IMPORTANT.**

Fidelity to mediation day after day is important, even if it is not always easy, with its ups and downs, its moments of grace and insight, its moments of struggle, because it is where inner work takes place. This is deep-down work, much of which is imperceptible. Through our humble fidelity, God works in us, we open ourselves to the work of grace and the Spirit of Jesus gradually takes hold of us to create a new heart in us. Sometimes, it is spectacular and rapid-like for Saint Paul; sometimes

it takes an entire lifetime, progressively, even slowly, but little matter: this is the mystery of God's ways.

Without fidelity to prayer, there is no real spiritual progress. This is why the devil does everything possible to distance us from prayer or discourage us in our fidelity. If we are not faithful to prayer, there is the risk of stagnating in our life as Daughters of Charity. We could be good Sisters who do some good for those who are poor, but we risk losing sight of the essential, getting off course and straying from a deep relationship with God that allows us to live in trust according to His loving plan and in the joy of belonging to Him.

The work of God in prayer bears fruit in two intimately connected areas: knowledge of God and self-knowledge.

### ***Knowledge of God***

Knowledge of God, to which the Holy Spirit allows us gradual access in times of meditation, remains a mystery of the faith, but insights and intuitions help take us from our flawed, limited images of God to the reality of who God is. This knowledge of the heart makes us love Him deeply.

### ***Self-knowledge***

At the same time that God reveals Himself to us, He shows us who we are. It is a path of humility because the light of God enlightens us about ourselves. The light of God shows us our resistances, weaknesses, blindness, self-sufficiency and all that is sin in us. God wants to enlighten us about our faults because He wants to forgive us, heal us and help us understand His infinite mercy even better. This self-knowledge is important because there is no healing if there is no illness; there is no conversion if we do not know our sin.

Of course, sometimes prayer takes courage since it is demanding to find ourselves alone before God, faced with ourselves. We can lose our appetite for things of God and feel a sort of weariness or boredom. This can happen to us even if there are no exterior signs. We can all, one day or another, face this lethargy. Pope Francis often speaks of spiritual sloth or acedia.

However, it is not because I am sometimes bored at meditation that I should give up on it. On the contrary, I confront boredom by remaining faithful to meditation. I go to meditation not because I always find pleasure there but for God's good pleasure. Even if I am bored, I remain there for you, Lord, because I believe that you love me. I go to meditation not just because I find the God of my joy there; I also go there for you, Lord, for your joy. A major conversion takes place when I begin to love God for Himself.

The most crucial moments are not necessarily at the beginning of a vocation. Beginnings always have a thrilling side. Something is new; we are discovering; we give ourselves. Later, we are not as we were before; there are less tangible effects, and this is often the time of big conversions. In midlife, we must face the seriousness of our commitment and hold to it in a renewed way, a more authentic way, in deep joy and inner peace underpinned by the conviction of God's unconditional love.

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

To conclude these thoughts, I would say that prayer is not just the time set aside for meditation, Lauds and Vespers or the sacraments but **our whole life**. In all circumstances, we are invited to be in relationship with God. Would we constantly be in a state of prayer? Yes, as Saint Vincent desired, "*I'd say let's never leave it and spend no time without being in prayer*" (CCD IX, 332).

As our Constitutions invite us, let us ever more become, like Christ our compass, “*Adorer of the Father*” by going apart to pray with Him in humility, “*Servant of His loving plan*” by remaining united to His will in simplicity and “*Evangelizer of the poor*” by expressing His tender love in charity wherever our Superiors send us. Our authenticity in our relationship with God in prayer should be evident in the concrete reality of our interpersonal relationships. Evidence of this prayer appears in mutual service and in service of those who are poor. The proof that we love God is the love that we have for each other (cf. Jn 13:34-35).

Sister Antoinette-Marie HANCE  
*Daughter of Charity*

Quasi-Province  
The Sisters serving at the  
United Nations

Presentation given at the Motherhouse

N

*News from  
the Provinces*

As you know, there have been some changes in our United Nations offices. Sister Catherine Prendergast has moved to Geneva to replace Sister Monique Javouhey and now focuses on human rights there. Sister Margaret O'Dwyer is working at our office in New York.

Today, we would like to talk to you about homelessness. Our Assembly theme, "*Ephata*," can be interpreted in many ways. When Jesus spoke the word, "*Ephata*," he was referring to a man's ears being able to hear and a tongue empowered to speak. We know our own hearts, minds, and spirits can also be opened. But the word *Ephata* also could mean to open the doors — the doors of homes and shelters to persons who lack them.

## STATISTICS

Global statistics for homelessness are very sparse. It is estimated there are 150 million people globally living without homes (Yale Global). That is slightly more than the number of people living in Russia. As



many as 1.6 billion people experience inadequate shelter (2015 Habitat statistics). However, a proper global census of persons experiencing homelessness has not been done since Habitat conducted one in 2005.

## THE CALL TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Our call to address homelessness arises from several sources, beginning with the Nativity. Jesus entered the world without a home. Mary gave birth to Jesus in substandard housing conditions. Pope Francis said, “*The Son of God knew what it was to be a homeless person, what it was to start life without a roof over his head*” (September 24, 2015). We also hear the call from Isaiah when he discusses the fast that God chooses. Isaiah questions, “*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house?*” (58:7) The book of Leviticus advises us, “*If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you*” (25:35). The letter of James queries, “*And if one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?*” (2:16) Finally, we have the passage close to Vincentian hearts, Matthew 25:35: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*”

Pope Francis has great compassion for people living without homes. When he visited the United States in 2015, he called a blessing upon a meal that was to be eaten by persons without homes at a Catholic Charities food program. The Pope has said, “*How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses 2 points?*” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 53) He also said, “*We can find no social or moral justification, no justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing*” (September 24, 2015).

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We look to inspiration from our Foundress, Saint Louise. When it was discovered that orphans were not treated well at a local facility, Saint Louise initiated works so that they could be cared for properly. The Sisters also tended to refugees from war and conflict, beggars on Paris streets, homeless elderly, hungry persons and more. It was the poorest who went to hospitals, and we know the great efforts the Sisters put forth to provide health care to poverty-stricken persons, perhaps some of them homeless. We know that Saint Vincent de Paul was committed to alleviating every form of poverty. His 13 Houses project was developed to care for abandoned children.

Moving forward to today, we have our Assembly preparation documents, which note, “*Today, human rights are disregarded*” (Work document for the Domestic Assembly, p. 9). They further state, “*Respect for human rights and holistic human development is losing ground almost everywhere*” (p. 8). One of the most blatant forms of human rights violations we observe today is the lack of a home for millions. If we want “*to advance in a Gospel-inspired way of being and acting*” and “*to make bold commitments with those who are most poor*” (p. 8), how might we respond to the global crisis of homelessness?

Here are some examples among many of how the Daughters are already responding to these calls to serve people without homes:

In Nigeria, Sisters work with street children in Port Harcourt.

In London, the Sisters opened their service, the Passage, to collaboration with others, ultimately resulting in the creation of Depaul International.

In India, the Sisters assist foster children in Bengaluru.

In Brazil, the Daughters opened San José Shelter in Curitiba.

In Australia, a Sister provides spiritual care for guests at a center.

In Spain, the Provinces provide meals for migrants as well as making apartments available to refugees in collaboration with Church and government agencies.

In Ghana, the Daughters of Charity work with street children in Kumasi.

In Ukraine, Sisters provide basic medical care for people experiencing homelessness.

In Mexico, Sisters serve migrants traveling from Honduras to the United States.

In the United States, Sisters collaborate with many volunteers to provide a variety of services to homeless persons in Macon.

Following natural disasters in the Philippines, the Sisters involved local residents in rebuilding homes and faith communities.

These are just a few examples.

## **VINCENTIAN FAMILY EFFORTS**

The Vincentian Family adopted homelessness as a theme during its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2017. At that time, Father Tomaž Mavrič launched the Global Initiative on Homelessness, sometimes called the Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance.

The Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance has as its goal to end homelessness. It organized the 13 Houses Campaign. The goal is to have a 13 Houses Campaign in each of the 156 countries where the Vincentian Family exists.

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The Vincentian family hopes to address homeless “*by trying to sensitize society to the reality and plight of the homeless, to try and create momentum around systemic change so that we’re not just doing band-aid solutions but can really try to work to change the fabric of what keeps people homeless*” (Father Joseph Agostino, *America Magazine*, October 2017).

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH), located at DePaul University, supports efforts to end street homelessness. For example, when we needed language related to homelessness for a document to submit to the UN, IGH helped us. The Institute’s vision is that, within a generation, we will live in a world where everyone has a place to call home – a home that offers security, safety, autonomy and opportunity. The Institute is going to establish an online global coalition so that best practices to end homelessness can be shared.

Now, let’s go back to the big picture.

## CAUSES

Homelessness is often considered a personal failing when, in fact, it is the failure of governmental, economic and social systems to provide for basic human rights. It is a very clear manifestation of inequalities. In a paper presented to a group of experts on homelessness in Nairobi in May, Dr. Suzanne Speak from Newcastle University in England notes that poverty is probably the main cause of homelessness in the developing world.

A leading cause of homelessness for women is domestic violence. Many times, women would rather take to the streets than face danger at home.

Lack of affordable housing is another significant cause. One study shows that in some cities in the global south, housing costs represent more than 200 or 300 percent of average income.

Urbanization is a further cause of homelessness. By 2050, about two thirds of the global population will live in urban areas.

Consider Lagos, Nigeria, which had a population of approximately 7.2 million in 2000. That number is expected to rise to 24 million by 2030.

There is a relatively new term related to homelessness: commodification. It means that as more people move to cities, developers build more highly expensive accommodations. That drives up the cost of housing, breaks up neighborhoods and displaces persons with lower incomes. It is happening globally.

UN Special Rapporteur, Leilani Farha, has been very vocal about this. *“Rather than being valued as a place to live in a community, housing has become a commodity to be bought and sold for profit,”* she said in 2017. *“People talk about income inequality: where it manifests so clearly is housing inequality... I see a society that doesn't care about the most vulnerable.”*

Climate related and environmental disasters also contribute to homelessness. Flooding, droughts, rising sea levels, wildfires and environmental events such as the collapse of a toxic waste pond in Brumadinho, Brazil, all have profound effects.

In 2018 alone, 17.2 million people in 144 countries and territories were displaced within their own country by disasters, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) states. Already, in the first half of 2019, 7 million persons were displaced internally due to disasters.

Agricultural changes also are affecting homelessness. Rising sea levels are eroding some lands used for agriculture. As more farm work becomes mechanized, the number of agricultural jobs decreases. Many rural individuals are moving to cities to find jobs but struggle to find housing.

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War and conflict are further causes of homelessness. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 25 people were forced to flee every *minute* in 2018.

Several other significant causes of homelessness relate to the elderly, youth and families. In some locations, widows are turned out of homes when their husband dies. In other locations, the cost of housing is above what a retirement income can afford. Youth may turn to the streets because of family conflict, abuse, neglect, addictions, mental health issues or economic problems, such as health costs, lack of employment, low incomes or lack of affordable living space. Problems in foster care also can feed into the crisis (National Coalition for the Homeless).

Families can be displaced for multiple reasons, such as insufficient income to afford housing, domestic violence, medical bills, poverty, unemployment and more.

## CONSEQUENCES

As we prepared this talk, four persons were murdered on the streets of New York while they slept. Vulnerability to violence and safety issues, such as physical or sexual abuse, are consequences of homelessness.

People without homes also can experience physical and mental health issues, difficulty in finding transportation to jobs, feelings of inadequacy (as if homelessness were a personal failure), vulnerability to drugs and alcohol, exposure to HIV/AIDS, food insecurity, absenteeism from school, stigmatization, vulnerability to trafficking and more.

Many times passers-by ignore persons living on the streets. Moreover, some cities criminalize homelessness.

## THE HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING

Where does the right to housing come from? Let's begin with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, article 25. It states, "*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, and **housing**...*"

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) passed resolutions in 2016 that encouraged governments to develop and implement social protection floors (E/RES/2016/7&8). What are social protection floors? They are nationally defined sets of basic guarantees that should ensure that all people in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security together with secure, effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level (International Labor Organization).

The International Labor Organization's World Social Protection Report 2017-2019 states that income security is dependent upon access to social services, including housing.

The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, adopted during the United Nations Habitat II Conference in 1996, said that action must be taken so "*everyone will have adequate shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible and affordable and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities*" (A/CONF.165/14).

Sustainable Development Goal 11 calls for "*making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*" and makes reference to a "*focus on homelessness*" (A/RES/71/256, §1).

Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, issued a report to the United Nations Human Rights Council that says, "*Homelessness is a global human rights crisis that demands an urgent global response.*" It continues, "*Homelessness is an extreme*

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*violation of the rights to adequate housing and non-discrimination and also a violation of the right to life, to security of person, to health, to protection of the home and family, and to freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment” (A/HRC/31/54, §2 and 4).*

Failure to address homelessness will result in a failure to achieve a great number of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

### **HOW ARE COMMUNITIES ADDRESSING HOUSING ISSUES?**

- Building denser housing.
- Indexing minimum wage to the local cost of housing.
- Constructing tiny houses.
- Requiring developers to include a certain amount of affordable houses in their construction or providing tax credits to developers for building affordable units.
- Some elders are taking in younger boarders.
- Making structural improvements in favelas.
- Applying penalties to organizations that leave buildings empty as a tax write-off or while waiting for the market to increase the price they might earn for renting the building.
- Subsidizing rent for persons experiencing poverty.
- Providing rent-controlled housing.
- Creating community land trusts that build affordable housing on land permanently held in trust, which enables people to keep the rent down. (Community land trusts no longer belong to individuals; rather, a board has responsibility for the asset. The land and buildings no longer can be sold and are thus removed from the speculative market and protected from land-grabbing strategies.)
- Giving priority to housing: ensuring that people first have a home and then addressing any other needs by connecting them to supportive services.
- Engaging slum dwellers in strategies to improve their dwellings.



## WHAT ARE WE DOING AT THE UNITED NATIONS?

Shortly after the Vincentian Family met in Rome in 2017 to honor the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the charism, a Working Group to End Homelessness was formed in New York. It included nine members of the nongovernmental organizations representing the Vincentian Family and other interested NGO groups. Father Guillermo Campuzano, CM, leads it, and Sister Margaret serves as secretary.

The group worked diligently to raise awareness about homelessness because it is not specifically mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals. It further sponsored panels of speakers about homelessness during the Commission for Social Development in February 2018 and February 2019, as well as during the New Urban Agenda meeting in New York in October 2018.

The Working Group advocated for homelessness to be named as the theme of a high level UN meeting. It successfully lobbied with countries to make homelessness the focus of the Commission for Social Development in February 2020. African nations were particularly supportive, along with countries including Iceland and Ireland.

Vincentian Family United Nations representatives met twice with the Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance to explain their work, consider linkages and discuss strategies for the upcoming Commission on Social Development.

Because there is no internationally accepted definition of homelessness, it is difficult to hold nations accountable, and they can say, “We don’t have a problem.” Advocacy to end homelessness will require encouraging the United Nations to develop a common definition, measure homelessness and address it.

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An intern developed linkages between homelessness and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Working Group sent three persons to a meeting of experts on homelessness in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2019. Some of the materials presented at that event will help UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres prepare a report about homelessness.

We are active in developing a day for nongovernmental organizations like ours during the Commission on Social Development meeting in 2020. It may include an exhibit related to homelessness.

We are collaborating with other NGOs on a panel of speakers related to homelessness for the upcoming Commission on Social Development. Sister Catherine is exploring potential for collaboration in Geneva related to homelessness. She has already connected with the human rights person who addresses issues related to homelessness with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We have worked tirelessly to highlight at the UN the plight of persons experiencing homelessness. From here, we all go forward to ensure that as Daughters of Charity, we carry out the spirit of *Ephata*, opening doors to persons experiencing homelessness and welcoming the stranger.

Sister Catherine PRENDERGAST and Sister Margaret O'DWYER  
*Daughters of Charity*

Province of España-Norte  
Let God act

When making choices, priority will be given to the truly poor. Saint Vincent thus urged the first Sisters to seek out “the poorest of the poor”. Constitution 11 expresses this well (Saint Vincent, January 1657).

Saint Louise said, “*Oh, what a happiness, if, without offending God, the Company could be employed only in the service of those who are destitute in all things!*” (*Spiritual Writings*, A. 100, p. 833)

Based on these priorities, the Province chose to sustain one of its works for people with serious mental disabilities. Thus was born the San Vicente de Paúl Center in Lugo, a province of Galicia, where the number of people affected by various disabilities is higher than elsewhere in Spain.

**WHY IN LUGO?**

A study indicated that 15% of people in Lugo have a mental disability. Furthermore, the government policy at the time aimed to integrate people with disabilities into their families rather than create new specialized centers for them. As a result, the Province chose to care for disabled people who do not have any family or cannot remain with their families.

Since 1872, the Daughters of Charity have served people with disabilities in Mondoñedo (Lugo). When the facility became

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too run-down, we planned to renovate it. Unfortunately, the lack of an agreement between the community and the owner of the building as well as other problems made it impossible to remodel this structure.

Therefore, we decided to build a new establishment. After visiting several cities in the province of Lugo, including Rábade, Corgo and Nadela, to look for a place that met all the criteria, we chose a property in Rábade, seventeen kilometers from the capital of Lugo. Thanks to Divine Providence, the Director of Inserso, an organization under the Department of Health and Social Services, suggested that we turn to the Departmental Council, which had a site on the outskirts of the city of Lugo.

During a plenary session on June 30, 1980, the President of the Departmental Council signed the document handing the property over to us.

After overcoming many difficulties, we laid the first stone of the building in December 1980. Our intention was to *“build a center to house 72 male and female residents, with the technical and developmental means necessary to humanize and personalize the required services to care for their physical, psychological and therapeutic needs.”*

The construction completed, five Sisters with a staff of caregivers welcomed the first residents to “build” another “edifice” together, that of a life in common consisting of closeness, goodwill and cordiality but also discipline and mutual respect. It was not easy because the patients came from psychiatric hospitals, other centers, broken families, etc.

The inauguration took place on September 27, 1984. The profiles of the 72 residents are as different as their disabilities. The first step was a specialized medical evaluation to determine the diagnosis of each resident: severe oligophrenia (mental deficiency),

schizophrenia, moderate and severe insanity, Down syndrome, autism, etc.

This complex situation impelled the Sisters, caregivers and employees to set simple but effective objectives to succeed in the endeavor. They implemented small challenges that helped the residents to have confidence in their hidden abilities and organized educational games, handicrafts and outings with volunteer staff. They offered lots of affection, a language that residents understand and to which they responded, to everyone's great surprise.

## **TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER**

These disabled people also needed a juridical personality. The majority of them had no identity card or social security card and received no financial assistance from government agencies. We therefore worked so they could have a legal representative that, for most of them, was the center itself. All this showed us the harsh reality of society's view of them.

By meeting their basic needs and their desires as much as possible, trust and a certain joy appeared on their faces. The years went by, and despite financial difficulties, the staff unanimously agreed on the passionate and enriching nature of this adventure. After much work, we were able to sign an agreement with the Departmental Council of Galicia in 1993.

The residents' progress in terms of their skills and learning surprised mostly those who did not believe in the potential of people with a low IQ. However, constancy, affection and professionalism succeeded in dispelling the myths holding them back.

Taking into account their needs, preferences and capacities, we established several activities in 1998: sensory stimulation, a psychomotor workshop, production of candles, recycled paper and ceramics... These new areas enabled the development of their potential and a higher quality of life in common.

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As the workshop activities expanded, the facilities became too small. We thus looked for new land on which to build.

The new building was inaugurated in April 2004. Along with four workshop instructors, a Sister coordinates the activities offered in this new yet simple facility. Each morning, they welcome about twenty people who come either in minivans or on public transportation.

### **THE CENTER TODAY**

Over the years, San Vicente Center has made the changes necessary to respond to the necessities of the times, current legislation and clients' needs.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

This work began on the outskirts of the city. Today, it is located in one of the most beautiful areas of Lugo, thanks in part to the construction of a university campus nearby.

Restored facilities and garden areas contribute to the sense of well-being, luminosity, spaciousness, hominess, etc.

The staff that began with five Sisters and the same number of caregivers now numbers about fifty employees including technicians, specialists and caregivers.

### **OUTREACH OF THE CENTER**

In order to make people with disabilities known around us, the center belongs to the Federation of Associations for People with Mental Disabilities (FADENGA), which is part of the Spanish Confederation of Organizations (FEAPS). Both entities defend the interest of this sector in order to protect their rights in a complicated political and social context and amid uncertainty.

The residents may participate in outings, organized walks and competitions that allow them to compete with other similar centers. These experiences are gratifying. Participation in competitions is already very meaningful, to which is added the joy of returning home with trophies, medals or other awards.

Thanks to the community integration program, three residents have entered employment with a long-term contract. Others participate in classes offered by community centers.

As their health allows, the residents participate on a local, regional and national level in celebrations, outings and competitions such as soccer and basketball. This makes them more visible in society and, although each person is unique and different, more equal in the exercise of their rights.

We strive to sustain family ties. To strengthen this connection, we hold an annual celebration with families.

## **INTERNAL OPERATION AND ACTIVITIES**

Modifications, improvements and adaptations carried out over recent years have allowed all the residents, depending on their level of dependence (I-II-III), to benefit from the progress and advances.

From the beginning and with the goal of *“improving the quality of life of persons with intellectual disabilities and, to the extent possible, allowing them to be themselves and putting everything in place for them to increase their autonomy and facilitate their professional and social insertion,”* the center has been open to change. It has adapted progressively in the areas of health (nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and special education), psycho-pedagogy (psychology and pedagogy), social work, pastoral care, volunteer work and leisure activities. All of this helps us to care holistically for each person.

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While one of our obligations is to conform to current legislation, our primary task is to offer personalized attention for each of our residents in order to meet his or her needs and expectations. We also want to help all those who work in this center to have great dedication and patience.

At the beginning, this could seem difficult, but it is very rewarding. How could the smiles of Alberto and Suso, the face of Secundino or the gratitude of Maria for the least service fail to move you?

Because God, inexhaustible source of tenderness and mercy, committed the Company to the poorest of the poor, we want to pursue this passionate mission with the certainty that in order to continue His work, we should “let God act.”

San Vicente de Paúl local community  
in Lugo



### Province of Slovakia Vincentian collaboration

In Slovakia, the branches of the Vincentian Family – Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Satu Mare, Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal, International Association of Charities, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Marian Youth, Association of the Miraculous Medal, Depaul Slovakia and Vincentian Lay Missionaries – are very active.

With the Visitor of the Vincentians, representatives of these different branches meet regularly three or four times a year for spiritual formation and sharing on common projects and activities. The Jubilee Year of 2017 was an opportunity for closer collaboration, better mutual knowledge and Vincentian formation together. Each group strives to further the activities specific to its branch for the material and spiritual assistance of those who are poor. Nonetheless, a long-term (12 year) shared project unites us: a public national fundraising campaign called “Fight against Hunger”.

Everything began with Mrs. Gitka Šumichrastova, member of the AIC. *“A Daughter of Charity came to one of our group meetings and informed us about the international project of the Vincentian Family, ‘Fight against Hunger’. I learned shocking statistics about how daily people die of hunger and suffer from illnesses such as malaria, malnutrition, AIDS, etc. I must admit that I did not sleep well after that. The Fight against Hunger project also had suggestions for relieving this poverty. I reflected on how I would help since I was not in a position to go off on*

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*the missions, and my financial possibilities were rather limited. In our country, people do not suffer much from hunger, so how could I help people in developing countries? Since our town holds a fair, I asked if we could sell objects that we would make, for example, doilies, rosaries, postcards, etc. for a small sum that would be sent to the missions through the Daughters of Charity. This is how we began in 2002 with low expectations, but the Lord blessed this work, and we collected a sum six times greater than we had hoped. Since then, we have continued this activity at the town fair, and this financial resource has constantly increased, which has allowed us to help the Daughters of Charity serving as missionaries in Russia. Of course, it is not without difficulties, but, as Saint Vincent said, 'Good is not good if we do not suffer in it.' This saint is a model and constant help for me in my life. I thought about how I could expand this assistance for the hungry throughout the world. The initial impetus came when I met individually with a Daughter of Charity who is a missionary in Haiti, Sister Anna Ciganpalova, when she was in the country on her home visit in 2006. Her testimony about the unimaginable suffering in Haiti touched my heart deeply. An idea surfaced: we absolutely had to help them! After many misunderstandings and obstacles, I managed to convince several people, and we created a committee made up of different branches of the Vincentian Family to come to the assistance of this 'island of suffering'. As early as 2007, we succeeded in mobilizing the members of the Family. During the first collection for Fight against Hunger to benefit Haiti, Slovaks bought heart-shaped gingerbread, contributing a large amount to a designated account. This large sum was disproportionate with the poor economic situation of the country at the time. I then realized how God chooses weak and inadequate tools to accomplish His great work for those who are poor! A prayer accompanied the fundraising campaign since prayer has greater strength. A year later, the funds raised doubled, and this continued the following years."*

The Coordinating Committee for Fight against Hunger was thus

created. During the year, the members of the branches of the Vincentian Family meet to discuss organizational issues for the fundraising as well as its practical aspects. These include posters to inform the public about the campaign, leaflets with information on how the money collected the previous year was used, which helps with transparency and the credibility of the campaign, suggestions for better marketing (for example, press conferences, etc.). The main campaign takes place in September and October, especially around the feast of Saint Vincent. Throughout the country, volunteers in churches and on the streets sell the small heart-shaped gingerbread, enabling the public at large to contribute to the campaign by buying them. People can also contribute by debit card or text message.

The organizers focus on parish events. They present the missionary works and project photos in churches. At the beginning, funds were intended only to help Haiti, but this assistance has gradually extended to other countries where Slovak members of the Vincentian Family work: Honduras, Russia, Ukraine and Albania. Since 2015, we also help poor families in Slovakia with these funds, which has further encouraged donors' generosity.

Our Fight against Hunger campaign differs from other public fundraising in the country due to its low overhead since it relies on volunteers alone. Grants from the fund focus on the poorest of the poor and are systematically distributed by priests and sisters on mission, which means zero risk of abuse. Revenue from the campaign serves primarily for food, medicine and training or education of people who are poor. The detailed account of expenses, photos from the missions and other forms of feedback assure the transparency and trustworthiness of the campaign.

We now have a website (<http://www.bojprotihladu.sk>) where those who are interested can find information on the campaign in progress and how they could get involved in preparing the gingerbread or selling it as volunteers. They can also find many facts

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and photos about the countries assisted, as well as those proving how money was used for specific projects. The organizers can download and print posters and other promotional material as well as the permission to do this fundraising. The website further contains the detailed balance sheet prepared annually at the end of the campaign. We send it to the Interior Department of the Republic of Slovakia with a detailed description of the gross and net income of the campaign, its cost and the allocation of money among the different branches of the Vincentian Family.

### **Prayer for the Fight against Hunger campaign:**

“God our Father, your Son Jesus Christ said that we would always have the poor with us. God of tender love, send your Spirit to teach us to recognize the needs of the least fortunate. Make charity burn in our hearts after the example of Saint Vincent so that we recognize the face of your suffering Son in persons who are poor.”

Blessed be God for everything!

Sisters of the Province

# Extraordinary Missionary Month

October 2019

M

Missionary  
Month

## Introduction

On October 1, 2019, Pope Francis opened the Extraordinary Missionary Month for the Church to “rediscover [its] fruitfulness in the joy of mission.” In his homily, he encouraged all the baptized to heed the Lord’s call “to make [their] talents bear fruit, with boldness and creativity and... to be active in doing good. Not notaries of faith and guardians of grace, but missionaries... bearing witness by [their] lives” like the martyrs. The theme of the October 2019 Extraordinary Missionary Month is “Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world,” that is, mission understood as the proposition of faith that God makes to humankind.

We can therefore understand what the Pope wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*. “We no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’” (120). This is the reason for his invitation to “rediscover the missionary dimension of our faith in Jesus Christ” (Message for World Mission Day 2019). Indeed, “the Company is missionary by nature” (C. 25a), and “wherever we

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*are, whatever our ministry, each one of us is missionary”* (IAD, p. 22).

To participate actively in this Extraordinary Month, the Formation Commission of the Quasi-Province chose to invite Sisters currently at the Motherhouse to share one of the ways that they served those who are poor in their Province of origin. It was an opportunity for all the Sisters there to further discover the beautiful diverse reality of the Company, revive their missionary momentum and reflect on implications for their missionary life.

## My life as a servant in Indonesia

### Encounter with lepers

In Indonesia, the Daughters of Charity have a home to house, help and advise people with leprosy. They find themselves among friends and receive food and help from the Sisters. This allows them to have a sense of independence.

However, before offering you my testimony, I would like to share some information about leprosy with you.

People think that leprosy has disappeared, but leprosy still claims victims. India, Indonesia and Brazil account for 80% of cases. This illness attacks the skin, nervous system, respiratory tract and eyes. It results in flesh wounds, muscular weakening and numbness. Leprosy is caused by the bacteria *mycobacterium leprae*. It takes 6 months to 40 years to develop in the human body. The signs and symptoms of leprosy appear one to twenty years after the bacteria infects the patient's body.

Leprosy is known as one of the most feared infectious diseases because of its consequences, generally highly visible and especially impressive physical deficiencies that can lead to death. Treatment aims to break the cycle of the propagation of the leprosy bacteria. Intense medication for at least six months is required if you hope to be cured and prevent transmission. Treated early enough, leprosy can be completely cured and leave no physical aftereffects.

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Who is at risk for leprosy? Primarily, people living in regions with poor sanitary conditions: polluted water, lack of food, an environment that weakens immune defenses, etc. Patients affected by leprosy suffer not only from the illness itself but also from the many signs of rejection and hostility that it provokes. Very often, if not always, lepers are rejected by their own families. Moreover, society excludes them since it fears leprosy and its visible symptoms, the white and red blotches on their skin. People with leprosy thus find themselves particularly isolated.

My mission consisted in restoring their hope and helping them out of the isolation into which their illness and society gradually lead them. Drawing on the example of Jesus who healed lepers, I went to visit them in their homes to give them back the hope of healing and confidence for the future. I also helped with their future reintegration in society by helping them acquire skills adapted to their abilities in painting, sewing, animal breeding, farming, etc.

These unfortunate people constantly invite me to demonstrate patience, gentleness and humility. They can do nothing for themselves against the illness and the physical and moral suffering that results. I know that Jesus dwells in the hearts of these lepers, but they feel so powerless against the illness that they gradually lose their faith and trust in the all-powerfulness of God. Whether they are Catholic or not, they are all children of God and therefore my brothers and sisters. In contact with them, I learned to open my hands and my heart and offer both material and spiritual support so that they, too, might feel the presence and love of God in their lives. My service consisted in bringing them gradually back to God while helping them to recover a decent life and their place in society. Having served people with leprosy, I better understand to what an extent the Kingdom of God is really at the service of the least fortunate and those who are poor.

Sister Brigita SAMUEL  
*Daughter of Charity*



My life as a servant in India

*“It was not you who chose me,  
but I who chose you.”*

*“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.”* The Province of South India includes seven states with different languages and cultures.

On December 26, 2004, a tsunami set off by an earthquake in the Indian Ocean ravaged the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There were many deaths, and hundreds of thousands of people lost their homes. In this unparalleled situation, the Motherhouse sent financial assistance, and several Sisters from my Province went to help with the construction of 200 houses. We also bought fifty fishing boats so that those who were poor could quickly resume their livelihood. The Archbishop of the diocese of Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, who had come to bless these houses, was deeply moved by the genuine service of the Daughters of Charity on behalf of the poorest of the poor. Therefore, he invited us to serve in his diocese in the region of Chirayinkeeze; we joyfully answered to his call.

In 2007, we bought a plot of land; then, Sister Treasa Pullolil was sent there to plan the construction of a house on the land. I was sent to Chirayinkeeze in 2009. We had many problems with the construction, but the Virgin Mary was with us as Mother and guide, and she did everything for us. Finally, the local community was inaugurated in 2010, receiving the name “Mary Rani Bhavan,” with Sister Treasa as the Sister Servant.

### Sisters' Testimonies

Sister Treasa began the activities in the parish: preparation of children for First Communion and Confirmation, service in the sacristy, visits to families, morning and evening tutoring, the rosary and the novena of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. We next opened a small kindergarten, and every Sunday we offer two hours of catechism, which is very important in order to obtain the catechism diploma, necessary to enter the Catholic University.

As the city was located on the coast, we began to pray the rosary and the novena of the Miraculous Medal every Wednesday on the beach with parishioners. We explained the history of the Miraculous Medal and distributed them. After speaking with the parish priest, we began to pray the novena of the Miraculous Medal in the church after Sunday Mass in order to encourage more participation. We began the Association of the Miraculous Medal and a group of the Children of Mary. Parishioners began to pray with great confidence and obtained many graces, miracles and healings through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. On December 26, 2011, construction was completed on the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal on the seashore. Each Wednesday morning, Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the community, open to the public; after Mass, we always prayed the novena of the Miraculous Medal. The other days of the week, we would go in the evening to the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal to participate in Mass and pray the rosary and the novena. People would offer thanksgiving Masses and obtain divine graces through Mary.

To reach this chapel, you must take a boat across a small lake. Each time, I thought of Jesus who climbed into a boat to go from one place to another and teach the crowd surrounding Him. All these memories are unforgettable. One Wednesday evening when we were in the middle of the lake after Mass, there was a heavy rainstorm and fierce wind, and we could no longer control the boat. We nearly died. Standing in the boat, I was inspired to invoke Mary, and we prayed in a loud voice, “*O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.*” Very quickly,

the rain and wind stopped, and I calmly arrived safe and sound at the local community. Everyone thought that the boat had sunk, but Mary watched over us and protected us.

Each year, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal for ten days. More than 10,000 people join us for this feast and receive many blessings through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

The number of miracles increases daily, making the chapel very famous in the diocese. People come from all over to get a Miraculous Medal and receive God's blessing. There are over 500 families in the parish or more than 2,000 people who wear the Medal. Early in the morning, people come to the chapel to pray before setting off to fish. They all put a Medal in their boat, a sign of their confidence in God. Some boats even received the name "Miraculous Medal". The community has progressively opened the doors of its chapel to all beginning in the morning until 8 o'clock in the evening. In front of our house, we placed a statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in a shelter in the form of a shell. (In India, the shell is one of the eight good omen symbols in Buddhism. The god Vishnu also wore a shell, symbol of the ocean and the first breath of life.) The people came to the chapel whenever they needed help but also to thank the Virgin Mary. In emergencies, they would telephone us to ask for our prayer.

With much joy and gratitude, I can confidently say that the Virgin Mary has brought countless people to God and continues to help them to grow in their faith and trust in God.

I love the Virgin Mary very much. I am sure that she is always with me as my mother. She is the one who led me to the Company.

Sister Teresa PUTTATHANKAL  
*Daughter of Charity*

My life as a servant in the Philippines

## Saint Catherine Labouré School in Pili

### **St. Catherine Labouré School in Pili**

Several years ago, I was missioned to a school in the mid-eastern part of the country located on eight hectares of land. The land was flat and wide enough for a farm beside the school. The land was therefore divided in two: a portion for the school and a portion for the farm to grow rice, the staple food of the Philippines. The farm was intended to help support the other services and the school. During the rainy season, the farm is a rice field, but during summer time, it becomes a big vegetable garden to maintain its fertility.

The farm was very beneficial, not only for the school and our local community of Sisters, but also for the farmers who needed land to cultivate.

### **My mission**

I was into my twelfth year of vocation when I was sent to serve in both the school and the farm. My time was divided between teaching in the school and working with the farmers plus several other “extra” assignments: accompanying the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, taking care of the canteen and the kitchen, doing marketing and being treasurer at the same time. These were both challenging and exhausting times for me.

## **The challenges of this mission**

Looking back now on this mission that I took on, I realize that everything I did was through the grace of God. I could never have done the work because of my lack of experience. When I first received this mission assignment to Pili, I was shocked. I could not imagine myself cultivating the land, toiling the farm and planting and harvesting rice. I asked myself: What can I do in the farm? How could I manage the farm? How do I toil the land? How do I survive living in the middle of the countryside whereas most of my growing up years were in the city? And many other questions for which I found no answers at that time. There was nobody and no time to express my feelings, fears and doubts... not even time to cry because I had to pack and go immediately since the Sister whom I was replacing had already left for her new mission.

I had to be there before the planting season. The farmers were waiting for the signal to prepare the materials and begin cultivating the land. Thus, with tears inside and smiles outside, I set out and traveled to the place where God sent me to serve.

## **Taught by the farmers, formed by the poor**

When the farmers first met me, everyone was doubtful about me and my competence. I heard one of them saying that I was too young to manage the farm and had no knowledge and experience of farming whatsoever. He was right, but I took those words as a challenge; they served as stepping stones for me to strive to learn and improve for the greater service of the poor. There were moments when I cried and asked for help to equip myself with the knowledge that I needed to be able to respond efficiently to the service. My Superiors encouraged me to study and earn a degree in agriculture. However, as I reflected and discerned, I realized that this was not the answer. The farmers with whom I worked were very simple and learned to farm their fields through expe-

## Sisters' Testimonies

rience and the wisdom handed down to them by generations of farmers. I chose to take crash courses, participate in conferences and take advantage of these learning opportunities rather than finish a four-year course in agriculture. Learning at the school of the poor was one of the most important and best things that ever happened to me. I am convinced that all these experiences have helped me to become a better Daughter of Charity.

### **Our collaboration**

Perhaps you wonder: where is the service of the poor in this situation? During cropping time, each farmer is responsible for planting, toiling, caring for and watching over his portion of the field, but they also work as a team. During harvest season, the poor families surrounding the farm are invited to help in harvesting. In addition to sharing in the harvest, the farmers' families receive assistance for studies. Two children from each family receive a scholarship to the school to lighten the financial burden of education and offer the possibility and hope for a brighter future.

### **Working the field: my season of grace**

1. One of the many graces that I have received as I immersed myself in the farm was experiencing the abundance of God's goodness and loving protection. God, who knows my limitations and weakness as a person, was always there to strengthen my will and my desire to strive more and do better day after day.

2. When I took over the service, a drastic move was proposed toward a greener and more sustainable development. We shifted to a biodegradable way of doing farming by converting the process of growing and harvesting rice into a more natural way: organic farming. This involved converting the land, a very complicated and very challenging process. Some people did not agree with the idea, especially the farmers who had farmed the traditional way for many years.

The shift was taxing and involved paying attention to many details. It needed a lot of patience, re-learning and hard work.

We were convinced that shifting to organic farming is one way to respond to the challenges of climate change, but it also meant facilitating a change of mentality. Yes, the conventional system of farming is having and gaining more harvest, but if it destroys the environment, what is the use of having more when it diminishes the essentials: people, values and spirit?

We were thinking globally while acting locally. It was a long process, but it was worth the wait since the result has been beneficial and significant to the global system. It may seem a small act, but I believe the impact is greater since it helps to balance the ecosystem and clean the environment.

3. I learned to collaborate with different agencies and with those who are engaged in the same field. I also tried to learn little by little from the farmers who taught me how to make things possible in a practical manner with humility and simplicity. We shared with one another all that we had learned. It was a real exchange of gifts and resources.

4. At the school of the poor, I was evangelized by their way of living, especially in taking care of the environment and of creation. For example, the farm had many snakes and rats, but the farmers responded to the situation by capturing them, “talking” to them and letting them go without doing them any harm. They told me, “If we do not harm them, they will not harm us either, Sister.” Truly, the idea is effective. In my four years working on the farm, I never experienced the damage of crops, and unbeneficial organisms never infested the field.

**Lessons of life and faith from the farmers**

1. The simplicity of their faith is very visible and palpable through their confidence in God each day while waiting for the grains to grow.

Working with the farmers has contributed a lot to my growth as a Daughter of Charity. On my own, I could not have coped with the challenges of the service.

2. Another lesson that I have learned from that mission is to be open to the many possibilities and room for improvement. I learned to be humble enough to acknowledge my weaknesses and limitations, bearing in mind that sometimes it was not the well-learned and highly equipped people that make us better persons but the simple and lowly ones like the farmers. Working with them for a couple of years, I was able to discover the most essential in life, which is worth more than any doctoral degree.

3. One of the many conversions that molded me into who I am today was being stripped of myself before the Lord. I realized that I do not know anything and that I need people to accompany me on the journey. They taught me how to love and be faithful in little things, to appreciate the beautiful life with which God has gifted me and the possibility to grow into the person that He wants me to be.

4. Now, I look at every situation and experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, as a gift and blessing because only then can I discover my strength and capacity as a person and how far I can go when things get tough. Going beyond in the eyes of faith is fulfilling, knowing that in the end, we will be judged according to our love.

Sister Rochelie BLANCIA  
*Daughter of Charity*



## My life as a servant in the Province of Central Africa

### All is grace

In response to a call from Bishops, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Burundi in 1971 and in my parish in 1977. That is where I met them and witnessed their love for those who are poor and their corporal and spiritual service. I allowed the desire to follow Jesus with them, which I tried in vain to snuff out, mature. After several years, I asked to be admitted to the Company, and I began my Postulancy, which at that time took place in the parish.

**From 1983 to 1987**, government persecution of the Church began, with the closure of religious buildings, removal of crosses, confiscation of minor seminaries and schools run by consecrated men and women, imprisonment of priests and silencing of bishops. Many missionaries were sent away when renewal of their visas was denied. The Daughters of Charity had to close their six local communities in the country. Native congregations took up several buildings and services. The General Council of the Company sent some missionary Sisters to other countries, and the rest of the missionary and native Sisters went to Rwanda. The Seminary moved to Rwanda to welcome the three Postulants on February 2, 1986. I was one of them!

As a Postulant, I had to leave my country, but after Seminary, I was sent on mission even farther away, to Congo and a newly opened local community in the diocese of Goma. I shared the sufferings and joys of *Ad Gentes* missionaries: for three months, I could neither understand those who were poor nor communicate

### *Sisters' Testimonies*

with them, but I was happy to be among them. The mothers' harsh living conditions helped me better understand the demands of my vocation as a servant. I also more fully realized the importance of our presence in this region where the people felt abandoned by the civil and religious authorities. The parish had existed for thirty-five years, and we were the first congregation to respond to the Bishop's call! Ten years had already passed since the Catholic population had built a house for the Sisters and a space for a small clinic, but no one had agreed to come to this remote, difficult to reach location. Even priests thought that it was a punishment to be assigned there! And yet, what communion between the poor and ourselves! Honestly, they watched over us. They knew that we were unfamiliar with the region, and they made sure we had everything that we needed. It was a great joy for them and us when we would walk through the deep forest to visit villages located at the edge of the parish, forty kilometers or more away.

**Finally, on November 20, 1996**, the Daughters of Charity returned to Burundi. Following the bloody events of 1993, numerous missions were deserted, and many people had taken refuge in cities because they were safer than in the countryside and hilly region.

Personally, I was delighted to return to my county that I had to leave in order to pursue my formation since the Daughters of Charity had to leave like the rest. It had been the first time that I went far away from my parents to follow Christ and serve Him as a Daughter of Charity.

Back in Burundi, we returned to our old local community house. The poor were happy to see us again; for them, it was a sign of peace to see foreign Sisters again in their region that the government had labeled a "red zone". There was much to be done to rouse the inhabitants' spirits and willpower. I took care of the orphaned children and those who suffered from malnutrition. There was no orphanage; I followed up on them in their little

huts, generally destroyed by the war. Others were housed with volunteer foster mothers who did not have enough to support even themselves. They were the first to encourage me in the face of the large number of children left to fend for themselves and to give me ideas for the good of the children, for example, even going to court to recover the land that belonged to one of the families of orphans but that neighbors had taken for themselves. Every morning, I prepared to receive new cases. We were welcomed as saviors during each home visit. Sometimes I wondered if I was really in my native country. Solidarity had disappeared; the way uncles or aunts oppressed young children was unbelievable. I learned to be patient, to be both a mother and a father, ready to forgive at every moment. This was necessary since the older children had trouble thinking of the youngest ones, and when they received assistance for the babies, they would resell it to have pocket money or a ticket to go to the capital. I also had to start all over again with the mothers of children sick due to malnutrition. Just when they seemed to understand how to fight against this illness, two months later, they would bring the child back to me in worse condition than before, saying, "Here is your child!" It was a call to recognize the trust and humility these mothers had for the caregivers and to more deeply live Christ's words, "Let the little children come to me."

Sister Bernadette BIZIMANA  
*Daughter of Charity*

Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta  
Daughter of Charity (1875-1958)  
Servant of God  
*“Sower of the culture of mercy”*

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**Title from her declaration as Venerable**

*History of  
the Company*

In Madrid on the morning of December 18, 1958, Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta received the sacrament of the sick and, looking at a statue of the Virgin Mary assumed into heaven, said, *“My Mother, into your hands, I place my life and the future of the Province. May those who come after us be better than we are.”* She kissed the crucifix and died.

Because of her reputation of holiness, the ecclesial curia of Madrid held the diocesan process from December 12, 1991, to December 2, 1993. The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints recognized its validity with a decree on November 25, 1994. In Rome on June 6, 2017, the theological consultors recognized the heroic virtue of the Servant of God. During the ordinary session on March 20, 2018, the Bishops and Cardinals, including Cardinal Angelo Amato, recognized that the Servant of God had heroically lived the theological and cardinal virtues and the specific virtues of the Daughters of Charity.

On April 14, 2018, the Vatican made public the decree by which the Church, through Pope Francis, recognized the exemplary virtue of Venerable Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta. This was a great joy for all the older Sisters who had known her. This recognition describes her way of being, her lifestyle and her mission, *“never looking at another with indifference or turning away from the suffering of her brothers and sisters”* (cf. Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, 20). *“The Servant of God, Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta e Idoy, was an eminent witness of this culture of mercy: her heart, animated by an extraordinary love, never closed to the suffering of her brothers and sisters, and her eyes never ceased to see in them the face of the Divine Spouse”* (text of the decree).

### **A happy childhood**

The Domínguez de Vidaurreta family was well known in Tafalla (Navarra) and the surrounding area. Justa’s parents, Telesforo and Celestina, were Catholics with a good social standing. Her grandparents, endowed with a noble coat of arms, enjoyed an excellent reputation in Mendigorriá (Navarra). In 1875, Telesforo, the president of the Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul of Navarra, and Celestina, involved in the parish, were expecting their third child. They asked God for a girl, in good health, because their first two sons were sickly. Due to the war between liberal and conservative forces, the Domínguez de Vidaurreta Idoy, conservatives, had to flee to Azpeitia (Guipúzcoa) at the end of summer 1875 because of death threats. A family friend welcomed them into his home. Justa was born there on November 2, 1875. Justa was baptized in San Sebastian Parish in Azpeitia in the same baptismal font as Saint Ignatius of Loyola. She would thus tell her friends, *“Since we were born in Azpeitia and baptized in the same baptismal font as Saint Ignatius, we should be saints like he was; this is what God asks of us.”*

### Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta

The war over, the family returned to Tafalla where it recovered its stability despite the loss of some assets. From her mother and maternal grandmother, Justa learned to love God and those who are poor, to discover the essential role of prayer and to endure difficulties in life patiently. From her father, she learned the sense of justice and love of those who are poor by accompanying him on his visits to patients in the hospital and lonely elderly people in Tafalla.

### **Learning faith and charity**

With her five younger brothers, Justa learned to live as a good Christian, attentive to the needy after the example of her four aunts who were Daughters of Charity (two on her father's side and two on her mother's side).

After the exile of the war, Justa went to a private school that had just opened. In 1888, at the age of 12, Justa made her First Communion and said, "*The King of kings, the God of purity, will enter me, and He wants to find my soul clean and very beautiful... What happiness to adore Him who can do all things in myself.*" From then on, the Eucharist would be the center of her life. That same year, the Daughters of the Cross opened San José Intermediary School, and Justa enrolled as a boarding student. Gifted, she continued to develop her faith life and her love of those who are poor. Along with humanities and science classes, she studied sacred history and learned handicrafts such as sewing, embroidery, knitting, etc.

At the school, she was part of a good band of friends. She enrolled in the Children of Mary in the parish and the youth conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded by Father Victor Lerralde, chaplain of the hospital in Tafalla, which the Daughters of Charity administered. When she left school, she was fully involved in the charitable activity of the parish and wanted to give herself to God.

## Discovery of her vocation as a teacher

During her three academic years with the Daughters of the Cross, Justa deepened her faith life and compassion for those who are poor. She had a sense of responsibility and discovered the importance of spiritual direction thanks to her director, the parish priest of Santa Maria.

Her classmates said of her, *“She was serious and worked hard in class, but was full of life and amusing during recess. She had leadership qualities. She earned her friends’ affection simply and without forcing herself. With them, she organized a Sunday literacy class in the San José classrooms and the parish vestibule.”*

She enjoyed teaching others to read and explaining the catechism during evening classes. Sundays after Mass, she taught the domestic employees’ young daughters. With great creativity, she kept their attention and spoke in a simple, easy to understand way in order to communicate her message. Her four closest friends, Francisca, Juana, Emilia and Maria, admired her leadership, sense of humor, pleasant conversation and ability for healthy entertainment. The first two also became Daughters of Charity. Her first biographer, Enrique Albiol, described her as a good educator. *“A talented and precise person, serious without being closed, friendly without being indiscreet, she earned people’s affection... joyful and with a sense of humor, she was also wise in her judgement and morally upright... throughout her life, she kept a young heart with the same purity of her childhood and adolescence... expressive, cordial, humble of heart, devoted... Frank and energetic, firm in her decisions, loyal in her relationships, with a deep sense of friendship... a refined observational prowess and autodidactic pedagogy... gentle and pleasant tone; her voice communicated the peace, light and serenity of her deep inner life.”*

## The call to be a Daughter of Charity

A little before she would turn twenty, a charming young man from a good family showed interest in Justa, and her parents had a favorable opinion of him. It was a good match for her and for the family! However, God had other plans for Justa. In the depths of her being, Justa heard God's call to give herself totally to Him. Her spiritual director encouraged her in that direction. She quickly set aside the idea of marriage and discerned her religious vocation. Should she enter the contemplative order of the Most Pure Conception, also known as Recollects? or the Daughters of the Cross, who are good teachers? or instead the Daughters of Charity who serve those who were poor in the hospital and whom she had met during her visits to the sick? She rapidly put aside the Recollects but hesitated between the Daughters of Charity and the Daughters of the Cross. A bell ringing was God's sign for her.

In a letter to her friend Maria, Justa wrote, "*Hearing the bell of the Tafalla hospital chapel, something resonated in the depths of my soul... It was as if the voice of God were drawing me to the Daughters of Charity, where I have several aunts. Their witness and dedication to the service of the poor attract my heart to this Company.*"

Aware of what she would have to give up, she implored her friend to ask the Holy Virgin and Saint Joseph to obtain for her the graces that she would need to make such an important step. "*Yes, my dear Maria, having a real vocation, we cannot aspire to greater happiness than consecrating ourselves to Our Lord in the flower of our youth and observing the precious chastity, poverty and obedience that are the religious vows.*"<sup>1</sup>

When she wrote these lines on December 3, 1894, Justa was just 19 years old, but she was convinced of God's call, and her deci-

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1 Albiol, Enrique, CM: *Madre Justa, biografía*, [*Mother Justa, a biography*]  
Ed. La Milagrosa, Madrid 1961, p. 18.



sion was firm. She hoped to follow Christ resolutely and enjoy the foretaste of heaven implied in fidelity to God's will and the total gift of self to God to serve Him in persons who are poor. At the end of December 1894, she wrote again to Maria with advice about her future. *"Today, I asked during Holy Communion that you might really know what you want in order to do the will of God Our Lord and become a saint... I ask you to entrust this delicate matter of your vocation first to the Holy Virgin and then to her beloved spouse Saint Joseph... Ultimately, may the will of your dear Spouse be done, and you will be happy wherever He wants you."*<sup>2</sup>

The force and certainty with which she conveyed her conviction that God was calling her to be a Daughter of Charity to her parents and brothers impressed them. *"Would you have said the same thing if my fiancé were a billionaire and I had to go with him to the other end of the earth? ... Well, the Spouse whom I have chosen is much more than a billionaire; rather, it is He who has chosen me and assures my happiness and the family's honor."*<sup>3</sup>

### **Formation, work and sending on mission**

On June 1, 1895, leaving her family, friends and any personal plan, Justa began Postulancy at the Municipal Hospital of Pamplona, persuaded that every decision implies a choice and giving up other things. Guided by her Sister Servant, Sister Sarasa, she gradually learned the practices of the Company. One of her postulant companions said, *"She quickly earned the esteem and admiration of the patients and of all those around her... To sustain her spirit of faith, she dedicated herself to prayer and did so with such great piety that she edified me as well as the others."*<sup>4</sup>

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2 *Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis, Summarium*, Selected writings, p. 550.

3 *Ibid*, Test. II, p. 73.

4 *Ibid*, Test. III, p. 78; Test. XX, p. 406.

*Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta*

On September 4, 1895, she arrived in Madrid where the Visitatrix, Sister Jovellar, and the Seminary Directress, Sister Alvaro, received her. Her companions emphasized how easily she adapted to the rhythm of the Seminary: schedule, classes, cleaning and housework, tasks that she was not very accustomed to doing in her family home. The Sisters also brought out her joy, sense of humor and creativity in classes. A companion said that her natural humility and sense of the presence of God were disconcerting. She never spoke about herself nor matters concerning her. When someone hurt her and then asked forgiveness, she welcomed the request with great kindness as if nothing had happened. The formation program at that time centered on four doctrinal points: the Catechism and Christian doctrine, the Gospel and the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Rules given by Saint Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity and the lives of the Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and the then-Venerable Louise de Marillac.<sup>5</sup> Formation focused on the person of Christ, source and model of charity.

At the end of her Seminary, she received her first mission as Sister of Office on the formation team. Surprised, she obediently accepted. The Directress entrusted her with the humanities, culture and religion classes for the Seminary Sisters. Along with the subject matters, she sowed little seeds of the values that she lived: remaining in the presence of God, work well done, love of truth, loyalty to Superiors, responsibility, steadfastness and, above all, seeking God's glory in everyday life. She strove to be faithful to the Holy Rules even in the smallest matters.<sup>6</sup>

On September 8, 1900, she made vows for the first time. Her life became more and more configured to that of Jesus Christ. During the cholera epidemic that struck several neighborhoods of Madrid in 1905, she demonstrated heroic generosity in the service of the sick. Seven of her companions would die from cholera. Justa

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5 Cf. Biographical notice on Father Etienne (Directives for the Seminary of the Daughters of Charity)

6 *Positio*, op. cit., *Informatio*, pp. 265-269.

remained totally available, both for service of the sick in emergencies and for teaching in the schools near the Central House or for catechesis in the parish. During twenty-six years in this “hidden” office, she aptly harmonized teaching with development of the virtues of humility, simplicity and charity, to which she bore witness in simple services such as cooking, cleaning, clothes washing, ironing and sewing. One of the Seminary Sisters said of Sister Justa, *“Although she had to repeat the same reminders, she never demeaned us. Her rule was to make us understand that by living in the presence of God, everything is done well. She served each Sister and especially, with heroic patience, bore with all the Sisters who had hurt her... She strove all the harder to please them and accept them.”*<sup>7</sup>

### **Seminary Directress**

On December 17, 1922, she was appointed Seminary Directress at 47 years of age and 27 years vocation. To prepare for this new mission, she went to the Motherhouse in Paris, where she remained a month and a half. The focus of her teaching would be living baptism as fully as possible. Many testimonies state that she insistently would repeat, *“A good Christian is the foundation for building a good Daughter of Charity, and a good Daughter of Charity is the foundation for building a saint.”*<sup>8</sup> Convinced that it is only based on Christ that one can be a true servant of those who are poor and continue His mission among them, she encouraged the Sisters to allow themselves to be configured to Him who is the source and model of all charity. She considered the Rules of the Company a good summary of the Gospel and a *good program for holiness.*

Her convincing words came from her heart. *“Acting with charity and purity of intention, let us be at peace and ready to offer the sacrifice that God asks of us at each moment. If we encounter a*

7 Albiol, E., op. cit., p. 146.

8 *Positio*, op. cit., *Summarium*, Test. XII, Ad. 59-60, p. 251.

Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta

*situation that seems impossible to bear, let us place our trust in Him, and He will act in us. Let us always strive to be instruments of God.”<sup>9</sup> “When you live in faith and walk in the presence of God, you see clearly that everything comes from God, that He knows all things and that He can do anything. We can be sure that nothing happens that He has not arranged or allowed, and as a result, let us exercise our faith, and our souls will be at peace and joyful.”<sup>10</sup>*

Sisters testified at her beatification process, “Hers was a soul full of God that understood very well the situation and the inner state of the person with whom she was interacting. Her guidance and advice greatly helped me to be an authentic Daughter of Charity.”<sup>11</sup> “She was humble and simple... She eagerly received us and never wore a serious expression... When we went to see her with any sort of problem, she firmly advised us to place it in God’s hands, sure that He would give us the appropriate help and solution... She was admirable with the sick Seminary Sisters..., gently and kindly comforting them. Her concern for each person extended to material and spiritual matters, which is why the Seminary Sisters loved her. I observed a high spiritual level in the Seminary.” The same Sister added, “She had extraordinary love for her Superiors and inculcated that love in us. She demonstrated no particular like or dislike for any Sister; she was impartial and corrected with extraordinary charity... We Seminary Sisters observed something special in her: an intense desire to give herself totally to God. She wanted us to share what she felt. She had a very strong desire for perfection, for feeling the presence of God, and she wanted us to feel it as well. This was an expression of zeal for the glory of God... Faith in the person of Christ, very important for the service of those who are poor, was one of her favorite formation themes... She had great trust in God and recommended frequent prayer... When she needed to

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9 Ibid, Test. XIV, pp. 297-98

10. Public copy of the Process, Writings, Letters, *Proc.* f. 2055.

11. *Positio*, op. cit., *Summarium*, Test. XIV. Ad. 15-20; p. 198

*make an important decision or had a difficult problem to resolve, she would say, 'Let's leave this matter on the table and go to the chapel to consult the Lord'... She reminded the Seminary Sisters of the spirit of our Founders... Her instructions helped us approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation with renewed faith, and once a week we had available to us enough confessors for us to choose among... I think that, thanks to her spirit of faith, she was able to hold firm in the various difficult moments of her life... She was very invested in our formation and wanted it to be perfect in order to bring children to knowledge of the Kingdom of God and thus make it as present as possible here on earth... When you would ask her something, she would reflect on its suitability and appropriateness, and if she realized that it was not possible, she would say so, but if possible, she would look for a solution that would satisfy you.'*<sup>12</sup>

Another Sister said, *"Sister Justa had great faith... she had great love of Christ... and a great desire for perfection and for zeal for the glory of God, which she communicated to us through her behavior and words... She wanted us never to forget our love of the Church... I remember her reflecting on her determination to be faithful to grace's action: 'our relationship to grace sanctifies us, not places'..."*<sup>13</sup>

Her primary mission for thirty-six years was the formation of young Sisters, a task that she performed with joy and application.

## **Provincial Visitatrix**

Sister Justa was appointed Visitatrix on July 24, 1932, when the Spanish Province was the largest in the world (8,300 Sisters and 628 local communities). She began this mission during a difficult period of anticlericalism and more or less overt persecution of the Church. The Second Republic had been proclaimed on April

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12. Ibid, Test. XXX, p. 519-520 and p. 527-529.

13. Ibid, Test. XXXIII, pp. 571-572.

*Sister Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta*

14, 1931, aggravating the conflict between Church and State. On May 11, 1931, the clash escalated when convents and houses of religious were set on fire. Spain was swept by a wave of secularism against the Church that would culminate in the Civil War (1936-1939): many community houses were closed and even destroyed. Sisters were forbidden from serving in social works that they had administered for decades. In these difficult times, Sister Justa kept her calm and absolute trust in God, particularly in 1936 when she was detained by popular militia in a long “house arrest” during which she suffered offenses and humiliations. Sister Justa showed her readiness for martyrdom, a highly-present reality in the Spanish Church at that time. During the persecution of the Civil War, twenty-nine Daughters of Charity were assassinated (since beatified as martyrs for the faith). After a long imprisonment, she was freed and left for Valencia, then Marseille (France) and finally Sanguësa (Navarra), where she continued to set up field hospitals to care for the sick.

The civil war over, she returned to Madrid. With renewed commitment, she dedicated herself to formation, reorganization and the government of the Sisters of the Province. At the request of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Propaganda Fide) and with the approval of the general Superiors, she sent missionary Sisters to Cuttack, India. In 1945, the government awarded her the Great Cross of Charity, an honorary decoration for her great merit in the field of charitable work.

In the final stage of her life, she continued to promote vocations and the expansion of the Company. The Servant of God’s strong personality harmonized perfectly with a deep spirituality, yielding a life overflowing with charity in the service of those who are poor and of her Sisters in community. Her humanitarian and evangelizing work was founded on the faith she received beginning in her childhood with her family.

Whatever the situation, Sister Justa passed on the Gospel message and encouraged her Sisters to live an active and renewed fidelity to the original charism. In 1952, she made possible the foundation of the Company in the Dominican Republic.

Her simplicity and purity of intention helped her always be attentive to people's material and spiritual needs. Beginning in her adolescence, active participation in parish activities developed her sensitivity toward those who are poor and excluded, for whose promotion she maternally worked in practical ways. Always ready for forgiveness and reconciliation, constantly and generously practicing virtue, Sister Justa attained a great spiritual maturity that earned her a reputation for holiness in her lifetime.

Sister María Angeles Infante  
*Daughter of Charity*  
*Vice-Postulator*

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## **Immaculate Mother,**

**we thank you,  
for reminding us that, because of Jesus Christ's love,  
we are no longer slaves to sin,  
but free, free to love, to love one another,  
to help one another as brothers and sisters, despite  
our differences —  
and thank God for the differences among us.**

**Thank you,  
because with your purity,  
you encourage us  
not to be ashamed of good, but of evil;  
you help us to keep at a distance the evil one,  
who deceives us and draws us to himself,  
into coils of death;  
you grant us the gentle reminder that we are  
children of God, Father of immense goodness,  
eternal source of life, beauty and love. Amen.**

*Pope Francis  
December 8, 2019*

