



Feast of Pentecost
31 May 2020

Dear Vincentian Family Leader,

May the grace and peace of the Lord be always with you!

Our societies, and especially those whom we serve, have gone through a trial we never imagined when we were in Rome in January. We have grown weary of hearing the word “pandemic” let alone of having to deal with its consequences. We mourn our losses and accompany those who are suffering as best we can.

As we continue to struggle in varied phases of this pandemic, we fervently pray that the Holy Spirit will break through the darkness which covers our lands and bring us to a new birth and a renewed zeal for the mission entrusted to us.

It is a great joy to share with you some of the many blessings which the Lord bestowed on our Vincentian Family when we gathered in Rome from 8 – 12 January 2020. What a priceless experience of our moving forward together with over 200 representatives from 97 Branches and various apostolates of our Vincentian Movement.

Over the course of these days, we studied many themes and expressed many hopes for the future of our shared Charism.

This letter is a summary of the richness that was shared in Rome in the talks given, the feedback sessions, and so many energized discussions. Soon to follow will be a plan of action which will, hopefully, nurture your dreams into reality.

May the Lord bring to completion what He has begun in us.

Happy Feast Day!

We remain united in prayer and in service,

International Coordinator, VFO
In the name of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee
and the Vincentian Family Office Team

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Introduction

Sister Blandine Klein, SC, who was the Conference Reflector / Responder, offered us a powerful summation of our time together in Rome in January 2020. Her words give shape to the structure of this letter. She said:

The foundation of our charism is not in the defense of values but in the acceptance of being swayed by the Gospel which reaches out to all.... Our Vincentian commitment must tell our contemporaries God's concern for people marked by poverty, disease, frailty..... Our commitment must demonstrate the dignity of these people. This dignity is not linked to individual performance but must consider the history, relationships, family and social dimension of the person received.

After the leadership conference, the Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC) met to begin the process of discerning our next steps and of defining a course of action in response to what we have seen and heard.

We used Sr. Blandine's summation as a guide for our discussions. We now share some of the initial fruits of our time together in Rome.

I. The Vincentian Charism

The charism is constantly evolving and adapting. The only constant over the centuries is: "the charity of Christ urges us on." The charism is therefore alive! (Klein)

This living Charism provides us with a vision of our future as a Vincentian Family.

Repeatedly, and in various contexts, the Leaders called the Family to deepen the collaborative bonds among us. Implied in their call was the recognition that in some places collaboration has begun while in others it is only a buzz word. If we are to truly grow the charism into the future, we must, at the very least, act collaboratively in the following areas:

- i. In our delivery of services to those living in poverty,
- ii. In our common discernment of the new forms of poverty which cry for a Vincentian response,
- iii. In the relationship between consecrated and lay Vincentians, as true partners in the Mission,
- iv. In our formation in Vincentian spirituality and Vincentian pastoral praxis,
- v. In our understanding of the charism as a Movement and the equality of relationships that this implies,
- vi. In appreciating and celebrating the cultural differences within the Family which will only help us strengthen one another in our Vincentian journey,
- vii. In discerning how the Branches of the Family can be more agile, able to breathe life into their experience of the Charism while honoring their roots and history,

- viii. In a reflection of how the Family can be an agent of systemic change, and
- ix. In our willingness to change those structures which prohibit our working together in a true spirit of collaboration.

For further reflection: As I reflect on my response as a leader to “grow the charism into the future,” what actions will I commit to for each of these areas?

We invite you to reflect on four avenues in which we are called to journey.

a) From Collaboration to Communion: Vincentian Spirituality

Communion calls us to go deeper than collaboration because of the Charism we share. Such communion accepts that this path involves risk – both of failures and of successes! But in both, we hold on to the Lord made present to us in each other.

Collaboration for communion demands concrete actions to move forward. Thus, the VFEC in collaboration with Vincentian Family Office (VFO) will develop strategies to work on the following lines of action:

1. We will develop a “common” Vincentian Retreat (in a similar vein to the Ignatian retreat experience) which can then be used for both preached and guided retreats, adapted to the realities of the participants.
2. In practice, our Vincentian unity must take place and be expressed in social actions, Vincentian days, Missions characteristic of the Charism and, above all, spiritual retreats that nourish and train us to exercise unity. We will encourage each National / Regional Council to reflect these goals in their annual Vincentian Plan.
3. We will organize territorial meetings of the Superiors General of the Vincentian Family (by country, region, or continent) so that they can discern how best to collaborate with one another in the face of the poverties they confront every day.
4. We will study, together with existent National Councils, the structures in which the Vincentian Family is experienced on the local level. Where necessary, we will call for changes which will better meet the needs of those in poverty – the reason these structures exist.
5. We will dialogue with both the lay and consecrated Branches of the Vincentian Family, as we gather regionally, to formulate a practical plan for the encouragement of lay Vincentian vocations, and especially of those laity who work in consecrated-sponsored institutions.

b) Love is endlessly inventive: Vincentian Action

*Ubi caritas et amor
Ubi caritas
Deus ibi est.*

We sang this simple mantra throughout our time together. In order to give substance to this exhortation, we must appeal to our imagination, to our creative faculties. Moreover, these dreams need to be made concrete and doable so that we will be always ready to respond to the emergence of new forms of poverty. Constantly learning and applying the process of systemic change is essential for the future. Carrying out service projects with the poor in parallel with a reflection on systems and policies that impact the future of the Charism.

Thus, we will develop strategies to work on the following lines of action:

1. We will invite our Vincentian professionals, working in various ministries (health care, education, social services, women's services, etc.) to gather globally to discern the new challenges we face as Vincentians in these services.

For further reflection: Are we addressing the new forms of poverty which those whom we serve are struggling with every day? How? If not, why not?

2. Other actions which may be investigated include:
 - The exploration of models of the best practices which enshrine our Vincentian values in relation to governance and management,
 - The design of international training modules or immersion experiences for these works, and
 - The creation of tools which would support and advise on the growth of these services.
3. Through the work of the Vocations Task Force, we will provide youth with the opportunity for internships that in turn will highlight the Vincentian Charism manifested in that activity.
4. We will invite our Vincentian sociologists and those working in the arena of social justice to participate in a Systemic Change Forum which would directly address three questions:
 - i) What are the major "systems of poverty" in which the Vincentian Family is currently engaged (i.e. homelessness, human trafficking, etc.)?
 - ii) What must be done to effect systemic change in these systems?
 - iii) How can Vincentians do this effectively?

For further reflection: Can you identify members of the Vincentian Family who can assist in this process? Who?

5. We will explore the feasibility of some new Vincentian Initiatives:

- i. *The Environment*: How will the Vincentian Family respond to the call of Pope Francis and ‘*Laudato Si*’ to “swift and unified global action” in relation to environmental degradation and global warming? What might the Vincentian Family do to join in this cause to safeguard the future of our planet?
- ii. *Human slavery and people-trafficking* are great evils of the modern age. As an international network, what can the Vincentian Family do to be more effective in combatting these evils?
- iii. Disaster Relief: What protocols will enable the Vincentian Family to formulate a workable strategy when disasters strike?

c) *Dignity is not a concept - but action is a fight: Vincentian Formation*

In her keynote address on Saturday afternoon, Sister Constance Phelps, SCL said:

As we anticipate and birth new forms of living our charism in the various branches, we must assume that we are seeking God in contemplation to deepen the mystical life, that we are affirming and challenging each other in conversation, and that we find ways to support each other by deep friendship, mutuality, and trust. We must remember:

We are preparing ourselves not for the comfortable predictability of yesterday, but for the realities of today and all those unknown possibilities of tomorrow.

To accomplish this task, we need a Vincentian Formation process equal to the task. Thus, we will develop strategies to work on the following lines of action:

1. The development of a comprehensive Formation Plan for the entire Vincentian Family which will respond to the following needs of the Leaders:
 - i) A deepening of the understanding of Vincent’s spirituality and its development through the Founders of the Branches of the Vincentian Family Movement,
 - ii) A deepening of the understanding of the place of prayer in the Vincentian vocation, i.e. being Mystics of Charity,
 - iii) An understanding of collaboration as an essential missionary praxis for every Vincentian, and
 - iv) An understanding of the prophetic nature of the Vincentian vocation in the call to effect systemic change.
2. Such a Formation Plan may include initiatives such as:

- A series of new “St Lazare buildings” in various places around the world, modeled on the role that St. Lazare played in forming people during St. Vincent’s time,
- Tuesday Conferences for the modern era,
- Centers which could provide a variety of international residential formation programs for younger and older members of the Vincentian Family, and
- The development of a core training program for members of the Vincentian Family, including areas such as collaboration, systemic change, business planning, fundraising etc.?

d) *Living the charism allows you to grow spiritually and humanly: Vincentian Praxis*

Living the Vincentian Charism is not an end in itself, nor is it a search for personal satisfaction. Rather, it allows everyone to ask the right questions, to raise mountains, to act with courage and to see a future full of hope.

Thus, we will develop strategies to work on the following lines of action:

1. The Leaders of the Branches of the Family have the primary responsibility to be the first propagators of everything that we proposed in our gathering in Rome.

For further reflection:

- a) **How can you support each other, as leaders, to achieve this line of action?**
- b) **How can you share through FamVin and social media your strategies for collaborating and communicating the fruits of this meeting with your members?**

2. We will explore the feasibility of another Vincentian Leadership Congress a few years from now. Each leader will be asked to bring one of their younger members with them. This future congress will enable the Family to assess what we have done as a result of this gathering, have input on the future structure of the Vincentian Family, and continue to forge both formal and informal relationships with each other.
3. We will also invite young lay Vincentians who are not members of the Branches of the Family to participate in these international gatherings with us.

Additional crucial themes that were developed during the conference.

II. Communications

Good communication lies at the heart of any relationship. In order to strengthen our ties, to develop our collaboration, and to work for systemic change, we must come to know one another.

Concretely, Javier Chento and Monica Villar asked the following of us:

FIRST PROPOSAL: That, at least once a quarter, each branch of the Vincentian Family send a news item to be published on famvin.org. Only three or four paragraphs and some images are needed. Making known the concrete actions that are being carried out in different parts of the world is motivating, it helps us to know ourselves better and encourages collaboration, and it encourages other members of the movement of the Vincentian Family to follow suit. On the other hand, it makes visible to the outside what is being done from the Vincentian charism worldwide.

SECOND PROPOSAL: To encourage some of the members of our specific branch to collaborate periodically with some article of reflection/formation, valid for the Vincentian Family worldwide, to be published on our common websites and social networks.

THIRD PROPOSAL: The Communications Commission needs collaborators who can dedicate some time per week to maintain our communication networks in the different languages. Do we know anyone in our branch who could join the commission?

FOURTH PROPOSAL: If, in my branch, there is a communications officer, please ask him/her to contact Mr. Chento, to explore ways of collaboration. His email address is: chento@famvin.org.

FIFTH PROPOSAL: The Vincentian Family maintains contacts with numerous media in the Church and in the world through our "Press Office" (<http://famvin.info>). It is at the disposal of all when we need to report on a relevant event.

For further reflection: How will you seek to solidify the commitment of all the members of the Vincentian Family Movement to a praxis of communication, thus strengthening our relationships with each other, the Church, and other collaborators?

III. Homelessness

Leaders became more aware of the need to address this global issue and what the Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance is coordinating to address it. They received the observations of the leadership and are in direct contact with them for further development of this ministry.

For further reflection: Will you share how your Branch is working in this vital area of our Vincentian life by writing a brief article (with pictures) for FamVin and our social networks?

IV. Creation of a Culture of Vocations

We are called to invite, to welcome, to listen always with the same watchword: joy, be happy, love our world. Invite by telling our personal story, our call. We have a lot to offer as an individual, as a family: welcome with enthusiasm and listen with an open mind and a loving heart. This vocational policy is vital in the recruitment process for the different branches of the Vincentian Family. I see three points of attention:

- ✓ *Do not live in nostalgia;*
- ✓ *Is the work of the branch always done in a network?;*
- ✓ *Be present, be where the young people of today are. (Klein)*

Many observations and recommendations were sent to the Vocations Task Force as a result of the input of the Leaders. The Task Force will be in touch with you regarding the next steps which you will be invited to explore in the work of vocation promotion to the Vincentian Charism.

As mentioned in Rome, we are hoping to launch a new Vincentian Volunteer Website on Pentecost Sunday. For more information, please contact the Vincentian Family Office at vfo@famvin.org

For further reflection: If any of your apostolates can host volunteers (be it for a day, week, month, year, etc.) would you offer your site as a place in which people may experience our Charism first-hand?

V. The Transmission of the Charism

The work of the Task Force on the Transmission of the Charism was well presented by Brother Rene Stockman, FC. As leaders commented, the handing over of our spirituality to our co-workers is of utmost importance, but it is not an easy matter. For this transmission to be effective, it is necessary to seek the sources and for that rely on the experience of the older members and Branches. Opening to new forms of transmission is also necessary as we rely on the vitality and vision of the youngest, who in practice are the successors and conservers of the Charism. In conjunction with seeking the wisdom of our elders and vision of the youngest, it is critical that our employees themselves are incorporated into the passing on of the Charism.

For further reflection: What are you doing to facilitate the transmission of the Charism with your members and employees?

We are grateful to the Task Force for its work. Please be sure to read **“Not Yet All We Will Be” The Transmission of the Vincentian Charism** which presents the results of their study (Number 6 on the YAPP). It can also be found on FamVin at <http://famv.in/2020Roma>.

VI. Resources

During this congress, many other topics were addressed. We now present them so that these suggestions will not be lost.

1. Symposium Books

This meeting was another fruit of the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of the Charism celebrated in Rome in October 2017.

The compilation of all the talks given during this historic event can be purchased in the following languages: English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French, and Polish.

You may order online by going to: <https://www.vincenziani.it/simposio.html>

2. Vincentian Film Festival: Finding Vince

As we know, films can be the parables of today. Our hope is to collect in one place online, **VinFlix**, a rich resource of films that can be used by Vincentians in their ministries.

These will contain not only those films shown at the 2018 *Finding Vince Film Festival*, but all work produced by the Vincentian Family and our collaborators. We will announce when this online resource will go live.

Meanwhile, if you have any films which you would like to have shown here, please send them to the Vincentian Family Office at: vfo@famvin.org

3. YAPP

Generally, our contribution to the environment by conducting a conference as paperless as possible was successful. The talks given at the conference are now online on the

YAPP. In addition, you will find many pictures of the events of the week, as well as all the feedback which was submitted, especially from the small group discussions.

In case you have already deleted the link, you can again access all these materials by going to <https://my.yapp.us/VF2020> or to the FamVin website <http://famv.in/2020Roma>

We are also aware that some of you may not have access to this app. If that is the case, and you wish to receive the documents which we shared there, we will find a way to email them to you. Please contact us at: vfo@famvin.org

VII. Advancing the Mission

During the annual meeting of the VFEC which followed the congress, Fr. Joe Agostino (international coordinator of the VFO) spoke of several powerful encounters which he had with various participants. They were people who came from need. And yet all of them wished to contribute something extra so that the work of the Family, and the experience we shared in Rome, could live on. Heart-felt, simple, and self-sacrificing was their gesture; generous beyond words was their action; emotional was each encounter; and the resultant sense of profound gratitude for the presence of the Spirit at work in our Vincentian Family was priceless.

The VFO is a recognized 501 (c) (3) Not-for-Profit organization in the USA with Tax Exempt Status and is also listed in the Official Catholic Directory. Thus, it has the legal ability to qualify for Church and non-Church based funding.

Our challenge is to develop a comprehensive financial strategic plan which includes a detailed Vincentian Family organizational budget and advancement initiatives. Such a plan is to be collaborative, mutually benefitting both the VF Movement and the Branches of the Family. To achieve this goal, the VFO needs both the funding and personnel necessary to fulfill its international mandate for the Vincentian Family.

The VFEC has developed a concrete plan regarding an annual financial contribution to the Vincentian Family, a plan based on the number of members:

- a. From 1 to 500 members: \$1,000.00
- b. From 501 to 1,000 members: \$2,500.00
- c. From 1,001 to 2,000 members: \$5,000.00
- d. From 2,001 to 3,000 members: \$7,500.00
- e. From 3,001 to 5,000 members: \$10,000.00
- f. More than 5,000 members: \$25,000.00

The above listed contributions are suggestions and each Congregation / Association should feel free to make the donation they wish. We encourage all the Branches, according to your means, to contribute no matter how small or large.

In addition, the VFEC has decided to gather financial experts to establish an endowment fund for the Family's work. In addition to this effort:

- ✚ we will seek not-for-profit recognition in the European Union,
- ✚ we will further develop our annual appeal to the Branches of the Vincentian Family, and
- ✚ we will discern support strategies from Vincentian Family Companions who support the Mission of the Charism (though not belonging to any Branch of the Family).

For further reflection: Have you remembered to send your annual contribution to the VFO for the work of the international Vincentian Family?

Conclusion

Sister Blandine, in the final remarks of her talk on Sunday, beautifully summed up our work and sent forth the Family:

The Vincentian Family of the 21st century will be, I say we "will" and not "must" be more and more collaborative. It will be rich in all its diversity. It will be deeply spiritual. It will help others to find in their inner language the hope which will allow them to start again in life. It will be committed to systemic change. It will remain prophetic through its love of creation.

Thank you for your attention, I do not doubt that we will meet again very soon for all these collaborations to build!

And, as expressed by one of the participants:

In short: we are grateful, encouraged and challenged. Grateful for the opportunity we got, encouraged by the stories, the input and the encounters in such an international setting, and challenged to find ways of forwarding the message to our own sisters and brothers and to other people outside our inner circle.