



**Speech – September 9**  
**Inauguration of the 16<sup>th</sup> General President of the SSVP**

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*Dear members and colleagues present at this ceremony,  
To all who are watching on Ozanam TV,  
Beloved Vincentians of France,  
Members of the Vincentian Family,  
Guests, ladies and gentlemen,  
Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ!*

**Good day to all!**

Let me present this speech in the Portuguese language, understanding that this ceremony is being transmitted live by Ozanam TV, online, to Brazil and to the world. Translations of my text are available in English, French, and Spanish. Thank you.

First of all, a big thank-you to France for welcoming us so nicely! France is a friendly, hospitable country, from which the principles of equality and fraternity spread throughout the world. It is also from here that we were inspired by Saint Vincent, Ozanam, Bailly, and the other founders.

I am certain that Ozanam, Bailly, and the other founders of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society are very proud and happy on this day: in which a South-American Vincentian is elected as General President of our institution. And all this happening in the HOLY YEAR OF MERCY! It is a very great blessing!

I want to thank God and my family, relatives and friends, Vincentians, for this election and inauguration as the 16<sup>th</sup> General President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

Pope Francisco also comes from South America, as well as the new general-superior of the Congregation of the Mission, father Tomás Mavric. And it is from the “continent of Hope” that God has chosen and inspired his children to contribute to building His kingdom!

I think that our ancestors never could have imagined that one day a Brazilian would reach this position. I say this not due to lack of training or knowledge on the part of Brazilians, which would be untrue. After all, it is in Brazil that we have the greatest concentration of Conferences, Councils, Charities and volunteers. But I believe that our founders could never have imagined this, seeing as Brazil is located very far from Paris, where Ozanam and his friends began this “Work of God.” Praise God for that!

I joined the SSVP on April 16, 1986, in the city of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, upon invitation by the dear friends **Alexandre Soares** and **Paulo Rocha**. In Brazil, the young Vincentian movement was coming together. I was only 16 years old; I was a teenager who didn't even know what the acronym SSVP meant. I joined the Society so I could have a healthy way to fill up my free time on the weekends.

Only later, over time, attending the weekly meetings of the Saint Thomas of Aquinas Conference and making home visits in the needy neighborhood of San Martin, was I able to perceive the true greatness of the Saint Vincent de Paul mission – both spiritual and material. Only after some time did I conclude that "being Vincentian is making people happy" and that "practicing charity is coming nearer to Jesus Christ each day," above all to continue doing what He did when He came to this world: love and serve the poorest.

Becoming Vincentian was the best thing I've done in my life. In these 30 years of walking the path as a member, I've had the privilege of having excellent mentors who taught me everything I know. All the members and partners who have touched my life have had great importance in my path to this point, because all of you have contributed in some way to the formation of my character and improvement in my spiritual and Vincentian life. All of you have been instruments of God in my path.

In the General Council, in addition to the beloved members AMIN DE TARRAZI and MICHAEL THIO, who were role models in my life, I had two exceptional godparents. The first is named JOSÉ-RAMÓN DÍAZ-TORREMOCHA Y DÍAZ, the former General President who invited me to be part of the General Council's international communication team in the years 2000/2002. I met Torremocha in 1997, while on my honeymoon with my wife Andréa in Madrid, when I had the joy of visiting this great leader of the SSVP.

Years later, in 2008, Torremocha invited me to take on the role of International Regional Vice President for South America, a role that I have performed with great dedication to this day, accepting the invitation of Michael Thio to continue in the role during his term, which was very flattering to me.

The second Vincentian godparent that I had is HUÁSCAR NABUCO DE ABREU FILHO, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, who invited me to give a speech about "Internal and External Communication" at the 4th Iberian-American Meeting of the SSVP, held in Mérida, Mexico in 200. Huáscar is a wonderful member - a loyal, friendly, neighborly person who always knew how to open doors for talented new people in the SSVP. In Mérida after my speech, he commented in a prophetic tone: "The future General President has just spoken." I looked at him and smiled, without understanding the weight of the prophecy at that time.

In Brasília, I had excellent teachers in the Our Lady of Health Conferences, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clara of Assisi, and Our Lady of Fatima, as well as in the Our Lady of Graces Private Council, in the Divine Holy Spirit Central Council, and in the Metropolitan Council of Brasília. Teachers are not only those who praise and encourage, but above all those who correct and educate with charity.

I want to emphasize this: all the people who have crossed my path in the Vincentian life, whether members, partners, and observers, were and are important to me. You are gifts from God in my life! I feel a piece of each of you in my heart. Many of the experiences that I had in my Vincentian path are also recorded in the four books of stories that I wrote in order to share the knowledge and spread the successful Vincentian practices from various countries.

*Dear members,*

*Dear partners,*

*Dear friends,*

I also want to thank all the National and/or Superior Councils that granted me their votes, resulting in sufficient votes for my election. I also thank those who did not vote for us, respecting the will of their Councils. Thank God there is democracy in the SSVP, and we have to appreciate the existence of candidates, as the elections could not occur without them.

In Rome, the electoral process proceeded in a perfect climate of fraternity, harmony, and enjoyment. From the seven candidates who were initially nominated by the countries (one Russian, one French, one Irish, one Malaysian, and three Brazilian candidates), only two continued to the final round. This is not the first time that two Brazilians have been candidates to the General Council. In the 2010 elections, when Michael was elected, there were two countrymen as candidates. This is natural, understandable, and even desirable, since Brazil has a large number of Vincentians, conferences, and works.

But it is necessary to clarify that in an election for General President, the nationality of the candidates is a secondary consideration. Of course each one's training, availability, capability, ideas, and willingness to serve are factors to be observed. Above all, what really counts is the action of the Holy Spirit, as made clear by our tradition and our regulations.

In my election in Rome, this past June 5, I had the opportunity to express myself on two occasions, when I reaffirmed my commitment to the 20 items on the Work Plan that we will implement over the next six years, always with **seriousness in the expenses, dialogue, and transparency**.

Some of the proposals are considerable innovations, such as the creation of the role of General Ombudsman (which will be filled by a woman, so she will be a General Ombudswoman), the revision of the aggregations and institutions, and the international competition of essays about the founders. Other projects represent the revival of ideas from former General Presidents, such as the Circular Letters, the International Youth Meeting, and the publication of an annual institutional magazine from the Council.

However, the majority of the various points of our Work Program are projects that originated from my observations as Regional Vice-President, regarding themes that can help us advance and improve greatly in the management of the General Council, and strengthen the institutional role of the Council. The comments from the Zone Coordinators, National Presidents, and Regional Vice-Presidents greatly helped me to develop this Work Program. These people are at the foundation, and they know very well how to resolve any eventual problems. Therefore, we must always listen to them!

One of our main projects will be to continue the internationalization of the SSVP, as been done very successfully in China. The world has around 210 countries and nations, and the SSVP is present in 151. These numbers show that we need to enter all the regions of the planet, to take the Vincentian message to every corner. As we know, the Vincentian spirit is missionary by nature, taking us where God desires.

The urgent charity activities throughout the world serve as a great shout of alarm given the new forms of poverty and social exclusion, especially because it seems like wickedness has overcome good in the world: terrorism, violence, persecution of immigrants, the advance of poverty, economic crises that generate social abysses, lack of dialogue among religions, and destruction of the environment, among so many other global challenges.

In order to reverse this trend, we must establish more Vincentian Conferences throughout the planet, to sow seeds of charity, train new generations of God's children, strengthen family values, and build a more Christian world, based on evangelical principles, justice, and charity.

We will intensify the activities focusing on the canonization process for the blessed Ozanam, investigating a new case that has arisen in Portugal, and re-opening the case in Venezuela, in addition to widening the collection of new accounts throughout the world. Something tells me that, by the end of my term, we will be honored with the decision of the Vatican to canonize the blessed António Frederico Ozanam. Let's pray!

The area of Vincentian training will be strengthened. We will give all our support to the UNIVERSAL TRAINING, developed under the management of Michael Thio. Investing in Vincentian training is the key to preventing conflicts. The more knowledge we have, the more love is shared and fewer problems appear. In many places, it is clear that the lack of Vincentian training led to unnecessary conflicts in Conferences, Councils, and Charities, causing immense damage to the SSVP's image. We can only avoid this evil with good training.

Speaking of training, we need to rescue the original spirit of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, which has cooled in many parts of the world. We have to advance and modernize, yet without abandoning our founders' legacy. It is necessary to reinforce the role of the Vincentian Conference as "community of faith and service." It is fundamental to reaffirm the role of the Councils as a key element in supporting the work of the Conferences.

We need to emphasize that Vincentians form an "international charity network" and that they seek sanctification through committed service towards those who live in poverty. Our spiritual life is the first thing we must think about. We should take into account our holiness before doing the charity work or taking on any administrative role in the structure. The compassionate and tolerant heart of the Vincentian leaders is the secret to avoid disputes and strife within our organization. Above all, a contentious posture is neither Christian, nor evangelical, nor Vincentian.

We can always disagree, but with charity and respect. Personal opinion must yield to collective thought, as was the desire of our founders, who chose the "collegiate foundation" as a pillar for making decisions in the SSVP.

We will also be attentive to the constant renovation of the SSVP, seeking new ways and ideas to attract more youth, children and teenagers to our Conferences, since they will guarantee the continuity of our work.

We will broaden the partnerships and common projects with the International Vincentian Family. We intend to sign cooperative agreements with renowned institutions, such as "Doctors Without Borders" and the "Red Cross," in addition to increasing ties with "Caritas Internationalis" and the Vatican. We will propose the establishment of an "institutional support fund" to help the poorer National Councils in the structuring of their administrative headquarters.

Who knows? One day we could see an SSVP General President speaking before the great world leaders, at the United Nations, talking about Ozanam and his desire to "bring the whole world together in a network of charity."

We will continue the excellent initiatives led by CIAD in humanitarian aid and social projects. The good practices that are already being done by the General Council, established in the terms of my antecessors, will be maintained and strengthened. We cannot shut our eyes to the great concentrations of poverty and social vulnerability in various places of the planet. Our mission is to take the "Gospel of Hope" to all human beings, especially those who are impoverished due to humanity's lack of love.

To carry out all these challenges and initiatives, I am inviting talented and smart Vincentians from all parts of the world to occupy roles in the structure of the General Council. All the positions will be appointed by the end of the year. There are 85 members total in the International General Council. We are keeping some of the leaders of the current administration, bringing new people onto the team, renewing our cadres and allowing new ideas to arise!

The terms in the environment of the General Council are of two years, and can be renewed for equal periods, up to a total of six years. I want the people that I am inviting to continue with me until the end of my term in September 2022. Let's act together to do excellent work for the entire Confederation of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. I'd also like to thank the Vincentians who will accept our invitation from the bottom of my heart.

To the National Councils, I leave you with a message of unity. We know that the General Council is the "Council of Councils," and its role is to provide services to the countries that form our International Confederation. I hope that all think as I do: this structure can never be considered a "power structure," but rather a "hierarchy of love" that provides services to benefit the poor, beloved by God.

Therefore, I implore you to continue being generous in the donations made to the GGI and at the same time to count on us to provide a closer and more efficient service to all.

We want the General Council to be better-known in every part of the world, and for it not to be seen as a "rich cousin that lives far away" who occasionally shows up for a visit.

*Dear members,*

*Dear partners,*

*Dear friends,*

To all who closely accompanied the June 5 election, I leave you with the following message: thank you very much for your prayers, for the messages of support, and for trusting in Divine Providence. We ask in prayer that the will of God be done, and that is what we believe: God made the choice, and "God is the one who guides and will guide this work," as Ozanam said. We are mere instruments of His for the achievement of the Lord's work.

I also want to make a special request to all the partners and members in the world: pray for me, understand my limitations, and help me never to forget that this role – which I take on today – is a service within the Church. More than a service, it is a commitment to a divinely inspired work. With the support of a loyal board of directors, in harmony with the same ideals and objectives, I intend to be a servant leader, as the Vincentian Rule teaches us.

This is why I adopted as the motto for our administration the biblical passage in Mark chapter 9 verse 35: "**Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.**" This verse is

especially directed to the Vincentians who occupy roles in the structure of the SSVP, from the Conference President to the General President, and all the Vincentians who make up the boards of directors of the various Vincentians Councils.

Help me to be “the servant of all.” Help me to be “the very last.” Help me to be “the General President of your dreams.” That is what I ask of you. This task requires enormous responsibility and sacrifice, but at the same time it is a great privilege and a joy. I thank God for having chosen me for this noble function. And I hope not to disappoint you.

In my Circular Letter of January 31, 2017, I will speak directly to the partners and members in the world, introducing themes that merit reflection, in benefit of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. On that occasion, we will open the essay contest for the **YEAR OF BAILLY**. In addition, next year we will have two great anniversaries that speak directly to all our hearts: commemorating 20 years since the beatification of Ozanam and 400 years of Vincentian charisma (not to mention 300 years since the apparitions of Our Lady in Aparecida, Brazil, and 100 years since the apparitions in Fátima, Portugal).

I ask for your prayers, support, and understanding, so that together we can perform this role of service well. I always ask God to give me strength to change what is necessary, and courage to face the adversities and criticisms – sometimes unjust – that we might hear. It is necessary to have benevolence for all, tolerance of others’ imperfections, and pardon for offenses, and this is how I want to behave as General President. I will do all I can to perform well in this CGI institutional role.

The most important words in the daily routine of Vincentian activities are the following: **donation, service, charity, humility, and spirituality**. These five words represent a GREAT deal within the Vincentian charisma. If we lose this identity, we lose everything that Saint Vincent de Paul and the founders taught us. In addition, the main characteristic of the SSVP is the **lay character**, since its foundation in 1833, proposed by Ozanam and maintained throughout all these years. Laity is the key to our autonomy and our independence, and we cannot give up this characteristic which has forged our vision, mission, values, identity, and charisma.

That’s what I have to say at the moment. Thank you very much for your presence here in Paris in this ceremony, and thanks to all who joined us via the internet and Ozanam TV. Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ! May He be praised forever!

***Member Renato Lima de Oliveira***  
***16th General President***

***After the speech: read the appointment of the new board members (list of names and roles).***