

The Fruits of the Spirit

The Learnings of the Vincentian Family Symposium

Of October 2017

Introduction:

What follows below is the fruit of the reflection of many people on the themes of the Symposium. A planning committee gave it direction, speakers addressed the themes, synthesizers listened to and collated the reflections of the participants, and the planning committee organized all of this into concrete recommendations for action by the Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC).

Before the Symposium began, we prayed that the Holy Spirit would come upon us in Rome and move among us in powerful new ways. Without a doubt, we got what we prayed for!

We know that we cannot control the work of the Spirit. The learnings that are shared below are God's surprise gift to us. Our work is to respond to this gift, recognizing that it is not given for us alone, but to animate us to an even more zealous service of God's chosen ones – those whom we serve.

We prayed that we may run to them as someone runs to put out a fire. Let us also pray now that the decisions we have made will do just that.

I. The Vincentian Charism

Without a doubt, the charism of St. Vincent is a worldwide phenomenon, whose freedom and breadth have given birth to our Vincentian Movement. By very definition, this Charism-Movement is greater than any of its containers. We cannot be reticent in our expression of the charism. Today, possibly more than at any other time in our history, calls for its bold proclamation.

- A. Symposium discussions clearly call the Vincentian Family to continue to develop our understanding of the Charism from a **lay perspective by lay members of the Vincentian Family**.
 - a) This will necessarily include discussions around terminology;
 - b) This also needs to include a description of what is the Vincentian charism that can be easily articulated by the young (those under 30 years of age);
 - c) This needs to be disseminated through the full use of modern means of communication, and not just the written word.

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

1. Invite the **Vincent de Paul Center for Social Spirituality** (the Netherlands) to facilitate this study of the Charism with lay Vincentian theologians from around the world.
 2. Create a Task Force composed with members of the Vincentian Marian Youth, youth leaders of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, members of MISEVI, and members of Vincentian Family Universities to draft a definition of the Charism that can be easily articulated, understood, embraced, and acted upon by the young (and thus by all of us).
 3. Ask both groups to dialogue with experts in the field of communications, including the team at the Vincentian Family Communications Commission, to propose the methodology for disseminating the developments around these two areas above.
- B. The Symposium was a moment of **ENCOUNTER**. Over and over people spoke about the fact that what makes us Vincentian is not the charity we share but the way in which we share it. The Charism, centered on love, is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to us for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Our lived understanding of the charism comes from our encounter with Jesus, those in poverty, and one another.

- a) We must remain always ready to listen to the stories of others;
- b) Such listening includes a reciprocity which builds relationships.

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

1. Ask The Vincentian Family Office (VFO), in collaboration with its Advisory Council, to design processes and create opportunities for such encounters to continue to occur and for these stories to continue to be shared on the local, national and international levels through:
 - a) The international Branches of the Vincentian Family;
 - b) National Councils;
 - c) Regional Vincentian Family gatherings.
2. Mandate the VFO, in collaboration with its Advisory Council, to find creative ways to present the Symposium experience internationally and in all branches, where possible making use of the materials prepared by the synthesizers in each language group as well as the composite report of the six language groups.
3. Again encourage all countries in which the Vincentian Family works to create a “National Council” (or its equivalent structure) through its President, Fr. Tomaž Mavrič, CM.

4. Ask the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change and the Vincentian Family Collaboration Commission to include in their respective curriculums components on listening and storytelling.
 5. Utilize the lessons learned through “Finding Vince 400” to continue to tell the story of Vincentian efforts to globalize charity.
- C. The living of the Vincentian Charism is also a call to **Conversion** which is a necessary result of the risk of encounter. This risk will only be taken when there is:
- a) An openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and
 - b) A willingness to trust the other in the encounter.

Our horizons are expanded only when we work in collaboration with each other. The fruits of such collaborations are:

- a) Our Viability and Credibility – as we work with the members of our own Branches as well as other Branches, and
- b) Our Life for the Future – as we work with others who share our same vision for making life more truly human.

As we engage in this process, the power of the Charism is set free, for it is much larger than any of its containers and much greater than all of us.

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

1. Personally invite the Superiors General of the Vincentian Family to a more intentional membership in the Family. This invitation will happen during face-to-face meetings by the VFO team with the Superiors General to provide another moment of encounter. They will include a personal invitation to participation in the next meeting of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family in January 2020.
2. To encourage National Councils to invite the Collaboration and Systemic Change Commissions to help the Vincentians in their countries learn the necessary tools for collaborating for systemic change.
3. To ask the Vincentian Family NGO's working at the United Nations, as well as in Geneva and Brussels, to assist the Vincentian Family so that it may grow in awareness of those international organizations that are champions on behalf of persons living in poverty and to help the Family form collaborative relationships with them.

II. Vincentian Formation

The Vincentian Charism has evolved into a multi-cultural Movement over the course of its history. This reality necessitates the need for the Vincentian Family to spend some time and effort into thinking beyond our traditional Branch-based structures. Today our eyes need to be directed toward outward focused processes, communications, and education that is broader, more fluid, and applicable to others beyond our usual reach or familiarity: e.g. un-churched youth and other millennials; those of other faiths or no faith; collaborators drawn by the Charism's values and characteristics and sense of encounter.

- A. The experience in Rome was a counter-cultural one. It was a powerful reminder that if the Vincentian Family is not inclusive or open to others, it will die. A necessary piece of the formula for the future is formation.

Such Vincentian Formation in the Charism can never be done in isolation. It is inclusive by nature – and must include all the Branches in a locale, leaders as well as members, consecrated as well as laity, the young as well as seasoned members, those living in poverty as well as those who serve them.

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

Mandate the existent Vincentian Family Task Force on Formation to design strategies around the above statement. Of particular concern will be the inclusion of those living in poverty in the formation which we offer.

- B. Effective formation demands the good use of all the modern means of communication and education available to us. As such, we must be willing to invest time, people, and money into the creation of effective means of communication and education. Such communication is more than the sharing of information. It includes, but is not limited to the internet, social media, and verbal as well as non-verbal avenues for sharing the Charism.

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

1. To hire an Executive Director for a Vincentian Family Press Office for the promotion of the Mission of the charism.
2. To create a Vincentian Family advisory group to assist this Executive Director. Advisors will include members of the VF Communications Commission as well as experts from VFEC Branches and other collaborators.

III. The Charism into our Future

The participants of the Symposium made clear to us that the future is NOW, it has already begun! And, given this reality, we must ask ourselves some hard questions in the here and now. Failure to address these today will have dire consequences for the Vincentian Family tomorrow. The Spirit has given us this moment of grace, not for ourselves, but as a gift to be given especially to those in poverty we serve. Some of the questions which were raised over the 4 days included:

- a) Are we willing to take risks?
- b) Are we willing to let go?
- c) Are we willing to acknowledge and work with new forms of poverty?
- d) Are we willing to redefine Vincentian Family membership?
- e) Are those living in poverty truly welcome at our planning tables – are they really integrated into our projects?
- f) Are we willing to engage in ongoing formation?

In response to this reflection, the VFEC has decided to:

1. Prioritize the Systemic Change principle of the integration of those in poverty in our planning projects.
 - a) That we encourage the Branches of the Family to examine how they realize this priority;
 - b) That we ask the Systemic Change and Collaboration Commissions to again emphasize this principle as a key component of their formations.
2. Name a Task Force to study how to best transfer the religious (consecrated) leadership of sponsored ministries to lay leadership. This Task Force will need to address, among others, the following questions:
 - a) In collaboration with the Task Force on Formation, what is the requisite formation in the Charism;
 - b) Shared governance;
 - c) Distributed leadership;
 - d) Methodologies for clarifying roles, responsibilities, and relationships, etc.;
 - e) And lessons to be learned from other congregations facing the same challenges.

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