

TRAINING REFLECTION
SPECIAL EDITION
July-September 2023

**Proceedings of the AIC International Assembly of Delegates
Rome – 21st-24th March 2023**



AIC • 2023

ROME

Citizens of the world,
walking united in hope



Associations present



Present through prayer

Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Cuba, Curaçao, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guyana, Ireland, Japan, Mozambique, Paraguay, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Venezuela.

Programme

Tuesday 21st March

Responsible citizens of the world

Opening ceremony

- 1) **Words of welcome** (*Elena Capra*)
- 2) **Opening speech** (*Rose de Lima Ramanankavana*)
- 3) **Presentation of AIC delegations** (*Tayde de Callataÿ, Clara Ines Diaz Henao, Suzanne Johnson*)
- 4) **Presentation of the AIC and Executive Board activity reports**
(*Rose de Lima Ramanankavana, Bénédicte de Bellefroid*)
- 5) **Presentation of the Synod 2021-2023**
(*Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Thierry Bonaventura, Alicia Duhne*)

Solemn opening mass (*Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle*)

Presentation of spiritual advisors (*Sr Hanna Cybula, DC, Fr. E. Typamm, CM*)

Presentation of the EB candidates (*Melodee de Castro*)

Presentation: Protection of creation – sustainable development – climate change
(*Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, CM*)

Presentation of AIC projects, group work and plenary discussion

Awarding of the *Dominique Prize for Sustainable Development 2018, 2020, 2022*

Closing of the day – prayer – *Fr. E. Typamm, CM*

AIC solidarity evening

Wednesday 22nd March

Networking to unite our strengths

Papal audience and visit to St Peter's Basilica

Presentation: Networking within the Vincentian Family, with international organisations, and within AIC (*Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, CM*)

Presentation of testimonies from partnerships within the Vincentian Family, within AIC and with international organisations (representation work)

Group work

Eucharist

Thursday 23rd March

How should we react to contemporary forms of poverty?

Prayer

Introduction to the day – Key theme

Presentation: Actions to address the consequences of the pandemic and other contemporary crises
(*Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, CM*)

Awarding of the *Claire and Jean Delva Prize to tackle violence against women 2019 & 2021*

Presentation of AIC projects, group work and plenary discussion

Presentation: *The path to effective charity* (Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, CM)

Group work: parallel meetings

- **National Presidents' meeting** (*Rose de Lima Ramanankavana, Bénédicte de Bellefroid, Tayde de Callataÿ, Christine Peeters, Gilberte Van Caneghem*)
- **Spiritual Advisors' meeting** (*Alicia Duhne, Laurence de la Brosse*)
- **Meeting for other participants:**
 - o **French:** *Milagros Galisteo, Florence Odile Enganeben*
 - o **Spanish:** *Clara Inés Diaz Henao, Lottie de Pivaral, Ana Lucia Gondim*
 - o **English:** *Suzanne Johnson, Melodee de Castro*
 - o **Italy:** *Paola Secondini, Myriam Odoardi*

Workshops: **Priority Lines of Action 2023-2026 – Choice of priorities** (*Erica Melloni*)

Eucharist

International folklore evening

Friday 24th March

The future of AIC – Getting down to action!

Prayer

Introduction to the day – Key theme

Workshops: **Priority Lines of Action 2023-2026 – Follow up of the Assembly** (*Erica Melloni*)

Closing workshops: **The future of AIC** (*Erica Melloni*)

- a) **Evaluation of the Assembly**
- b) **Commitments**

Farewell speech (*Rose de Lima Ramanankavana*)

Statutory Assembly (*Christine Peeters*)

Conclusions (*New President*)

Closing Eucharist

Italian night (*AIC Italy*)

With the generous support of:



Words of welcome

Elena Capra, President of AIC Italy

I am moved and honoured to take the floor today, in the presence of so many figures of authority and so many AIC volunteers from all over the world, exceptional witnesses to charity and faith.

I am especially moved by the idea that after five difficult years, during which we were forced to cancel our Assembly due to the seriousness of the circumstances, we are able to host such an important and significant event for our Association in Italy.



We thank the Lord for bringing us here, and we thank Saint Vincent and Saint Louise for their invaluable guidance (the paintings you see hanging on the walls were painted especially for this occasion).

Welcome to all of you who show love for people living in poverty.

Welcome to His Eminence Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and thank you to His Excellency Bishop Raffaello Martinelli of Frascati for welcoming us to this wonderful region, where Vincentians have been present for centuries.

Welcome to the representatives of the Vincentian Family: to Father Gregorio Banaga, CM, Vicar General; to our international spiritual advisors, Sister Hanna Cybula, DC, and Father Emmanuel Typamm, CM; to our national spiritual advisors, Sister Maria Rosaria Matranga and Father Giuseppe Carulli – to both of them go our thanks for their spiritual guidance and help in organising this event.

Thank you to Paolo Beccegato, Deputy Director of Caritas Italy and Head of the International Zone, for his availability. Thank you to the Aldobrandini Family, who have supported the Vincentian Volunteers for centuries. I would also like to greet and thank all the people and authorities present here today whom I have not mentioned, and I apologise for this.

Over the next few days, we will pay special tribute to Rose de Lima, who has guided us through these last three very difficult years, and to Alicia, who we were unable to thank from the bottom of our hearts three years ago, to whom we express our gratitude for having carried out such an important task with a such a strong sense of duty and dedication. We will have the opportunity to say goodbye to them later.

Dear friends, words fail me, but I would like to thank you again, because even if there are still a thousand problems of language, organisation, arrivals and departures to sort out, we remain united: in our hearts, in our enthusiasm for our charism and in our fidelity to our mission!

Over the next few days, we will discover experiences and ideas from every continent on issues of great importance: respect for our planet – the protection of creation, sustainable development and climate change; the importance of networking and being united in hope; and finally, on how to respond to the new forms of poverty that are tragically on the rise in the world today. I thank you and wish you all a productive and joyful Assembly.

Opening speech: Citizens of the world, walking united in hope

Rose de Lima Ramanankavana, AIC International President

Dear AIC volunteer sisters, dear friends, dear guests,
Here we are, finally, all together on this great day, as we inaugurate the start of our International Assembly 2023.

Let us give thanks to the Lord; his GRACE is inexpressible.

First of all, I would like to thank all our dear guests who have kindly responded to our invitation and I welcome them among us:



In particular:

- His Eminence Cardinal Tagle, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples
- The Vice-President of Caritas Italy, Mr Paolo Beccegato (representing the President, who is unable to attend)
- Mr Thierry Bonaventura, Communications Manager for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. He works with Cardinal Mario Grech, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops.
- The Father General's representative, Father Gregory Bananga, CM, Vicar General. The Father General apologised for not being able to be with us.
- Sr. M. R. Matranga, DC, National Visitatrix
- Father Gabriel Naranjo, Spiritual Advisor of AIC Colombia, who has agreed to be with us during these days of training to share his knowledge with us. Many thanks, Father Naranjo.
- Monsignor Viva, Bishop of Albano
- Monsignor Raffaello Martinelli, Bishop of Frascati

Allow me also to introduce our two AIC International Spiritual Advisors: Father Emmanuel Typamm, CM, Sister Hanna Cybula, DC.

Welcome to all you fathers, sisters and spiritual advisors who have come to support the volunteers from AIC groups around the world. Thank you for your commitment and spiritual guidance.

I cannot continue my speech without expressing my deep gratitude to the volunteers of AIC Italy, particularly the National President, who leads the association, and the volunteers who, since the beginning of the preparations, have shown their enthusiasm and commitment so that this great assembly can take place in the best conditions despite the still fragile and difficult world context.

I would also like to thank AIC Colombia, which was ready to host the AIC international assembly 2020 in Bogota, an assembly that had to be cancelled at the very last minute because of the pandemic. Your hard work went a long way in preparing this assembly.

THANK YOU ALL! AND WELCOME TO ALL MY VOLUNTEER SISTERS!

Welcome to all of you too, dear interpreters, who are always present when we request your help.

Today, we are gathered here in this beautiful place, together, from every continent, after these dark years of pandemic.

And together we are going to look for ways to move forward, despite the many challenges of the post-pandemic period, atrocious wars and disasters of all kinds, because as the Pope said in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, *“we are [...] called to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God, who makes himself present, accompanies us with tenderness, [...] and, above all, guides our path”* (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Peace, 1st January 2023).

The Lord’s grace will accompany us, and St Vincent and St Louise will inspire us!

The theme that we have chosen for our assembly clearly shows that we are not going to give up in the face of the multiple catastrophes in the world today, because we are all “citizens of the world, walking united in hope”. We are going to unite our talents, our strengths, our convictions and our Vincentian values to train ourselves, so we can face the new forms of poverty in a world that is changing ever more rapidly.

I would like to express a special thought for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who are living through long months of suffering from the war. Let us think of our Ukrainian volunteer sisters who have put their own needs aside to come to the aid of the victims of these atrocities. The value of charity inherited from St Vincent and St Louise inspires you and urges you to always do more.

But I also can’t forget all the volunteers around the world who have shown an immense wave of support in welcoming refugees or sending aid of all kinds from every continent. What a wonderful example of solidarity!

We have followed what our Holy Father the Pope told us: *“the greatest lesson we learned from Covid-19 was the realization that we all need one another [...] And that none of us can be saved alone”* (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Peace, 1st January 2023).

But alas, Ukraine is not alone in experiencing this state of war. How can we forget what is happening in Africa? How can we not suffer with the families who are victims of terrorism in the DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria and Lebanon?

How can we not suffer when we see the young girls who are victims of rape and violence, those who are homeless, those who suffer the abuses of human trafficking? How can we fail to respond when very young people are dying of hunger? Or when we know people are suffering the consequences of disasters caused by climate change?

If the years 2020-2022 were years of suffering, we will do our utmost to ensure that 2023 is a year of support, solidarity and hope. Our presence here shows our determination.

To begin with, Cardinal Tagle and Mr Bonaventura will help us to look more closely at the question of synodality, as our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has asked us to do. This will enable us to see how best to follow up on this theme, which is so important for the Church today.

The theme of our assembly: **“Citizens of the world, walking united in hope”**, aligns with what is already proposed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*: that we must *“hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”* (*Laudato Si*, 49). This cry of the poor resonates so much in us as disciples of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Father Naranjo has already helped us to prepare our reflections, by following the methodology advocated in this encyclical: listen/observe – discern – act. The training reflections that you have received since September have used this preparation methodology.

Integral ecology is not based on doom and gloom, but rather on **a hope that gives life, and therefore leads us to action.**

We will therefore try to see how we can take practical action, and we have chosen 3 directions:

- Protection of creation – Sustainable development in the context of climate change;
- Networking: within the Famvin, with international organisations, and within AIC itself through twinnings;
- Adapting our actions to contemporary forms of poverty.

To ensure that this assembly would be fruitful, we have opted for an active working method, guided by Father Naranjo’s talks, with numerous presentations of AIC projects, working groups by language, moments of conviviality, interspaced with times of prayer.

I am sure that after this assembly, we will return home with concrete decisions on actions to be taken, as true multiplying agents, ready to apply the Priority Lines of Action that we will draw up here together.

The Holy Father tells us that *“the time has come for all of us to endeavour to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common”* (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Peace, 1st January 2023).

Dear volunteer sisters, I am counting on you and trusting you to carry out our future projects for a better world by following the proposals of our Holy Father:

- Taking care of our Common Home
- Tackling climate change
- Tackling the plague of inequality
- Guaranteeing access to food
- Ensuring decent work for all
- Welcoming and integrating migrants and marginalised people

“Building a better world day by day as PEACEMAKERS”

Thank you for your attention.

The ongoing synodal process

Thierry Bonaventura, Communications Manager, General Secretariat of the Synod

In order to take stock of the synodal process, I'm going to propose a twofold analysis of the process, itself proceeding on two levels.

1. First analysis: the Synod on synodality as an "event"

Vatican II opened a new chapter in the history of the Church. It is vital to keep this original impulse alive, namely, a **missionary desire to announce the Gospel – a gospel of mercy – in a new way**. The Church cannot be a citadel, always in a position of defence; Pope Francis wants a Church with its doors wide open: "like a field hospital after a battle".



- **First phase: consulting the People of God**

Never before had there been such broad consultation (both the number of those consulted and the subjects). **As for participation it was unprecedented**: 112 responses out of 114 (Episcopal Conferences), all the Oriental Catholic churches, Vatican dicasteries...

There was of course some resistance, even misunderstandings. We cannot say that all the People of God were listened to, but the truly important thing was the process undertaken in numerous communities.

- **Second phase: the continental phase, dialogue between the universal and local Church¹**

The continental phase started with local meetings, whose reports led to the drafting of an act of **RESTITUTION** submitted to the People of God.

On the basis of these reports a group of experts drafted a document for the continental phase (the second phase in the process). This document is neither a **summary** of the reports nor a mere **account** of the national/local experience. It is a working document where the voice of the People of God, with their ideas, questions and disagreements can be heard. **GENERATIVE TENSIONS** have been identified, i.e. questions which do not polarise opinion but rather open up a dialogue leading to a better understanding and practice of the Gospel.²

¹ Communities in a defined area, under the authority of a bishop.

² For example, the tension between needing to stay true to the Faith (the Church's teachings) and being a church of Mercy. This is what the Church really is, listening to people, not judging their behaviour or lifestyle.

The **generative** ideas are reflected in the **following five themes**:

Being a Listening Church

Listening as openness to welcome, starting from a desire for radical inclusion; nobody is excluded! Listening is not an instrumental action, it is following a God who listens to his people and a Lord whom the Gospels constantly present to us in the act of listening to the people who came to him along the roads of the Holy Land. In this sense, listening is already mission and proclamation.

Being a Church with a Mission

Through their baptism all Christians are part of the evangelising and missionary activity of the Church which is called upon to re-create the face of Jesus Christ and establish an “oasis of mercy”.

This outgoing drive towards mission is manifest in the particular attention given to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, but above all it places ecumenism once more at its heart.

Communion, participation and co-responsibility

Vocations, charisms and ministries, including the ordained ministry, must be seen in this mindset of the mission, not purely as internal organisational elements of the church community. The question of lay ministries therefore arises, and in particular the place of women in the Church, including their role in decision-making and access to governance structures.

How to give shape to synodality

In order to create concrete possibilities of living communion, participation and mission, the Church needs structures, especially in governance and this will imply adequate innovation in Canon Law. But “structures alone are not enough, what is essential is permanent training, or **formation**, which supports a more general synodal culture” and “**spirituality**”. Without prayer we can go nowhere!

Synodal life and the liturgy (especially the eucharistic liturgy)

Celebrating the Eucharist is the engine of missionary dynamism and the place where a missionary, synodal community is formed. That is why implementing a synodal style of liturgical celebration is so vital, recognising the value of all ministries and acknowledging all charisms.

The continental phase will soon come to an end. The joy and passion for the Church shown by all the participants were truly impressive, as was the frankness of the debates. There was a strong desire for a renewed Church where all play their part and are called to the same mission.

- **Third phase: towards the Synod**

In addition to the seven documents resulting from the continental meetings, we shall prepare the *Instrumentum laboris* which will be the working document for the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (in October 2023). We hope to have the document published in May.

From the outset Pope Francis has insisted that the real protagonist of this, as of any, synod is the **Holy Spirit**. Without the Spirit our meetings are in danger of becoming mere parliamentary debates.

Over the last two years of this synodal process we have worked tirelessly to “educate” people by spiritual conversations, training them to listen to each other as they listen to the Holy Spirit. To highlight this aspect the October meeting will start with an ecumenical prayer vigil in St Peter’s. The participants will then be on a three-day retreat before getting down to work.

This synod is above all a vast project of new evangelisation on a universal scale. Its aim is to make the faithful aware of their responsibilities in announcing the merciful Christ, that is to become missionary disciples.

2. Second analysis: the Synod on synodality as a “process”

This synod will be more a **synodal process** than an event. This means two things: the most important thing, more than the documents, the outcome of our discussions or the fruits of our discernment, is the exercise of **synodality**: listening to each other based on our listening to the Word to discover together what the Spirit wants to tell his Church. That is the real treasure of the path we have taken. It is only by practising it that synodality can be learnt.

Through your charisma, you, AIC, are the witnesses and face of the Good Samaritan Church since you have learnt to live by faith and mercy, which as Saint Thomas reminds us is the “greatest virtue” as it gives to others, and more importantly it relieves the wretchedness of others. And that is the basis for your specific participation and contribution to the life of the Church. “Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” (Misericordiae vultus, 2)

As AIC, it is your duty and responsibility to “samaritanise” our ecclesial culture.

To follow the synod’s progress:

- * www.synod.va; www.synodresources.org
- * **Twitter:** @Synod_va
- * **Hashtags** #synod #ListeningChurch #WalkingTogether
- * **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/synod.va/>
- * **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/synod.va/>

Allow me to conclude with testimony from Father Michael G. Ryan, Pastor of the Cathedral of St James in Seattle, which perfectly sums up our wishes for the success of the synodal process.

“Reading over the reports and reflecting on them, I found myself thinking how blessed I am to be pastor of a parish that is full of people who love the Church so much that they embrace it, affirm it, celebrate it, and thank God for it, but at the same time are not at all afraid to criticize it, challenge it, question it, and express anger, disappointment, and frustration with it.

The gospel tells us that “With God, all things are possible.” I can’t say that the same is true for the Church! We have to be realistic in our expectations. But isn’t it wonderful that Pope Francis

is determined to hear from the whole Church and not just the hierarchy? The idea is revolutionary. To my knowledge, an effort of this sort and on this scale has never been undertaken by the Church—not even in its earliest days when the numbers were modest. And not only does Pope Francis want to hear from the whole Church, he wants us—who are the Church—to listen to each other. And that is precisely what happened during our parish’s synodal process. And it is clear that those of you who accepted the invitation and came together to listen to each other in prayerful, respectful dialogues, were surprised by what happened, delighted by what happened, changed by what happened. I think our parish can never be quite the same as a result, and I’m willing to bet that the same is true for the entire Church.”

That is also my wish for this synod as well as for you, AIC and your assembly.



For a synodal Church: The AIC answer to Pope Francis's call Alicia Duhne, Past President

To prepare for the Synod of the Bishops in 2023, Pope Francis invited all the faithful to take part in a preparatory phase.

Traditionally a Synod is a religious meeting or assembly where bishops and the Holy Father meet. It is an opportunity for a mutual exchange of information and a sharing of experiences, the aim of which is to find pastoral solutions that are both valid and universally applicable.

This time Pope Francis has wished to include all the Church faithful, and get them to participate in the process.

Since AIC is a movement of faithful laypeople, in May 2021 we were invited to take part in the preparatory phase by Cardinal Grech, in charge of this matter within the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life.

To respond to this initiative and answer the questionnaires sent out for consultation, a working group was set up within AIC, with the following members: Rose de Lima Ramanankavana (Madagascar), Alicia Duhne (Mexico), Elisabeth Gindre (France), Suzanne Johnson (USA), Chantavisouk Niradsay (Laos) and Gabriella Raschi (Italy).

Numerous AIC associations answered the Synod questionnaire sent out by AIC. They thanked the Pope for this opportunity to express their opinions and feelings on the position of the Church in their various communities.

The Dicastery was sent a summary of the answers received. They were presented by continent, given the variety of situations and focus areas in the different countries. The following is a very brief summary:

- In **Asia**, Catholics are not numerous and it is not uncommon for actions to be undertaken with people of different faiths.
- In the **USA** ten groups responded. They appreciated the Pope's initiative as they felt that all too often lay associations are ignored in decision-making.
- In **Latin America**, four countries responded and their reaction was very positive. A lot of people participate in parish life and the laity is well organised. When it comes to integrating people of other religions or welcoming homosexuals, however, there is still a lot to be done. The issue of sects arose; they feel they are rarely welcome and that the door is closed to them.



- In **Africa**, four countries replied. The situation varies: in some places lay people are listened to in Christian groups. Elsewhere there is a separation and lack of dialogue between the laity and the Church.
- In **Europe** four countries replied. In Italy a large number of groups took part and this reflection on the Synod was often complicated. Experience shows that in many parishes the Church is not open to debate or willing to share responsibility. The president AIC Italy pointed out that there are fewer and fewer priests and they are getting older. There is often a feeling of loss or disappointment.

Formation in listening and discernment was suggested several times.

Even those most sceptical about the approach said they expected good results: if all these minds, ideas and hearts listened to each other the outcome would probably be new and unexpected paths and a spirit of creativity.

Reference to the Holy Spirit was highlighted several times: *“in order to move towards a Church where people ‘walk together’, let us trust absolutely in the Power of the Holy Spirit that will transform the earth and unite us in prayer”*.

To conclude: synodality is the path God expects the Vincentian Family to take today, walking with lay people, pastors, religious and all the People of God to put into practice the following keywords, COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION and MISSION.

AIC is fully in line with this approach.

Reflection on the homily by Cardinal Tagle based on Jn 5,1-3.5-16

AIC's primary mission is charity: this gospel passage shows us how Jesus acts when faced with someone in need. He asks the invalid beside the pool at Bethesda who had been ill for 38 years "Do you want to be well again?" The man answers that he has no-one to put him in the pool to be healed. Could it really be that during all his time of need no-one helped him? When we see the world today



we realise that this does happen. We saw this during the pandemic. Washing your hands to avoid infection was a simple enough measure for its proponents, but impossible in those parts of the world with no running water. The same goes for social distancing, something unachievable in deprived areas where people live in very close proximity to each other. What we need to do is see these situations through other eyes, as Jesus does, the eyes of love.

Jesus asks us all the same question he asked the invalid, do we want to be well again? Do we truly want a just, caring, healthy society, one that is respectful and at peace? If we really do, why does the situation remain the same? We are members of AIC, our mission is one of charity and when we touch the wounds of so many people we must say with conviction "yes, we want this person to be healed". We long for a human family cured of its divisions, of all these petty wars that lead to suffering.

We also need to take a moment to see Jesus' reaction to the man's answer "I have no-one to put me to the pool". It would probably have been simpler for Jesus to take him there himself but instead He says "Get up! Don't wait for anyone to take you down to the pool. My words are enough. Pick up your bed and walk". Jesus encourages him to be healed by his own abilities, overcoming his inner pain in addition to the physical ailment of not being able to walk. Jesus' words are powerful, making the man realise that he could get up and pick up his bed. Jesus wants us to avoid feeling like victims, so we no longer feel defenceless and unable to be cured. He says: you are strong and with the power of my word you will succeed. Get up, pick up your bed and walk. This is an important element for those like us who work in charity. Let us take a look at our motives and the way we act with the poor. We need to avoid keeping people paralysed, dependent on our help.

Jesus encourages the invalid, and every person, to become aware of his own strength and abilities. Part of charity should be the building of resilient communities, nurturing the development of each person's potential through education, to allow their talents, their abilities, their gifts to flourish. It is vital that we avoid the type of charity which means that people are unable to get up and pick up their beds themselves. The danger is we may want to feel needed rather than wanting those in need to develop fully.

This gospel is highly appropriate for the AIC meeting. We see Jesus in action, in circumstances similar to what we see today. He also teaches us how the Word of God can give inner strength

to the weak, how the Word of God can awaken them. As Pope Francis said, the worst form of poverty is denying spiritual care to the poor when we do not preach the Word of God as sustenance and strength. Let us hope, then, that AIC will be zealous in this task, being a channel for the love of Jesus, helping to uplift them.

We see at present an unfortunate increase in divisions in the world. It is all too common to find reasons to be opposed to each other rather than find reasons for coming together. Instead of seeing our various races, traditions and cultures as something of value, a heritage to be developed and nurtured, we see those who are different from us as strangers, a threat, and view them with suspicion. This also happens within the Church and constitutes a major obstacle for the synodal process. Let us therefore reflect on how to move forward together, showing the world that people of different cultures, different traditions, different languages can live as brothers and sisters without being enemies or a threat to each other. As women we are able to truly embrace diversity and are called upon to show the world, and the Church, how to be welcoming and how to take those who are different by the hand.

Tuesday 21st March

Theme for the day: Responsible citizens of the world

1. Presentation by Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM

'Protection of creation – sustainable development – climate change'

2. Presentation of AIC projects

- AIC Brazil
- AIC Argentina
- AIC Italy
- AIC Nigeria
- AIC Peru
- AIC Cameroon
- AIC Laos

3. Questions for group work

Protection of creation:

- 1) What struck me the most in Fr. Gabriel Naranjo's presentation and in the local experiences shared?
- 2) How can I personally contribute to the protection of our Common Home?
- 3) What can we do in our AIC group to contribute to the protection of our Common Home?

Protection of creation, sustainable development, climate change

Father Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, CM

Introduction

I would like to relate my presentation to the methodological proposal of the process of this Assembly: preparation, actualization and projection. The first theme, ecological, corresponds to the previous phase of seeing from the perspective of *listening*; the second, on networking, corresponds to the intermediate moment, judging from the perspective of *discernment*; the third, confronting the poverties of today, corresponds to what comes next, namely, acting from a perspective of *ripple-effect*³. These steps reflect the dynamics of synodality proposed by Pope Francis for the present-day Church and, ultimately, for the Vincentian charism.



On the other hand, everything linked to ecology, to the cooperation that is necessary in order to put it into practice, and to the new forms of poverty, is expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. I will develop this reflection on three levels that fit in with the trilogy of the title: the charismatic, the ecclesial and the socio-political.

1. Protection of Creation – Charismatic Perspective

The Vincentian charism is essentially social, not ecological, as is the case, for example, with the Franciscan charism. But the preferential option for the poor is inseparable from the preferential option for the earth: *Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, and as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*⁴ Social justice and environmental justice. In other words, *ecology without a social struggle is just gardening.*⁵

This interaction between the ecological and the social runs through the Pope's encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home*. This appears in the ten axes that structure it, enunciated at the end of the introductory chapter: *The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of the new paradigm and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.*⁶

³ Cf. AIC. General Assembly/2023. Proposed methodology.

⁴ Pope Francis. *Laudato Sí*, #49 (Hereafter, LS).

⁵ Chico Mendes. *Tierra Viva* [Living Earth], April 5, 2022.

⁶ LS, #16.

The Vincentian charism cannot be oblivious to this relationship. On the contrary, we must hasten to tend *to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to fire*⁷, integrating the protection of nature into our evangelical commitment on behalf of the poor. It is clear, then, that the AIC's reflection on this theme is a charismatic response to a sensitivity for creation, which is today one of the signs of the times.

2. Sustainable development in the light of Pope Francis's Magisterium – Ecclesial Perspective

This encyclical placed the Church in the midst of the world's ecological movement, enriching it with a vision of faith. As an inspiration for the AIC's commitment to ecology, I now propose a reading of this document from two perspectives: its biblical inspiration and its ethical and spiritual dynamism.

2.1. Biblical Inspiration

One of its main threads is the interpretation of the Word of God in the light of creation, and of creation in the light of the Word. It is a transversality that appears in four parts of the text:

- a. The starting point is the metaphor of the book: *The book of nature is one and indivisible and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth*⁸. In this way, we are reminded that the world is a whole and therefore cannot be looked at or treated fragmentarily.
- b. Moreover, using again the metaphor of the book, it is affirmed that *nature is like a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness*⁹. Hence the world is more than a problem to be solved, it is a mystery to be contemplated.
- c. Halfway through the text, this relationship between nature and the Word is raised to the level of an ecological and biblical theology, when it is affirmed that *God has written a precious book, whose letters are the multitude of creatures present in the universe*¹⁰. Everything created is *a caress of God*, a manifestation of the Creator and a way to relate to Him.
- d. Consequently, it is recalled that everything that exists is open to contemplation. *Hence, there is mystical meaning in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in the dewdrop, in the poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things*¹¹. The footnote

⁷ Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014, volume XI, page 25. Future references to this work will use the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XI:25.

⁸ LS, #6.

⁹ LS, #12.

¹⁰ LS, #85.

¹¹ LS, #233.

continues the list with an ascending contemplative process, from the most natural to the most human: *The wind that blows, the trees that bend, the water that runs, the flies that buzz, the doors that creak, the song of birds, the sound of strings or flutes, the sigh of the sick, the groaning of the afflicted...*¹².

2.2. Ethics and spirituality

From this biblical thread emerges the ethical and spiritual implications of sustainable development. Miguel Rubio specifies this practical projection in three aspects¹³, which we articulate here as a *lifestyle* characterized by:

- a. An ethical behavior with creation, which implies: the awareness that we are one human family¹⁴, an international regulatory standard¹⁵, dialogue that seeks comprehensive and viable consensus¹⁶, scenarios stripped of technological arrogance¹⁷, progressive educational processes¹⁸.
- b. A spirituality rooted in the transcendent and creative mystery of God: *Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of profound enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption*¹⁹. This harmony from the perspective of God is to be expressed in: *the culture of care* and its strategies²⁰, detachment and sobriety²¹, the inclusive mystical contact with nature²², the liturgical celebration itself and its symbolic elements²³.
- c. An ecological conversion: "I would like to propose to Christians some lines of ecological spirituality that arise from the convictions of our faith.... It is not so much a question of speaking of ideas, but above all of the motivations that arise from spirituality to nourish a passion for the care of the world"²⁴. This conversion must be personal, communitarian and pastoral²⁵, structural²⁶, ecological²⁷ and synodal²⁸.

¹² Eva De Vitray - Meyerovitch [ed], *Anthologie du soufisme*, Paris, 1978, p. 200.

¹³ Cf. Miguel Rubio. *Laudatos Si: a theology of creation in ecological perspective*. *Moralia* 39 (2016) 89 -117.

¹⁴ LS, #13, #14, #52.

¹⁵ LS, #53.

¹⁶ LS, #60.

¹⁷ Cf. LS, #16.

¹⁸ LS, #209.

¹⁹ LS, #222.

²⁰ LS, #231.

²¹ LS, #222-227.

²² Cf. LS, #235ff.

²³ Cf. LS, #235.

²⁴ LS, #216; EG, #124.

²⁵ Cf. *Aparecida*, Final Document.

²⁶ Cf. *Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, #26 (Hereafter, EG)

²⁷ Cf. LS.

²⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*.

3. Climate change in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – Socio-political Perspective

The Vincentian Family is formally committed to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, by virtue of being the convener of the Coalition of Religious for Justice (JCoR)²⁹. The agenda of the United Nations from 2015 to 2030 is focused on sustainable development, that is, on a development with limits, as proposed by Pope Francis. These limits are imposed by the finiteness of natural resources and the responsibility of our generation to use them with future generations in mind.

Climate change threatens ecosystems. Action plans must be developed at international, regional and local levels to protect natural resources and promote biodiversity conservation. These measures should encompass both prevention and mitigation of the damage we have already caused to the environment.

The repercussion of this care within the Catholic Church has had a tremendous impact on its way of thinking and acting, its theology, its worldview, its way of understanding and assuming its mission, its way of life. The encyclical focuses on a call to ecological conversion and focuses on integral ecology.

From this perspective, we recognize that there is not an ecological evil, a social evil or an environmental evil, but that all three are part of the same reality. In this vision has emerged the awareness of ecological sin, defined as: *an action or omission against God, against one's neighbour, the community and the environment. It is sin against future generations, and it is committed in acts and habits of pollution and destruction of the harmony of the environment. These are transgressions against the principles of interdependence, and they destroy networks of solidarity among creatures and violate the virtue of justice*³⁰. This change of vision has political implications with regard to *poverty and its causes*³¹. It is nothing more and nothing less than an *ecological leap*³².

We must address climate change through a holistic approach: all life is interconnected and we defend and care for it with the invaluable contribution of women³³.

Today, in the Vincentian Family, we understand the poor as individuals whose whole life is vulnerable. Not only the socio-economic and human poor, but all forms of life in which life itself is vulnerable, threatened, unprotected. We all have to be there, beginning with AIC, as pioneers, as has occurred throughout the history of the Vincentian charism. Yes, we must care for the poor: caring for the poor *alone* is an inadequate mission, because it ignores the relationship between the earth and the human person, between the impoverished earth and the victims of social injustice. We speak of social justice by referring also to environmental justice. Moreover, the protection of the dignity of life calls for a new theology, the theology of ecology.

²⁹ JCoR: UN Coalition of Religious for Justice, founded by 22 institutions of Religious Life.

³⁰ Amazon Synod. Final Document, 82.

³¹ Cf. AIC. *Iniciación al trabajo en forma de proyecto* [Engaging in work from the perspective of projects]. Mexico, Guillermo Kaiser Schlittler, 2001.

³² Cf. CLAPVI. Meeting of government teams. Chinauta, February 8-11, 2023.

³³ Cf. CLAR. *Horizonte Inspirador* [Inspirational Horizon] 2022-2025. Women of the Dawn, p. 23.

AIC Brazil: Santa Luisa community garden

This project was implemented to serve a needy population in the center of Curitiba, Vila Torres in Brazil. The town has 8,500 people: 2,500 of them are children and young people, and there are also a large number of elderly people.

During the home visits, the poor nutrition of the families was observed. At the same time, it was noted that there were many abandoned properties in the region ... empty lots where garbage accumulates and that are frequently by drug users. All of this gave rise to the ideas behind this project.



The objective of the “Community Garden” is to promote a healthy diet, to present the viability of this type of organic production and to utilize unused land. The best part is that this plan was implemented by the community itself, in this case by the AIC Volunteers.

At the present time 18 women from 40 to 86 years old are working and meeting once a week.

Each week, 79 people benefit directly from the products grown, allowing them to vary their diet. These products are organic. The surplus is marketed to the local community. The garden also serves as a workshop for children from 7 to 10 years old who, once a semester, plant a flowerbed, and then with the support of nutritionists from the Municipality, harvest, prepare and enjoy eating a meal in the garden.

The evolution of the Project is visible in all areas. At the beginning it was an idea that few would have bet on. Yet it was the only project of its kind in the city of Curitiba. Our work aroused the interest of the local media, and today other gardens have been planted, including in apartments and condominiums around the city. In addition, workers and families take seedlings and plants such as aromatic plants, cabbage etc. for their homes.

At every meeting and gathering of the volunteers with the members of the community, ideas for recipes and the use of the harvested products are shared. In addition to the exchange of experiences.

An agreement was also established with the City Hall which provides basic seedlings and technical advice.

Students from local universities participate in this project and our work has become known as the “green belt”. The Dominique Prize helped us to build a shelter to rest and it has a restroom which has allowed us to improve our work.

AIC Argentina: Sustainable self-built solar water heater project

The project began by considering the socio-economic situation of the residents of the neighbourhood *9 de Noviembre* in Bahía Blanca and especially the constant increase in the prices of electricity and gas that created the search for a possible solution that would provide economic relief.

The objective of this project is to obtain greater energy independence from the gas and/or electricity companies, thus eliminating the problem of dealing with rising prices and/or possible supply problems while at the same time helping people develop needed skills that will enable them to improve family resources.

To achieve this we foresee the need:

- to create a device, for low-income families, the thermo tank, that uses an alternative source of energy.
- to establish a formation centre for the neighbours, which will provide them with the necessary tools to build, install and maintain the water heater.
- to provide the possibility of developing a micro-enterprise that will generate income in the future.
- to offer a certificate that enables them, as multiplier agents, to replicate this project in other NGOs in the city and the surrounding area ... thus creating new possibilities for employment.



The project will allow the participants to reduce atmospheric pollution, eliminating up to 20 thousand tons of greenhouse gases for each household supplied with solar energy (the fight against global warming). As a consequence, the quality of the air we breathe is also improved. Likewise, it reduces the use of fuels and does not generate noise pollution.

On the other hand, by using this type of energy, the recipients saw that their expenses in taxes, both for electricity and gas, decreased notably and that they had hot water all day long, even on colder days.

We would like to share with you the testimony of a participant, Carmen Rodríguez who stated: *“In 2019 I took the first course that was offered the Solar Water Heaters. It was a very positive experience. They gave a very simple course that enabled us to build a solar water heater and this year (2020) I knew that they would help me install this in my house...”*.

Because of the pandemic, it was only in April 2021 that the solar water heater assembled by Carmen was brought to her house. She was provided with help in installing it and after a few months we visited her to see how she was using it. She very happily told us that her youngest son was washing his slippers by himself with hot water.

This year we want to continue forming neighbours: we hope to sponsor three workshops. We want to raise awareness about the use of this type of energy that benefits both people's health and the environment.

AIC Italy: We are here

The “Firewood for All” project, now known as “Noi ci siamo” (We are here), was set up by the AIC San Martino group in Pettinengo, Italy. It continued even during the COVID pandemic and provided firewood to around thirty families in difficulty who were being supported by the AIC volunteers in the town and province of Biella.

Thanks to the “*Sowing a Community 2.0*” call for tenders from the Simefica bank, the *Cassa di Risparmio de Biella* Foundation and Caritas, the project became more efficiently organised. It was led by the AIC Santa Luisa di Marillac group in Biella, and involved all the AIC groups in the province of Biella in buying wood for the beneficiary families. Unemployed people were also involved and demonstrated their willingness to be active and commit themselves fully to manual work of public benefit.

Over the past two years, around twenty people were involved, accompanied by a social worker and six AIC volunteers.

- ❖ There was first a period of training in the upkeep of green spaces, the use of gardening machinery, IT (being able to manage job offers via a smartphone), cookery courses to avoid food waste and save money, and a class on safety at work.
- ❖ This was followed by practical activities: cleaning paths, pavements, cemeteries and parks in agreement with municipalities and parishes; restoring gardens and wooden benches; restoring small items of wooden furniture, collecting wood and cleaning forests in agreement with the local forestry authority; delivering wood to families in need.



In addition to these activities, participants receive support in their job search (responding to advertisements, etc.) and preparation for job interviews with an expert in recruitment, to make them more confident and determined when meeting companies.

The project ended on 31st March 2022. It was a positive experience for the volunteers, who realised how important it was to help participants regain the energy and skills they had forgotten. Taking care of relationships and “education at work” were the other major strong points of the project, thanks to the professionalism and helpfulness of the social worker, who succeeded in creating an effective and close-knit team.

Particular attention was paid to the “regenerative” aspect of the activities, which enabled some participants to continue their training and others to start working on their own again.

Today, the AIC volunteers in Biella continue to supply wood to families in difficulty and raise funds through various initiatives. They are waiting to respond again to calls from associations that will enable them to get unemployed people involved in providing a very useful service to the community, such as cleaning up neglected forests or green areas.

Website of the project “Noi ci siamo”: <https://noicisiamobiella.it/>

AIC Nigeria: Empowerment of Nduhobokwe women in improved cassava yield

The people of Nduhobokwe-Uzoagba are predominantly peasant farmers engaged in the production of yams, cassava and vegetable farming. They suffer hunger and economic poverty due to poor yields resulting from a lack of money to purchase improved seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides.



In 2019, AIC Nigeria gathered and trained 10 women (pilot project) on how to increase their yield and income by using improved seeds, seedlings and fertilizer for farming. They were provided and empowered with improved cassava seeds and seedlings, as well as bags of fertilizers to enhance soil fertility. This project was successful as the farmers experienced an increase in their 2019 yield and obtained good quality produce. Thus they expanded their income generating activities to production of garri, fufu and tapioca using cassava tubers from their own farms. Some also engage in vegetable farming as an additional source of income.

In 2020, the objective was to end hunger and economic poverty in 25 families in Nduhobokwe.

To do so we trained 25 women farmers to engage in improved cassava farming and processing, we managed health promotion activities to purchase and administrate malaria and typhoid medications, we purchased and distributed improved cassava stems and fertilizers and we created an AIC Farmers' Isusu (savings) group.

Thanks to this project the farmers protect nature from bush burning, which people used to do to keep the environment clean and reptile free. There is now no need to do this with our project. And now the 25 women can feed and clothe their families and pay the medical and children's education bills independently of AIC Nigeria.

Testimony: *"Ms Blessing, a single mother, is now financially independent and helps a widowed mother too"*.

We would like to continue to help women with their field production and financial savings, and also recycle the cassava stems yearly and sustainably.

AIC Peru: Organic gardens – A caress for the care of the Common Home

The statistics of chronic child malnutrition and anaemia in children and adults is a great concern. Of the 8 zones that comprise the district of Pardo Miguel, the Naranjos zone has the highest number of children with anaemia. Currently, the rate is 17.61% of a population of 971 children under 5 years of age. This reality motivated the Naranjos volunteers to undertake the Organic gardens project together with the parents of the children with anaemia and in alliance with the local Health Centre and Municipality. They were able to take advantage of the fact that the AIC group has its own space of 240 square meters available for cultivation.

In addition, the Peruvian jungle, in general, is very fertile in the cultivation of fruit trees, nevertheless, the family planting of organic vegetables and greens is scarce. The predominant economic activity revolves around the planting of coffee and cacao seeds. Therefore, the availability of organic matter is an added value that is not used to promote these organic crops.

The general objective of the project is to reduce the level of anaemia in children under 5 years of age through the consumption of organic vegetables and greens in the Naranjos area. To this end, the AIC volunteers work together with fifty parents of children.

Thanks to the planned activities, it will also be possible to develop skills in the cultivation of vegetables and greens in bio-gardens, inform the beneficiaries about the differences in the nutritional value of organic and non-organic products, show the benefits of eating a balanced diet, and raise awareness of the relationship between nature and the human person.



The project contributes to the protection of creation by promoting regenerative and environmentally friendly agriculture, cultivating organic products without the use of agrochemicals. Instead, fertilizers and fungicides are made with natural products from the area, such as banana peels, cocona, cocoa bark, coffee, herbs and household waste (potato peels, cassava, corn, manure from small animals such as chickens and rabbits, for example) that will eventually degrade and generate compost, returning to the soil the nutrients necessary for its regeneration, thus contributing to the care of the environment.

Given that the project has just started, the expected impacts are as follows:

- ❖ An increase in the consumption of organic vegetables, which will influence a change in eating habits that will result in better health.

- ❖ Generate a habit of growing short-cycle products within households with the participation of all members of the family group, generating a multiplier effect.
- ❖ Promoting regenerative and environmentally friendly agriculture in a conscious and responsible way, but progressively.

In the long term, the project should evolve from a Formation Centre for parents with children with signs of anaemia to an open Centre for community learning. That is, that people who wish to learn how to make a bio-garden, can approach the AIC volunteer Association and replicate what they learn in their homes.

The war between Russia and Ukraine has generated a crisis in the availability of fertilizers for agriculture in the world, generating shortages and rising prices of basic foodstuffs for family welfare. Therefore, the objective of this project is to be prepared to face this crisis by promoting the creation of organic bio-gardens in which people can grow their own vegetables, consume them in a healthy way and above all at low cost.

AIC Cameroon: Community orchard

In Cameroon, as in other African countries, elderly, vulnerable and disinherited people are 80% dependent on the generosity of others and occasional and minimal aid from their states.

The Christian community in the *Oyom-Abang – Camp SONEL* neighbourhood in Yaoundé has several members aged 60-88 whose financial capacity and physical strength is diminishing day by day, making them more and more vulnerable. These people are looked after as well as possible by AIC volunteers and other people from various backgrounds, each using the means at their disposal.

It is in this context that AIC volunteer Mrs BAKODOCK, a retired lady in her sixties and a very committed member of this community, started a project to help elderly people in her neighbourhood. She has set up small income generating activities to promote good health and fight against poverty.

General objective of the project: Improve the living conditions of vulnerable elderly people and people living in poverty or with disabilities in the Nnom Nnam parish of Oyom-Abang, Archdiocese of Yaoundé.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- ❖ Producing avocado and plum tree seedlings (seeds);
- ❖ Distributing the seedlings produced to each identified target person;
- ❖ Creating a 3-hectare parish orchard of fruit trees, as of March 2023.



At present, the volunteers are in the process of acquiring land to create the parish orchard. For the moment, the project is being carried out in the private plots of the participants.

The AIC volunteers also run training workshops on the production of liquid soap and vegetable oils, which allow products to be sold.

The project aims to create an orchard of 2000 fruit trees (500 avocado trees, 500 safoutier (plum) trees, 500 orange trees and 500 mandarin trees) by the end of 2023. The income from the sale of the surplus plants and fruits will finance the activities to support elderly residents.

The seedlings will become trees with large leaves that will absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere, thus helping to reduce global warming. In addition, the seeds will be collected rather than purchased, reducing the carbon footprint linked to transportation. In this way AIC contributes to protecting the environment and the health of elderly people, in addition to diversifying their diets.

AIC Laos: Installation of pipelines and construction of a reservoir in Nampath

Nampath villagers have experienced anguish due to water shortages for a number of years, most significantly during the dry season. In searching for potential water sources, they discovered the source of a natural spring in the nearby mountain. In 2014, the Nampath villagers, facilitated by the local leaders, initially proposed the water pipelines project. The local leaders and AIC Laos conducted preliminary visits. A feasibility study was conducted to determine whether the project was realistic. In 2017, Ms. Teiko Hasegawa, representative of AIC Japan, made visits and had meetings with local leaders. The responses and recommendations from the meetings were taken into consideration for further study and discernment, in order to come up with prudent and wise decisions. Finally, from the beginning of the year 2019, aware of the immediate expressed need, the proposed program was approved and financially supported by AIC Japan.

The objective is to provide quality access to flowing potable water to the entire village, which means almost 81 houses with 86 families and a total of 534 dwellers.

Then the construction of the reservoir at the spring site was initiated and followed by the installation of the PVC pipelines. Each household had contributed voluntary free labour to assist the construction of the reservoir by carrying gravel, sand, cement and pipes to almost the top of mountain which is 6.2km from



where the flowing spring is situated. Thanks to God, back then we had water *but* unfortunately only for less than one month due to the pandemic and the construction of highways and railroads to the neighbouring countries through this village which slowed down the construction of the reservoir.

Given the circumstances, we, the local authorities and AIC have agreed to re-route the pipelines with the great hope of getting potable water back to the village to improve the sanitary conditions of these underprivileged villagers.

Unity and cooperation will lead to the progress and success of the project.

Wednesday 22nd March

Theme of the day: Networking to unite our strengths

1. Papal audience

2. Presentation by Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM:

'Networking: within the Vincentian Family, with international organisations, and within AIC'

3. Presentation of testimonies

- Within the Vincentian Family:
 - o AIC Spain
 - o AIC Philippines
 - o AIC and FAVILA
- Within AIC:
 - o Twinning between AIC Madagascar and AIC USA
 - o Twinning between AIC Madagascar and AIC France
 - o Twinning between AIC Spain and AIC Dominican Republic
- With international organisations:
 - o ECOSOC
 - o UNESCO

4. Questions for group work

Networking:

- 1) What struck me most in Father Gabriel Naranjo's presentation and in the testimonies presented?
- 2) How can I strengthen networking in my team (local, regional or national):
 - With the Church?
 - With Famvin?
 - With another AIC group (twinning)?
 - With international organisations:
 - o What topics in their work do you find in your services?
 - o Could one of your projects be presented as a testimony to the international organisations?

Summary of Pope Francis's speech Public audience of Wednesday 22nd March 2023

Sandra Arceo, AIC Mexico

Pope Francis reminded us that evangelisation, rather than being the mere transmission of doctrinal or moral teaching, means first and foremost bearing witness to our personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This is essential as people need witnesses, that is people consistent in their beliefs and their lives, in the faith we profess and the works we do.

Another aspect we must not overlook is that this evangelisation is not only intended for “others”, those on the outside, but also for ourselves, who belong to the People of God. And this means that as members of the Church we need to be evangelised in order to evangelise others, and are thus called upon to follow a path of continual conversion and renewal.

The Pope asked us for a personal answer to three fundamental questions:

- Do I believe what I proclaim?
- Do I live what I believe?
- Do I proclaim what I live?

We cannot just make do with easy, pre-packaged answers. We are invited to face the unsettling risk of searching, placing our trust fully in the Holy Spirit who is at work in each of us, driving us to push ourselves further than our boundaries, our limits, whatever they may be.

In this sense, the witness of a Christian life involves a journey of holiness. Through baptism we are called to be holy. A holiness that is not reserved for the few: it is a gift from God that must be listened to by us to bear fruits, in ourselves and in others. Chosen and beloved by God, we must bring this love to others.

After the audience AIC President Rose de Lima Ramanankavana and the Vice-presidents Clara Inés Díaz Henao and Suzanne Johnson, were able to greet Pope Francis.



Networking: within the Vincentian Family, with international organisations, and within AIC

Father Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, CM

Introduction

Networking is today another sign of the times. In fact, for several years the AIC has ministered in this manner and has done so from a perspective of synodality: *acting together against poverty and its causes*³⁴. It is *a way of doing things that involves intertwining relationships, learning, complications, moving step by step until a common, open and diversified space is created ... a space in which new initiatives, proposals and commitments can come to life*³⁵.

The AIC has given this various expressions: the emphasis on the construction of spaces and meetings for common action; the dynamics of active participation on the part of individuals, groups and institutions; processes, not specific actions, in the search for objectives that respond to the needs of the poor; valuing diversity and its relationship with unity, as a strengthening factor; the capacity to listen and learn, through attention, reflection and criticism; the systematization of teachings with a permanent evaluation of the processes and their interpretation; an atmosphere of mutual trust; viewing failures and criticism as factors of growth; the exercise of leadership; team work.... I will develop this dynamic from an ecclesial perspective and from a Vincentian perspective.

1. Networking as a key to Ecclesial Synodality

Networking has been “baptized” by ecclesial synodality, from the perspective of faith and its relationship with the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is providential that this AIC General Assembly is held on the eve of the first session of the Synod on Synodality³⁶, which is integrated with the attitudes of: listening and dialogue, encounter and discernment, decision making and follow-up.

Pope Francis himself, in his interpretation of the post-conciliar renewal, reminds us that *synodality is the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium*³⁷ because today it puts in play her life and mission.

During this Assembly and from now on, it is up to the AIC to claim as its own (for ecclesial and charismatic reasons and in a radical manner) this concept of synodality, thus, opening itself to the action of the Holy Spirit and *surprises of the Spirit*³⁸. Here, too, through the articulation of teamwork, both in its *form* and in its *style* and *structures*, the life and mission of the AIC are

³⁴ Cf. AIC. *Iniciación al trabajo en forma de proyecto* [Engaging in work from the perspective of projects]. Mexico, Guillermo Kaiser Schlitler, 2001.

³⁵ Oscar Jara Hollyday. *El trabajo en red: tejer complicidades y fortalezas. Educación de adultos y Desarrollo*, [Networking: weaving complications and strengths. Adult education and development]. 2012.

³⁶ XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, October 2023.

³⁷ Pope Francis. *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (October 17, 2015).

³⁸ Synod 2021-2023, Preparatory Document, #2.

at stake. How? through networking, teamwork, walking together, synodically... in the current *transformation of humanity* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, Chapter 1), where almost any project dealing with the common life has become impossible (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #61). Indeed, in this context communion lies almost mortally wounded because of:

- a) Socio-economic anti-values: inequality, commercialization of the human person, a sacralised economy, the idolatry of money, the divinization of financial markets...
- b) Socio-cultural anti-values: relativistic indifference, the culture of appearance and the consequent deterioration of native cultures, the market of religious proposals that (in reality) have nothing of God, moral relativism, the cultural crisis of the family, a globalized individualism as a way of life, the urbanization of society which reduces the meaning of human life to the struggle for survival.
- c) Socio-ecclesial anti-values: spiritual formalism, weakening of identity, practical relativism, activism, immediatism, outdated apostolic dynamism, individual confinement, spiritual worldliness, fratricidal wars, loss of fraternal love....

2. Networking from the perspective of Vincentian Synodality

We are going to refer to St. Vincent de Paul, focusing on his personal experience and the application of his method in the here and now. I am inspired by the reflection of Father Chaves, former General Councilor of the Congregation of the Mission.³⁹

2.1 The experience of Vincent de Paul

a) Collaboration with the poor:

The poor were the path that led Vincent de Paul to an encounter with himself and with God. In the school of the poor, Vincent transcended the understanding of the Christian faith as mere adherence to abstract truths. He grasped and discerned the calls of God in their concrete reality. The poor became a teacher who led him to understand meaning of committed faith and to put that faith into practice through mission and charity.

b) With the laity:

In Chatillon, confronted with a family in a serious state of abandonment and hunger, Vincent appealed to the faithful to help them. With the collaboration of the laity, especially women, he began the work of the Confraternities of Charity. The members have a specific vocation of participation in the mission of Christ. Indeed, they cannot be passive recipients, but are challenged to become active subjects of evangelization.

c) Ecclesiastical and political collaborators:

- The life of Vincent de Paul reveals an enormous network of relationships and collaborations. His action was the fruit of an attentive reading of the signs of the times, of discernment, carried out in living together, in collaboration and with the help of many people: we can say that his relationship with others was a foretaste of what we know today as networking from the perspective of synodality.

³⁹ Cf. Eli Chaves dos Santos. *La unión and colaboración en San Vicente y sus luces para nuestro hoy* [Union and collaboration in St. Vincent, and its insights for today], Rome, March 2012.

- Vincent developed his initiatives with a deep sense of ecclesial collaboration. Four aspects must be taken into consideration with analysing these various initiatives: they were accomplished in harmony with the thinking and orientations of the Church; seeking to meet pastoral needs; heeding the calls of the bishops; collaborating with other ecclesial associations.
- Vincent developed a wide and complex network of collaboration that involved political authorities and public authorities. He maintained relations with illustrious and prestigious people on the French political and economic scene. He counted on the collaboration of the public authorities to consolidate his missionary works and his charitable work.

2.2. Significant elements for our collaboration today as a Vincentian Family

Vincent de Paul saw that collaboration was the key to service on behalf of the poor. What does he suggest to us today?

- a) **Collaboration based on the calls of the poor and** therefore, collaboration **with** the poor: here we refer to a joint and organized search for concrete responses through a methodology of reciprocity, which develops the potential and the active participation of the poor.
- b) **Collaboration on behalf of the poor based on the evangelical mysticism of faith, hope and justice:** between Jesus and the poor there is a *sacramental* relationship so that what is done to the poor is done to Christ: *By serving the poor, Jesus Christ is served*. This is the “protocol” of Christian Holiness⁴⁰.
- c) **Collaboration with a deep ecclesial sense:** a living expression of the mission and charity of the Church.
- d) **Collaboration that empowers the poor and the collaborators of the poor:** valuing the missionary potential of the laity, especially women, providing them with technical, human and spiritual formation.
- e) **Creative, renewed and diversified collaboration that articulates good decisions within the Church and society: towards a** service that includes socio-political action, the search for legitimate human rights and the fight against the causes of misery.
- f) **Collaboration in humble reciprocity and the exchange of gifts:** thus, acting **in light of St.** Vincent, who assumed humility as a fundamental virtue. No branch of the Vincentian Family can consider itself self-sufficient.

⁴⁰ GE, 98-109. It is there that Pope Francis cites St. Vincent for the first time. He will refer to Saint later in the same Apostolic Exhortation.

AIC Philippines: Rebuilding houses damaged by typhoons in Naga City

While Naga City was struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, Typhoons Quinta and Rolly, considered the world's strongest typhoons in 2020, came a week apart, followed by Typhoon Ulysses. These super typhoons brought significant damage to agriculture, properties, and infrastructure and rendered thousands of families homeless. After a visit and assessment by Fr. Francis Tordilla, Rector and Parish Priest of the Archdiocesan Shrine and Parish of St. Jude Thaddeus, it was found that 58 houses had been severely damaged, the majority of which belonged to members of the Basic Ecclesial Communities. The families are informal settlers with young children, elderly people and people with disabilities. They are living in sub-human conditions. They do not have a permanent address, and were living without toilets, water and electricity inside their typhoon-damaged houses.

The objective of the project was to build 25 resilient homes for the disadvantaged and homeless families.

The project was achieved with the collaboration of Association International des Charites (AIC), Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance (Famvin), AIC USA and Teresita Fajardo from AIC Philippines. Through their collaborative efforts, 26 concrete duplex houses were constructed,



blessed and given to the beneficiary families. The conditions for the collaboration were that families must own their home lot and houses must have a toilet, bedroom and access to water and electricity. These conditions prompted the AIC Philippines and its partner the Parish of St. Jude Thaddeus to get 40 lot allocations from the Naga City government. A volunteer parish architect then designed duplex houses that could withstand strong typhoons. Additional funds were provided by AIC USA as solicited by Teresita Fajardo and Melba Vera Cruz. Fr. Roland Tuazon of the Congregation of the Mission made monitoring and follow-up visits to the relocation site. Inspired by the completion of the first houses, other local donors pledged financial support for the housing project.

In their testimonial, beneficiary mothers Jenalyn and Mavie said they are now living with pride and dignity. They call their home a “mansion” with a permanent address, toilet and sources of water and electricity. They have peace of mind and can sleep without fear of getting wet and evicted. They have less expenses now for medicines and house repairs. They can also save for food and their children's education. In gratitude to God and benefactors, they serve as Lectors, Catechists and Lay Ministers at the St. Jude Thaddeus Parish.

In the future for the eight allocated lots still available at the relocation site, collaboration with other entities and potential donors will continue. Home visits will be made to monitor the temporal and spiritual needs of the beneficiary families. This is the kind of charity of Christ that drives the Vincentian Family.

AIC Spain: The Vincentian Family Association (AFAVI)

I am going to present to you our experience of networking within the Vincentian Family and how, as a result of that experience, an association has been created, at the national level in Spain, which brings together several of our associations: The Vincentian Family Association.



It all began in 1997 as a result of an increase of homeless people in Seville where different branches of the Vincentian Family proposed to help. A pioneering project was born: In a house belonging to the Daughters of Charity, space was made available to accommodate 11 women and 30 men. There was no budget to hire personnel, but there was an extraordinary commitment and

dedication of volunteers, mainly from AIC and the Association of the Miraculous Medal, accompanied by young people from VMY and with the contributions from the members of the Congregation of the Mission in Seville and the Conferences of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Thus, a networking project of all the branches of the family at the local level was created: The Vincentian Family Miguel Mañara Project.

The union of associations was consolidated as an expression of our solidarity and commitment to people in vulnerable situations. Our mission: to welcome and accompany people in situations of social exclusion and vulnerability and to promote their autonomy, inclusion and active participation in society. Today, twenty-five years after the creation of this project, the Miguel de Mañara Centre is home to 41 people and houses others in four semi-autonomous apartments.

During these 25 years, other projects of intense collaboration between the Vincentian associations were initiated. In La Línea de la Concepción (Cádiz), the Contigo Centre was created in 1998. This is a project initially led by the VMY, which was later joined by the other branches. This centre was established in an area where drugs and truancy abound. It is a program based on preventive actions in which children and adolescents are supported through activities that promote equal opportunities. This reduces the risk of exclusion and promotes integral development through different socio-educational activities with minors and families in vulnerable situations.

Another network project that has been developed in this region is ALMA VICENCIANA, a project which was established in the provinces of Cadiz and Seville to support vulnerable women. This project has three houses and is able to accommodate fifty-one women. These houses provide immediate safe shelter for women who are the victims of “trafficking or

exploitation” and who often arrive in small boats in Ceuta or Melilla. Some are pregnant, others have small children (some only months old) and others have been raped for the purpose of trafficking. In our homes we offer accommodations that include psychological, educational, legal and social services and, promote their autonomy by supporting their integration into the labour market and into the larger society. In this project we act through the Humanitarian Aid Program of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration.

In light of the results of the Miguel Mañara project and these other two projects, in which different branches of the Vincentian Family are also involved, the constitution of an Association of Associations was proposed and the Vincentian Family Association (AFAVI) came into existence at the national level. As already stated the purpose of this is to welcome and promote the achievement of objectives in these projects, as well as others that have been taking shape (shelters in Rota and Lanjarón) and that may arise in the future in other parts of Spain. Currently the AFAVI is an association composed of the Daughters of Charity, AIC and VMY. It has its own legal identity in order to be eligible for aid from National Programs. Members of the different branches constitute its Board of Directors which is responsible for evaluating the projects and organizing the work in order to achieve its objectives (Vincentian values and charism provide a guiding perspective).

Within the work coordinated by AFAVI and within the framework of the International 13 Houses Project, the project “Sheltering homeless people” in Asturias is also included. Here, since February 2020, the Daughters of Charity have collaborated with AIC, SSVP and AMM and two other collaborating entities (the Cajastur and Alimerka foundations). Currently, there are four apartments where people are being sheltered.

The Latin American Vincentian Family (FAVILA)

Ligia Ferraez (AIC Mexico), AIC representative to FAVILA from March 2018 to March 2023 where she was coordinator, presented a Power Point explaining what FAVILA is and showing the actions this organisation has undertaken.



- The Latin American Vincentian Family (FAVILA) was born in 1999 in Argentina as a response to the urgency of providing a more effective service to the poor, joining forces and collaborating all the branches inspired by the charisma of St. Vincent de Paul.
- In order to work in an organized way, Latin America has been divided into six regions: Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean zone, the Southern Cone and Brazil.
- With the theme “Let us Vincentianize our great homeland in Synodality”, the creation of “Confraternities” was proposed (grouping of members of the Vincentian Family by professions or services to share experiences and establish bonds of unity).
- Currently there are 22 confraternities in operation: radio, biblical formation, educators, lay advisors, psychologists, graphic designers, translators, lawyers, musicians, alumni of Vincentian schools, indigenous Vincentians, social networks, social workers, housewives, journalists, poets, Vincentian-teenagers, agricultural producers, computer specialists, workers with homeless people, Vincentians on the border supporting migrants.
- Each confraternity meets once a month and each has appointed a coordinator.

The presentation ended by quoting Father Tomaž Mavrič, Director General of the Congregation of the Vincentian Family and Mission: *“I invite you to do everything possible so that these meetings, projects and initiatives are not limited to two or three branches in one country, region or city, but faithfully include all the branches.”*

The 22 Confraternities



Twinning between AIC USA – AIC Manakara, Madagascar Schooling for children

From the perspective of the AIC group in Manakara, Madagascar

Since 2003, there has been a twinning between AIC USA and AIC Manakara in Madagascar.

Manakara is a city located in the south-east of Madagascar that suffers from natural disasters almost every year. The most recent catastrophes were cyclones Batsiray and Emnati, which followed one another in quick succession.

The AIC Manakara group works with mothers who are heads of households because they have been abandoned by their husbands. Their children do not attend school and wander the city streets.

The financial support offered through this twinning is intended to:

- ❖ Tackle famine by setting up a canteen. The beneficiaries have their meals there every working day during the school year.
- ❖ Fund schooling for children.
- ❖ Allow huts to be built or repaired after cyclones.

The project has a significant impact, as the beneficiaries are more fulfilled and have the chance to continue their studies up to university level, improving their chances of securing a good job.



Through this twinning, the AIC group in Manakara manages to:

- ❖ Solve problems that are inherent to situations of poverty (education/nutrition)
- ❖ Face challenges
- ❖ Pursue the work of St. Vincent with courage
- ❖ Work as a team to promote the wellbeing of people living in poverty

This twinning has also allowed the volunteers to continue their work with the most disadvantaged people and to strengthen their project management skills.

Here is the testimony of Olivier, who was a beneficiary of AIC Manakara as a child: *“Thanks to AIC, I became a nurse and I am married to another student nurse. We are happy with our child, we work in a big hospital.”*

In the future, the volunteers would like to strengthen this twinning and exchange experiences and best practices.

From the perspective of AIC USA



The Ladies of Charity of the United States began their relationship with AIC in Madagascar in 2003 to help support the Madagascar Schooling and Nutrition Program. The women of the United States contribute annually to support the needs of women and children in Madagascar. These donations are collected annually at the United States National assembly and are made by individuals who recognize the need to support persons in poverty wherever they may be.

We can see the effects of our contributions when, once a year, the volunteers in Madagascar send a PowerPoint presentation to the United States on how the contributions have been used to impact the lives of those in Madagascar. The PowerPoint is presented at the national assembly in the United States. Debbie Chadwick, former President of AIC United States commented, *“Here in the United States we value investing in young persons, who will be our leaders of the future. I am blessed to be able to contribute to the growth of all young persons, whether they be in the U.S. or in Madagascar. It is encouraging to see a young person able to pursue their dreams because they had our support.”*

Holly Walter, current President of AIC United States comments, *“The importance of this twinning project cannot be underestimated. As Ladies of Charity, we are dedicated to serving those who need us no matter where in the world they are. The people of Madagascar strive to improve their lives every day and through our contributions are able to fund projects and educational opportunities for their women and children. I would recommend a twinning relationship to other groups. The value of a twinning project is a two-way street. Those receiving the support are able to improve their lives and become more self-reliant. Those making the donations are able to see the growth of the people they are helping and, in turn, see that they are making a difference in the lives of people living in poverty.”*

Twinning between AIC Strasbourg, France – AIC Fianarantsoa, Madagascar School canteen

From the perspective of the AIC group in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar

This twinning started in 1992 following the AIC International Executive Board's visit to Madagascar in 1991. Fianarantsoa is a city located in the Highlands, 400km south of the capital of Madagascar. The city is home to almost 25,000 disadvantaged people.

The **objective** of the AIC Fianarantsoa group is to help disadvantaged families get out of a wretched cycle of poverty by supporting the education of their children.

A twinning was therefore set up to help the AIC group achieve its objectives: a canteen was opened so that the children can have a balanced meal every lunchtime and thus follow normal schooling. The canteen can therefore solve the problems of both malnutrition and illiteracy.

Since the beginning of the school year in September 2022, 180 children from 5-18 years old have been using the canteen every day at midday, 5 days a week, throughout the school year. For most of the children, this is usually the only meal of the day.

The results are tangible because the AIC group in Fianarantsoa can feed 180 children:

- ❖ €1500 is sent each year by the AIC volunteers in Strasbourg.
- ❖ This sum allows the volunteers in Madagascar to buy 1,800 kilos of rice.
- ❖ Each child consumes about 300 grams of rice/meal (the younger ones a little less, the older ones a little more). The 1,800 kilos purchased last about one and a half months.



This project helps to ensure a better future for these children. There are few dropouts among the beneficiaries because they pass their official school exams. The twinning helps children from disadvantaged families to develop their intellectual abilities, meaning they can become responsible citizens who are no longer marginalised. They will have their place in society.

The twinning therefore allows the AIC Fianarantsoa volunteers to contribute to solving problems such as malnutrition and illiteracy. It encourages them and gives them the strength and courage to face challenges and continue the work of Saint Vincent. It is ultimately a team effort.

Here is a testimony from a mother about the canteen: *“My child has benefited from the canteen for two years. The canteen helps us a lot because it means my child can concentrate on his studies.”*

From the perspective of the AIC group in Strasbourg, France

The twinning between the AIC volunteers in Strasbourg and AIC Madagascar has been going on for 30 years! Every year the Strasbourg group donates a sum – 1,500 euros – to contribute to running the school canteen in Fianarantsoa. These funds are a substantial part of the income from the group’s clothes bank service. They continued to send the contribution during the pandemic, although the revenue from the clothes bank decreased a lot.

The important thing is that thanks to this twinning, the disadvantaged people who buy clothes from AIC contribute towards running the school canteen of the group in Madagascar, and thus also **become donors**.

Here is the reaction of two Madagascan beneficiaries living in France when they were informed of this twinning. It was the first time they had come to the clothes bank.

“We are very happy to be able to help others with our small contribution, and the fact that we can do it for our country makes us proud.”

Mrs. D., who also receives food aid, told the volunteers:

“What you are doing is important and gives me the opportunity to reflect on the fact that we too often complain about small problems. I myself am considered poor by society, but reality shows us that there are always poorer people who have more difficulties. Now that I know that I can also contribute to your project, I will come even more often and if possible, I will not limit myself in my purchases.”

This is why the volunteers think it is important to communicate and inform about twinning: everyone, according to their means, can be active and help others.

The AIC volunteers in Strasbourg will continue to work with their beneficiaries so that these children from Madagascar can “stand up on their own two feet”.



Twinning between AIC Granada, Spain – AIC Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic Margarita Naseau Children's Home

From the perspective of the AIC group in Granada (Spain)

In 2012, the two AIC groups in Granada (Louise de Marillac and Regina Mundi) started a twinning experience with the project *Marguerite Naseau Children's Home*, run by AIC volunteers in the area of Villa Duarte, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. There, young children, between the ages of three and four, are prepared to go to school. These children are provided with breakfast and lunch and engage in various school activities.

From Granada, we contributed to this project financially. Once a month, the volunteers of the AIC groups offer money that they have saved by depriving themselves of something they might enjoy. In turn this money is used to feed and educate the children at the Children's Home. All



the money collected is sent to Santo Domingo in June and December of each year.

From the beginning there was good communication between the two groups of the association. First, we communicated by email and currently we utilize WhatsApp. This process of communication enables the volunteers of the Dominican Republic to inform us about the activities they develop with the boys and girls at the Children's Home.

They send us photos of them in their classes or participating in celebrations (the feast of St. Vincent, Christmas, or some national holiday) and they also inform us about their needs. At the same time, the groups in Granada keep the groups in the Dominican Republic informed about the services we provide, our celebrations and the various experiences that we are living in our groups.

Seeing photographs of the children in their activities and hearing about them brings joy to the volunteers in Granada and revitalizes us, because we feel close to them even though we are living on two different continents. We are grateful to the volunteers in Villa Duarte for allowing us participate in their work: the news they send us enables us to experience as our own all that is being done in the *Home*. We want to continue collaborating in this project, to help other children who enter the children's home and to strengthen the bonds with the AIC volunteers in Villa Duarte.

The role of AIC national and local associations in advocacy within international organisations

- ❖ AIC has a seat at the table of international policy discussions because AIC is “on the ground”, working with people who are poor to develop solutions to poverty, hunger, housing, unemployment, educational and health care needs.
- ❖ AIC projects enable us to contribute the voices, experiences, practical solutions, and best practices not only to discussions with Member States but also at educational events.
- ❖ AIC projects demonstrates that there are **workable solutions that respect the dignity of people** and that **All people are the responsibility of governments and civil society.**

How can you participate?

Please continue to :

- ❖ Send articles about your projects for the AIC International office.
- ❖ Follow our work at the international policy bodies. When you **engage** your local, state and national representatives about your projects and concerns, reference our work at the UN.
- ❖ Send us / the AIC International Secretariat an email or text if you have some experience or project that may offer a unique perspective or solution on an issue.
- ❖ Sign the **Civil Society Declaration** each year. This reminds member states that we are part of a large group of people who care about people experiencing poverty.



Centre Catholique International
de Coopération avec l'UNESCO



WORLDWIDE NETWORK
RESEAU MONDIAL
CRESCENDO
FOR AN HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN AGING
POUR UN VIEILLISSEMENT HUMAIN ET CHRETIEN



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONFERENCE DES ONG DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Main themes within international organisations in 2023

- ❖ **Consequences of the pandemic and social crises**
 - Poverty
 - Hunger
 - Child labour
 - Informal work
 - Homelessness
 - Domestic violence
- ❖ **Human rights – Social rights**
 - Knowledge of and effective access to rights and services
 - The role of digital technology in social development
 - Ethics and new technologies
 - Rights of migrants in countries at war
 - Countries focused on at the 48th Human Rights Council session: Syria, Venezuela and Burundi
- ❖ **Women's rights**
 - Violence against women, homeless women
 - Decent work
 - Full and effective participation of women in public life and decision-making
 - Women's right to land and inheritance in rural areas (Africa)
 - Equality between men and women
 - Education of girls, especially in countries in conflict, or girls in migration situations
- ❖ **Rights of elderly people** and development of intergenerational ties to renew our society.
- ❖ **Intercultural dialogue and religious dialogue to promote peace**

Networking within the United Nations

MaryAnn Dantuono (by video), AIC Representative to the UN since 2017

How we “Network to unite our strengths” at the UN in New York, both with the Vincentian Family and others who share our values and goals.

The civil society (non-governmental groups) network at the UN brings the voices and concerns of the people we serve before this body. The UN is a very large organization of 193 Member States with a complex structure of committees and commissions, a Secretariat that helps to organize this work, along with many UN agencies. The UN does not give single NGOs much attention, but coalitions around topics or groups of like interest are formidable.

In 2015 all the Vincentian NGOs at the UN in New York came together, with the intent of collaborating. The Institute of Global Homelessness was added in 2019. Civil society is invited into the discussions at the UN, as an expert and an advocate. AIC International was accredited to do this work by The Economic and Social Council, also known as ECOSOC, in 2003. We submit written statements, offer oral interventions, sponsor or co-sponsor events to bring attention to issues, attend meetings of various commissions and committees, and most importantly, meet with the member states to talk about the people and needs we see in at local level.

In 2017, we agreed to work on the issue of homelessness and brought together an additional group of 20+ NGOS with an interest in homelessness as the Working Group to End Homelessness. The following year we influenced the Commission on Social Development to make homelessness a priority theme for the following Commission. The Commission passed a resolution that was approved in June 2020 by the 54 Member States of ECOSOC. It was the first Resolution at the UN on the topic of homelessness.

The Vincentian Family, as the leaders of WGEH, was approached by a group of African states, who wanted to move the Resolution to the General Assembly, all 193 Member States. We worked with them and on December 16, 2021, the General Assembly approved a Resolution titled “Inclusive Policies and Programs to Address Homelessness”.

That was an amazing accomplishment. As a result, Member States must consider people experiencing homelessness and access to safe and adequate housing in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfil the commitment of leaving no one behind. The Resolution contains a broad description of homelessness and requires Member States to collect data. Furthermore, it requires the Secretary General to report to the General Assembly in two years during the 78th Session in 2023 on progress and challenges that remain.

This is a very exciting time to be working at the UN. Collaboration and networking has produced great results. Importantly, it is not finished. We are also members of the NGO Committee on Social Development (60 organizations that are working to advance the Sustainable Development Goals), and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, over 250 organizations that are focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women. We

continue with the work of the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness, which is keeping up its work to include homelessness in the discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals, and insists that in order to eradicate poverty, we must address the issues of homelessness as an egregious form of poverty and a violation of the human rights.

Two examples of how together we are making a difference.

In 2021, the Vincentian Family offered a webinar on the theme of Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience. AIC Philippines provided information about their project of rebuilding homes with stronger materials in an area that was devastated by Typhoon Rolly. It provided pictures, and the voices of people who experienced this devastation (see p. 35).

Bringing the stories of women who lack inheritance rights into the Civil Society Forum in 2022 enabled the panel as well as member states to see AIC, but also to see how human dignity is attacked when people lack access to an adequate standard of living because of exclusionary laws or cultural practices (see hereafter).



AIC Madagascar: A roof first

In Madagascar, in rural areas, the situation of widows is particularly unjust because ancestral customs are deeply rooted in the culture and still in force. According to tribal laws still applied today, widows do not have the right to inherit from their husbands: it is the children and then the family of the deceased who inherit.

As a result, widows with several children to support may find themselves without income, without a roof over their heads, without any social protection. So in the hope of finding a better life, they leave for the big cities. But there their situation is even worse: they live by begging and sleep in the streets or in the market.

The volunteers of AIC Manakara were very concerned about this situation and set up the project “A roof first” to address it.

The objectives of this project are:

- ❖ To provide the mothers with small houses made of local materials to ensure their safety;
- ❖ To ensure food security for the mothers and their children through a school canteen that is open daily;
- ❖ To give the mothers literacy training, followed by training and awareness raising about their rights and duties as citizens;
- ❖ To allow them to guarantee health care for their families thanks to a mutual health group;
- ❖ To provide schooling for the children and to register them with the civil registry, otherwise these children have no legal existence.



The impacts of this project are numerous for the mothers and their children.

From being shy and fearful, the mothers have become:

- ❖ Self-confident women, able to participate in social debates and discussions and to defend themselves
- ❖ Fulfilled women who are ready to learn and move forward
- ❖ Women with children who are proud of their mothers

One day, one of the beneficiaries, Brigitte, told the volunteers: *“I have a roof, a key, I can receive my friends, I am like the others. And thanks to AIC, I have a small plot of land on which I can cultivate produce”*.

AIC now has a piece of land on which to build huts. The result is that the fear these women had of being chased away from the land has disappeared; the families can cultivate produce, and find small income generating activities. Their situation nevertheless remains volatile because they still do not have access to water, electricity and internet.

In the future, the volunteers want to:

- ❖ Encourage the widows to form cooperatives.
- ❖ Advocate within society so that women can enjoy their rights after the death of their husbands.
- ❖ Collaborate at national level with the ministries (Population – Justice – Members of the legislative assembly)
- ❖ Speak out at international level thanks to AIC representatives in international organisations.

MaryAnn Dantuono, member of AIC USA and representative at ECOSOC, the United Nations agency for social development in New York, asked the volunteers to present their actions at the Civil Society Forum *“Sustainable livelihood, well-being, and dignity for all”* in February 2022.

This project with widowed mothers in Madagascar fits with ECOSOC’s priorities, namely:

- ❖ Tackling homelessness
- ❖ Supporting poor families, especially women and single mothers
- ❖ Ensuring the most disadvantaged people have access to social rights

Presenting this local project at international level was really an enormous opportunity for AIC. One of AIC’s major strengths is its ability to raise awareness among decision-makers and contribute to the changes necessary to build a fairer world.

AIC's representation at UNESCO

Isabelle Chaperon (by video)

Alone we go faster, together we go further..

This idea is very relevant in the advocacy task that AIC undertakes within international organisations.

UNESCO, located in Paris, is the United Nations agency that works worldwide in the fields of education, science, human and social sciences, culture and communication. It also has cross-cutting priorities, namely girls and Africa.



NGOs – and therefore AIC – have a role to play, a voice to bring to these high-level discussions.

We have a word to say because we – that is to say, each of you – are active at local level. You witness the daily lives of so many people in very diverse situations of poverty to which we must respond.

Our vision as a Catholic NGO is to promote the idea that the human person is central. All people have equal dignity regardless of their circumstances, and so we advocate for a holistic approach to education, with a special focus on those in need. Our mindset is one of fraternity.

How do we strive to make your voices heard in global debates?

As an **example**: A very interesting achievement was the celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child in 2018. Instead of academic and intellectual speeches, we organised three sessions using testimonies from the local level: thanks to your contributions, we made the voices of girls heard at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. On this occasion, we also published a manifesto that was presented to the Director General, Mrs Azoulay.

We are now planning to organise two more events and we will ask you again for more information.

Another opportunity is for us to speak at the general policy debate during the UNESCO General Conference, which I did, on behalf of AIC, highlighting both the increase in violence against girls, and the needs of older people, who should not be left behind.

Other actions, for us as NGOs, consist in participating in the consultation phase of important draft texts, or in bringing, during forums or consultations, experiences from local level, like those of AIC Lebanon and AIC Egypt, which provided computers to girls during COVID.

As you can see, this work combines both ideas and best practices.

AIC is also a member of a group of Catholic-inspired NGOs, CCIC, which brings together its representatives to pool their efforts and expertise. It also provides training and information, and promotes collective action. I am honoured to have been recently elected President of this group, which is well recognised at UNESCO.

So, as you can see, this work cannot be fruitful without you, without your cooperation, without your answers to questionnaires and other requests for local experiences. I am very grateful to those who have contributed in the past and I hope we can continue to count on your support.

Together we will go further to make your voices and experiences heard, to make them really count at international level.

Thursday 23rd March

Theme of the day: How should we react to contemporary forms of poverty?

1. Presentation by Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM

'Actions to address the consequences of the pandemic and other contemporary crises'

2. Presentation of AIC projects

- AIC Lebanon
- AIC Peru
- AIC Argentina
- AIC Italy
- AIC Ecuador
- AIC Laos
- AIC Colombia
- AIC Slovakia
- AIC Poland
- AIC Ukraine

3. Questions for group work

Actions to address today's pandemics:

- 1) What struck me most in Father Gabriel Naranjo's presentation and in the testimonies that were presented?
- 2) What conversions (changes) are the current crises calling for (pandemics, conflicts, climate crisis, etc.)? (see also AIC training reflections)
 - a) On a personal level?
 - b) In my AIC group?

What more could my AIC group do to support:

- 1) People who have migrated?
- 2) Victims of human trafficking?
- 3) Homeless people?
- 4) People who are victims of very difficult life contexts (domestic violence, armed conflicts, severe economic and political crises, etc.)?
- 5) People who have lost their jobs?
- 6) People who no longer have access to schooling?
- 7) Elderly people who suffer from isolation?

4. Presentation by Father Gabriel Naranjo, CM

'The path to effective charity'

Key theme, 23rd March
Milagros Galisteo Moya, AIC Spain

From the start we looked at the Synodal Process, where AIC is moving forward with the rest of the Church in its mission of “samaritanising” ecclesial life. Saint Vincent already taught us to move forward together in love and in the service of our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

Walking side by side, living out our great diversity in our charism, is what creates the synodal path. A path made all the fuller when we also contemplate God’s mystery of creation, not only to admire it but also to take care of it, to protect it as part of our care of others. Our Vincentian charism may be primarily social but it is also rooted in ecology given the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of our planet.

We cannot, as AIC, just limit our actions to tending to the poor, our mission requires us to see the poor in the context of the earth under threat, wounded and unprotected by social and environmental threats. Protecting the dignity of life implies a need for a new theology that can direct our actions towards an ecclesial ecology.

AIC’s Vincentian charism is synodal, since our service is always carried out in collaboration with, by and for the poor in the most profound ecclesial sense. This collaboration is creative, modern and varied, empowering the poor, with the humility shown by Saint Vincent and in a spirit of mutual exchange with our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The Lord has called us, as Vincentians, to bring hope to the poor, living the gospel following St Vincent de Paul’s example, letting them feel the love of God in a meeting that is a mutual exchange. This is what Saint Vincent would have called making charity authentic.



Actions to address the consequences of the pandemic and other contemporary crises

Father Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, CM

1. Assumptions

Before going into the dynamic of ripple effect of this day, I would like to draw attention to two assumptions:

- a) The road travelled by AIC in its post-conciliar renewal: the AIC has been the branch of the Vincentian Family that has revealed great flexibility and vision in updating itself, returning to the sources and responding to the signs of the times. Its doctrinal and operative framework has changed in a paradigmatic way; it has updated its understanding of the Charism with its own hermeneutics; it has energized the formation of its members; it has modernized its structures of organization and animation; it has redesigned the methodology of commitment to the poor; in its maternal entrails a valuable overcoming of assistentialism with a view to promotion, and, beyond, towards systemic change and, today, to the political implications of its social and environmental commitments. In this sense, you have preserved your historical condition of being the first, remaining the pioneers; I repeat, the key to all this journey has been the determination to “act together against poverty and its causes”.
- b) The references that have been highlighted in the reflections of these three days: “sometimes there is nothing as practical as a good theory”⁴¹. Above all, the Word of God, whose Voice we hear in the movements of creation, the events of history and the cries of reality. Whose Face we recognize and contemplate in Christ whom we see and serve in the suffering faces of the poor. Whose House we build with our lifestyle: poor, prayerful, communitarian. Whose Paths we travel with our mission among the poorest of our countryside and our cities. In addition, the sense of belonging not merely to the AIC but to the Charism, therefore, to the Church and the Kingdom and as an expression today of this ecclesial and charismatic sensitivity, the doctrinal and testimonial magisterium of Pope Francis, and his call to synodality, from a perspective that moves beyond the limits of mere social friendship and universal fraternity. We must also mention here the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (from the perspective of the JCoR).

2. Pandemic and pandemics

Pope Francis’s world leadership with regard to the interpretation of the Covid-19 pandemic has been unquestionable. Hence the validity of a warning of his that has run through his many interventions: humanity cannot be reassured by the relief that vaccines have brought, nor can it rush into a post-pandemic in which there is a danger of returning to the situation as it was before. On the contrary, lessons must be learned from it. In fact, the Pandemic itself has uncovered other viruses, even more pernicious, and other pandemics even more disastrous,

⁴¹ Lewin Kurt. Comparative Epistemology. Madrid, Tecnos, 1991.

precisely because they are entrenched in the system of relationships and social structures, including in the culture of our societies. The dramatic call is still urgent: *May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us*⁴².

Indeed, the Pandemic has exposed our false securities, our hidden agendas, our individualistic projects, our sterile routines, our anaesthetics, make-ups, stereotypes, masks, disguises...⁴³. The virus of a selfishness that has penetrated today's civilization and has generated pandemics of generalized exclusion and indifference. The sudden halt in the frenetic pace of human life, with its confinement, this sudden change in our *modus vivendi*, has led us to realize that *we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented*⁴⁴.

3. Lessons

Pope Francis urges us to draw lessons: *This is not the time for indifference, selfishness, division, forgetfulness: we want to and must do away with them forever*⁴⁵. On the other hand, *it is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track*⁴⁶. Faced with the impact of what has happened, with such grave consequences, *we must make everything that happens to us something good, even the bad things*⁴⁷.

Believers must act from the perspective of faith: *Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you ... faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation*⁴⁸. Only in this way can we make a contribution to the crisis of the planet, with an alternative proposal of meaning, and with a more sober, more natural, more just, more supportive lifestyle. *Reflecting on the now and the hereafter*⁴⁹, we can invite all peoples *to embrace the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope. Why are you afraid?*⁵⁰

4. Historical pandemics

The primary objective of AIC in its most fruitful times, is to engage in a common struggle against poverty and its causes. I repeat this for the third time because it is even more pressing today. Indeed, we are suffocated by the historical pandemics of the social gap, poverty, marginalization, unemployment, lack of opportunities for the most vulnerable, structural deficiencies of health and education services, the rampant public and private corruption, drug trafficking and drug use, the murder of social and ecological leaders in many countries, the unspeakable attacks on life and dignity, the assault against nature ... in summary, war, violence and death.

⁴² Pope Francis. Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2020.

⁴³ Cf. Francis *Urbi et orbi* Message of the Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic. Atrium of St. Peter's Basilica, 27.03.20.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, Letter to Dr. Roberto Andrés Gallardo, March 30, 2020.

⁵⁰ *Urbi et orbi* message.

As if this were not enough, there are also the phenomena we have reflected and which have become more acute in the last three years: migration, human trafficking, homelessness. Nor can we turn a blind eye to the tendency towards self-referentiality that is holding back our movements and our structures, or to the scandals of abuse of all kinds of power that have put the credibility of the Church in question.

In the face of this gloomy panorama, the dreams of so many young people who have dared to plan an action to draw lessons from the Pandemic shine like a light and offer us some insights that can also define the horizon of our action: education and virtual culture; family and cultivation of faith and values; health, medicine and social assistance systems; fate of the poor and politics; ecology and system of life; faith and the meaning of life, relationships and daily concerns.⁵¹

⁵¹ Cf. Colombo-German Vincentian Foundation of Young University Students Bonds of Friendship-Bänder der Freundschaft. Monthly virtual meetings of 2020.

AIC Lebanon: Post-pandemic education project

The AIC project in Lebanon being presented here is called: “Support to schooling”. It is being carried out in Beirut. For this project, as in its other activities, AIC Lebanon works in close collaboration with the Daughters of Charity.

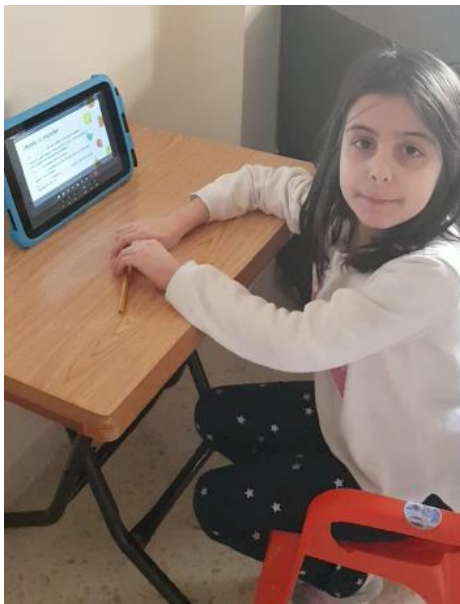
A few words on the context of this project: Lebanon, unlike its neighbours in the Middle East region, has neither oil nor uranium. But its wealth is even greater, and is exported all over the world, due to a lack of local opportunities. Lebanon’s heritage is its **youth!** Educating young people is the key to overcoming all difficulties! The resilience of young people in Lebanon has enabled the country to bounce back again and again over the last 45 years.

The economic, social and financial crisis has been shaking the country for more than three years and is progressively precipitating it into an unprecedented level of poverty. More than 80% of the population now lives below the poverty line; 40% in a state of extreme poverty.

In addition to the COVID crisis, skyrocketing inflation has increased unemployment levels and exponentially accelerated emigration. The country is emptying itself of its youth.

Finally, the explosion in the port of Beirut on 4th August 2020 devastated the landscape of a capital that was on the point of rebuilding itself, destroying many schools.

In a shattered country, where the government is of no support, only associations can bring some comfort.



It is in this context that AIC Lebanon decided to mobilise to rekindle a glimmer of hope in the eyes of disadvantaged Lebanese children.

The objective of the project: In 2020, due to the pandemic, students all over the world found themselves isolated at home, learning at a distance and having no real contact with their teachers and school friends. In Lebanon, as elsewhere, inequalities increased and many students lacked the tools to continue their education.

In order to prevent them from failing in their studies, AIC Lebanon, with the precious help of AIC International, decided to distribute 26 computers and tablets to students from the most disadvantaged families to stop them from dropping out of school.

For the two school years 21/22 and 22/23, the association also participated in the purchase of school supplies and the payment of enrolment and school fees for 45 students.

This activity is part of the association's commitment to education in Lebanon, a long-term project that has been carried out for many years.

Indeed, with the help of young volunteers, the association has been welcoming every day, for several years, about thirty students after school to help them with their homework and thus ensure their progress and academic success.

Prospects: In 2023, the association plans to expand its activities through a new collaboration with the IECD. This collaboration aims to ensure social and professional reintegration of young people who have left school before obtaining their secondary school certificate.

To do this, the association is offering them training in manual trades in various fields, such as mechanics, electricity, domestic assistance for seniors or sick people, early childhood support, hotel service, nail extensions or sewing.

To date, 40 young people have joined this adventure. They will attend one of several training centres and the courses will start soon.

AIC Lebanon carries a message of hope from young people in Lebanon and is extremely grateful to AIC International for its invaluable help.

Thanks to the support of donors and AIC International, all the volunteers from AIC Lebanon will continue to fight tirelessly so that education remains the promise of a more positive future for all young people in the country.

At AIC, we follow the vision of St Vincent de Paul, who taught us that "Christ is incarnated in the weakest, the poorest". May we keep the flame of true charity alive in our hearts and actions.

AIC Peru: Combatting violence against women

A common occurrence in the area: A teenage girl is raped by three assailants in the San Juan de Tangumi village. They doped her, raped her cruelly and left her bloodied on the road fifteen minutes from her home. After receiving help from a friend, she was taken to the hospital by her mother, her wounds were stitched, and she received medication and psychological care for a week. A police report is filed but the case goes unpunished ... there is complete silence. There is no justice from the authorities. This reality of pain and suffering is the common denominator in the lives of many adolescents and girls in Awajún. Their story has raised awareness among the AIC volunteers, thus giving birth to the TAMAR Project in the Peruvian jungle.

The objective of the project is to design a formation program in the prevention of physical, psychological and sexual violence aimed at boys, girls, adolescents and adult women who are victims of machismo and marginalization. The program is intended to generate situations of gender equality and respect for the lives of women in the Awajún educational community. For this purpose, we worked with two schools.



Through various activities, we seek to conceptualize the different forms of violence against women and its consequences on personal, family and social levels. We attempt to motivate individuals to adopt behaviours that promote gender equality and respect for both men and women. It also seeks to establish coordination with the Women's Emergency Centre and social agents who work with

victims of violence, to promote women's health, and to inform individuals about the procedure to follow in cases of physical, psychological or sexual violence. It also seeks to provide people who are the victims of violence with information about their rights in order to receive the necessary legal and/or psychological attention that will enable them to recover their dignity as human beings and children of God. Finally, we attempt to select women victims of violence with outstanding participation in formation sessions and insert them in productive entrepreneurship workshops so that they can create economic autonomy in their homes.

The current situation of poverty is confronted fundamentally with education. With professional psychologists and lawyers, we have developed prevention and awareness workshops against violence against women and have involved the students, parents and teachers of two difference schools in these workshops. At the same time, we offer workshops on the identification of violence and sexual abuse, as well as protocols to be followed when

violence becomes a reality. After the theoretical training, the women have participated in formation workshops on productive enterprises: dressmaking, baking and cosmetology.

The impact of this project is very concrete. The women have overcome their fear and now come to the Women's Emergency Centre for assistance. Twenty-five women have started productive enterprises in bakery/pastry and cosmetology to generate income for their families. That is to say, of the fifty registered cases, only twenty-five have successfully completed the training. Some school leaders have emerged who understand the meaning of violence against women and what it means to avoid it for a harmonious intra-family relationship.

In the future, it is hoped that women in situations of violence will be protected from their aggressors at a more professional level (psychological-legal) in strategic alliance with institutions in the area. We hope to improve the economy of the Awajún women through the expansion of the Productive Workshops in bakery and dressmaking. At the same time we want to promote the formation of children and adolescents so that they become the agents of change in their family environment ... living together in relationships of mutual respect and non-violence.

**AIC Argentina: P.A.N.N. (Producimos, Alimentamos, Nutrivos, Necesidades)
(We Produce, Feed, Nourish, Needs)**

The lack of work was affected by the prevailing economic and social situation, and during the pandemic it intensified and strengthened in families, impacting all its members. Many heads of families, in some cases men, were affected because they had to carry out activities outside the province and, in other cases, they were disabled for a long period of time, such as construction workers, gastronomic workers, artisans and self-employed workers.

This situation highlighted the unsatisfied basic needs, which made it possible to delimit poverty groups due to insufficient income and to focus the Project on *the most basic primary need, which is food*. A group of women was promoted through a “Confectionery Workshop” that allowed them to provide income to their homes through the production and sale of sweets. The project thus provided these individuals with the opportunity to generate income and achieve economic independence.

The objectives were:

- ❖ To create awareness of a work culture to improve the family situation.
- ❖ To strengthen basic baking skills to resume work activities.
- ❖ To provide training that would enable individuals to start their own business.
- ❖ To encourage solidarity for the integration of individuals that would lead them to solve problems or difficulties that they might encounter.



Thanks to this project, men and women make baked goods to be delivered to homes and/or family events. The proceeds from these sales were used for the necessary purchases of each recipient.

I can share with you Maria’s testimony: *through this project I was able to train myself, I learned how to make different cakes. I was able to sell my products and use that money to buy the food I needed for my family.*

In the future we would like to open a bakery with another project to generate work with the P.A.N.N. trainees.

AIC Italy: Breakfast with a smile

Description and background

“Days should start with a hug, a kiss, some affection and a coffee. Because breakfast should be plentiful,” Lucy told Snoopy in an episode of Peanuts. And in La Spezia, Liguria, that’s exactly what happens. Almost every morning, before dawn, in a welcoming and friendly environment, tea, coffee and freshly baked cakes are served to everyone. This initiative, called “Breakfast with a smile”, began six years ago to give homeless people not only a place to spend a few hours in the warmth with a coffee, but also a friendly atmosphere with familiar faces.

“Here we are all one big family,” explains Anna Lavazzo, the AIC volunteer who is in charge of the service. *“We welcome everyone who shows up to have breakfast with us, after a night spent in the cold, in a disused train car or under a porch”*; and over the years, strong and meaningful relationships have been created.

Changes noted

“At the beginning, there was a lot of anger about the hardships, the rough nights, whereas now people come to us with a smile. And the great thing is that we don’t just give out the first meal of the day, but we all have breakfast together, sit at the same table, tell stories.”

Anna explains that La Spezia has always been a city that looks after the most disadvantaged people. The local government gives a lot of support to associations that deal with the difficulties of those who live on the margins. *“We are all brothers: for us, the least we can do is take care of those who are disadvantaged compared to us.”* That’s why for Anna and the other volunteers, the alarm clock rings very early: *“The service opens at 5:45 a.m. and continues until 9 a.m.”*



At the beginning, many people came to get out of the cold, but unfortunately there weren’t enough volunteers. *“That’s why we do everything together now: those who come, despite the difficult night, help. There are those who heat the milk, those who set the table, those who prepare the coffee, they do it all spontaneously.”*

Evolution of the project

In addition to breakfast every morning, the space also allows people to take a hot shower and wash their clothes, which they get back clean and fragranced the next day. *“We have put*

bottles of shampoo and shower gel in the bathroom, just like at home, and soft towels where you can wrap up and dry yourself."

Anna says that the laundry service developed over time, from an idea provided by some of the people who came to have breakfast, thanks to the trust they built up day by day with the volunteers. *"Why do they have to throw away their clothes every time they get dirty? Finding something comfortable and that they feel good in is an achievement for them. That's why it's right to give them the opportunity to keep their clothes and not throw them away when they need to be washed."*

Knowing that there is someone in the world who is thinking about you completely changes your outlook on life.

Anna first had the idea for the project when she was having breakfast with her family one morning. Watching her husband and children eat breakfast and smile, she asked herself *"why us and not them"?*

AIC Ecuador: Urban gardens, a source of hope

After the COVID 19 pandemic, AIC Ecuador, concerned about the inactivity and fear of contagion, looked for strategies to motivate and reactivate the activities of the Vincentian volunteers working in different areas of the country on behalf of marginalized brothers and sisters.

One of these strategies was to analyse, study, visit and motivate each and every one of the groups. The volunteers of the AIC in San Gabriel were always concerned about providing food to our vulnerable brothers and sisters, and even more so during the time of pandemic. The members observed the lack of interest for vulnerable people, the abandonment of the elderly, in many cases by their own families and understood that this is the type of poverty that has to be fought.

On one of the visits, the board of directors of AIC Ecuador became aware of the fact that they had a hillside or ravine that is part of the property of the Daughters of Charity. Transforming this land would promote the sustainability of the dining room of AIC San Gabriel in order to offer optimal food to the elderly, migrants and other vulnerable people.

In addition, something very important, this work goes hand in hand with the spiritual guidance and evangelization of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.



AIC Ecuador enabled the AIC San Gabriel together with the Daughters of Charity, parents and students of the Pablo Muños Vega educational unit and people from the community to work together as a team in the execution of this blessed project. It fills us with emotion and hope to see everyone learning values such as: responsibility, perseverance, patience, conviction and selfless love.

The number of people benefiting from was around 50, but the number is growing every day, now there are 150 people (including migrants, seniors) who come on weekends to get their food.

Martha Bonilla, secretary of AIC San Gabriel stated: “we thank AIC International for the economic assistance that was given at the right time and for the allocation of economic resources which were used to purchase the necessary agricultural tools. The commitment of Mrs. Olguita was pivotal and enabled us to achieve the proposed objectives. Indeed, she infected us with her energy and spirit and encouraged us to move forward in this blessed work of helping others.”

In the future we want the project to be self-sustainable and we plan to do this through the sale of the products that are harvested. Since we are dealing with perishable products, we have to manage the harvest quickly and efficiently, such as tubers, vegetables and legumes from the area.

We also want to replicate this project in other cities. We are currently studying the implementation of this project with the volunteers San Vicente de Paul of the city of Catacocha, province of Loja, a city on the border with Peru.

AIC Laos: Human trafficking

Causes: Poverty is the very top cause of the human trafficking issue, which is becoming more and more widespread.

From 2014-2018, we had an anti-trafficking project led by a DC sister to help victims of this labour market. After the closing of this project, the DC's team still continues to make some individual visits to the victims.

Due to the practice of Lao ancestors' culture, girls in remote areas are not encouraged to go into higher education. The expectation is that after marriage, girls are just housewives who raise children and only do housework. Some trafficking agents take advantage of this to meet families with teenage children, especially girls, and claim that by working abroad, they will have more freedom. They suggest that they will not have to work very hard, but will get a very high salary, which they will be able to use to alleviate themselves from poverty.

However, when reaching the destination, the girls have to do various jobs that are different from the ones discussed with their parents before leaving home. For example:

- ❖ They are abused by their employers and made to do jobs that citizens do not want to do or to work for more than 12 hours for a tiny income. If they raise any questions, employers reply that their wages are reduced because they have to reimburse the travel costs.
- ❖ They are forced into prostitution and treated in an inhuman way.
- ❖ They have no access to medical facilities and no leave days (they work 7 days a week).
- ❖ Girls are forced into fake marriages in families where they are obliged to work all day and be a common wife of many men (in one case with 6 men) living under the same roof at night-time.
- ❖ They have almost no possibilities to come back home since they have no cash and their passports are hidden by the agents. Even if they can escape, they reach home only with the minimum amount just for transportation.

Consequences

- ❖ They are rejected by their own family, their community and/or their own society.
- ❖ They have unwanted pregnancies.
- ❖ They are carriers of HIV.
- ❖ They get psychologically affected and traumatized.

Support from the church

After the closing of the human trafficking project, the DC community still provides:

For returnees:

- ❖ Healthcare:

- Psychological support and counselling
- Payment of medical expenses, taking care of girls during their pregnancy and after the delivery
- ❖ Nutrition: from time to time, we provide basic food to the mother and encourage mothers to breastfeed their newborn babies.
- ❖ Finding light work to enable them to be self-sufficient



For those who still want to work abroad with the intention of having better living conditions, the church provides:

- ❖ Necessary information for legal travel (through Ministry of Labor or legal agencies)
- ❖ Necessary information for self-support and self-protection
- ❖ Information about how to contact Lao embassy in that country, their family members or close friends for help.

Current action: We hope that we will find sponsors to restart the project with full support.

AIC Colombia: Education towards recovering the dignity of people who are victims of the armed conflict and/or in situations of vulnerability

During the past fifty years or more, the armed conflict in Colombia has left 7.4 million victims in a situation of internal displacement. Although the number has been decreasing as a result of the peace process, this problem continues as a result of the violence generated by the guerrillas, paramilitaries or “BACRIM” – criminal gangs.

Bogota, as the capital of the country, has been one of the cities that has received and welcomed this population, exacerbating problems such as exclusion, poverty, marginalization, begging and drug addiction. Public entities are insufficient and ineffective and so many individuals are left helpless in situation unknown to them and thus, forced to find the means to survive.

The objective of the project is to accompany displaced people so that they become agents of change in society, thus contributing to the construction of peace and reconciliation in the country. To achieve this, the project focuses on:

- ❖ Recovering people’s dignity
- ❖ Providing a place of welcome, psycho-social and spiritual guidance, integral human-Christian formation and job training
- ❖ Enhancing skills
- ❖ Developing various processes of empowerment and reconstruction of their life goals utilizing Gospel values.



Today we provide courses in computers, cooking, entrepreneurship workshops, etc., in addition to psychological, moral and spiritual guidance, home visits, job training and nutritional support. All this thanks to an interdisciplinary team composed of AIC volunteers, psychologists, social workers, receptionists, SENA, shelter houses, etc.

AIC Slovakia: Supporting migrants from Ukraine

AIC Slovakia has 220 members working in 30 associations in parishes throughout Slovakia. The war in Ukraine has led the whole of AIC Slovakia and the Vincentian Family in Slovakia to more intensive cooperation and organization of aid to Ukraine.

AIC Slovakia organized clothing and food collections; some members accommodated people from Ukraine in their families. These activities are supported by the prayers of AIC Slovakia members.

AIC Slovakia, together with other branches of the Vincentian Family, annually organizes the “Fight Against Hunger” fundraiser. At the beginning of the war, a large part of the collected funds was transferred to aid Ukraine: a total of €100,000.

Thanks to cooperation with the Vincentian Family operating in Ukraine – AIC Ukraine, the Satmarian sisters, the Vincentian sisters, the Lazarian brothers and the Ukrainian DePaul, our help quickly reached where it was needed.



On February 28, the sixth day of the conflict, the brave driver Jirko and the even braver sister Vincent Damiána Poláková, accompanied by prayers, set off and successfully arrived at night in the Ukrainian city of Perechyn. The green van with the DEPAUL logo was the second Slovak humanitarian aid vehicle that successfully brought a shipment to Ukraine. Possibilities for assistance, including accommodation and material needs, were reported on the website of the Vincent Family, which we created for

this purpose in Slovakia. We organized financial and material assistance. Thanks to several organizations, we managed to get this aid to Ukraine for free.

After last year’s visit of three members from AIC Slovakia to the community of Perechyn, we also started sending medical and hygiene aid to this community. This assistance is implemented by the AIC Slovakia Saint Louise mobile hospice, based in the town of Handlová. AIC Slovakia has been cooperating with the Vincentian Family in Ukraine for several years and supports projects such as the soup kitchen for disadvantaged people in Bukovina with financial support and collections of food and clothing.

All these experiences of close cooperation and support have strengthened our relations with AIC Ukraine and would not have been possible without the prayers of our members.

AIC Poland : Helping Ukraine

The exodus: 24th February 2022, Russia started its aggression against Ukraine. The harshness of this aggression surprised everyone. A large number of Ukrainians fled to the border with Poland – mainly mothers with children, and elderly people and people with disabilities. They didn't know the language, had no money, no food, no spare clothes and nowhere to go to. They had to wait at the border in the icy cold (-7°C) for almost 30 hours. In the first week alone some 1.5 million Ukrainians crossed the border – the largest exodus since the Second World War. No-one was prepared for this. Our volunteers, with others, went to the border. Each refugee received a hot meal, clothing, hygiene products, transport and somewhere to stay, all free. Most were taken in by parishes, religious houses or by Poles in their own homes. Refugee centres were virtually non-existent in Poland at the time.

Managing the chaos: We worked to get social security numbers, social cover, SIM cards, medical care and to have the children attend school. We also supplied food, clothing and hygiene products.

So they could feel at home: We tried to reduce the mental trauma and, for a brief time at least, allow the migrants to forget the nightmare they were living. We organised weekly meetings, with coffee and cake, listening to the refugees, seeing what their needs were and enabling them to meet their compatriots. There was a special play area reserved for the children. We would pray together, cook together and have fun together.

Easter: Over the Easter period we got to know the different cultures and customs. Together we made the Easter Palms and prepared a traditional breakfast for 200 families.



Supporting AIC Ukraine: We stay in constant touch with our friends from AIC Ukraine. We were able to send them the money we raised as well as food and hygiene products. Father Jerzy Górny transported all this to the border with Ukraine. There were emotional and joyful meetings with Jan, Anka and Yana from AIC Ukraine.

Current challenges: The war goes on, no-one knows for how long. Over 9 million Ukrainians have crossed the Polish border. Some have continued their journey into other European countries whilst others have returned to Ukraine, and over 2 million have stayed on in Poland. We are all learning to live together but it raises a number of challenges on a daily basis.

We organise free Polish language classes. We encourage local initiatives to create jobs for the women, raising funds to acquire sewing-machines. A sewing workshop has been set up. We are also able to provide legal assistance and regular deliveries of food parcels and clothing.

200 families are looked after in Wroclaw, Warsaw takes care of 50 families and in Rabka there are 21 people.

We need to help Ukraine get through the winter with no electricity or heating, and have sent batteries, blankets, warm clothes and food to Bakhmut.

In conclusion: We send you our warmest thanks and sincere appreciation for helping Ukraine. Please do not stop this aid.

AIC Ukraine: Working with displaced people in a war context

My name is Anna Skoryk, many people know me as Anka. I am the vice-president of our national group. I am from Ukraine, more precisely from the East of the country, from the city of Kharkiv, which is located 36 km from the border with the country-aggressor, which attacked us openly a year ago and started a full-scale war.

The topic of our meeting is migration and the subject of my contribution to that topic is the migration and homelessness caused by the war in our country. But first I would like to take this opportunity to make a short personal input. This is very important in the light of this meeting, of our AIC organization and for us as individuals and Christians.

When the war began on February 24, 2022, like the other 2 million residents of Kharkiv, I woke up at about 5am (it was still dark) due to terrible explosions of rockets and artillery shots... It was scary, it was shocking... and it was clear that the war had begun – we were being attacked. To be honest, at first I did not know what to do, people called me, everyone was full of panic and fear... When the sun had risen, it was clear that the city was in smoke and explosions and shots did not stop. I got ready, took my documents and my cat and walked to a safer place, namely the basement in our church of St. Vincent de Paul. From that morning I never returned home... On the 6th day of the war, my small house was burned down from a rocket shell which hit it... I became homeless... In the basement, together with our parishioners and local residents (there were about 130 of us), I sat under constant rocket shelling from multiple rocket systems, air bombs and other types of weapons for 10 days... It is impossible to convey... I never want anyone to experience this... War is the most terrible thing that can happen to humanity.

The consequences of the war are homelessness, poverty, migration, illness, loss of relatives, loss of work... War brings all kinds of poverty and fear! After 10 days of this horror, we decided to evacuate to a safer place – to Western Ukraine, where our missionary Vincentian Fathers were waiting. We drove 30 people (adults and children) in 4 cars. The journey took 3 days because a lot of people began to evacuate themselves from Kharkiv and other cities and villages in Eastern Ukraine. The aggressor bombed and shelled the most densely populated area of the city where we lived, Saltivka, where more than 300,000 people lived in high-rise buildings. People saw their burning neighbours dying in the flames. The picture shows what the station in Kharkiv looked like in the first weeks of the war... people waited 1-2 days to get on an evacuation train. People fled to Western Ukraine, and then to Europe...



You can talk a lot about what happened and is happening, but given the above, I would like to say that having survived all this horror, I am very grateful for your support, which helped me survive. In the first days of the war, I received messages from our secretariat: Tayde, Bénédicte, Catherine, Laurence; from AIC UK: Christine, Dee and Marlene; from AIC Poland: Father Jerzy and Bernadette. In such difficult moments in life, it is very important that you are supported, to know that people are thinking of you and want to help. And most importantly, pray! Thanks a lot!!! You can't even imagine how it gave strength to endure all the horror in which we found ourselves.

I also want to express my great gratitude to all of you, your countries and your people and governments, who opened the borders of their countries, homes and, above all, hearts for us, Ukrainians, who fled to save our lives and the lives of our children. This is invaluable help and support. Thank you also for all the humanitarian projects and financial assistance that we have received and continue to receive.

Already describing my experience of the war and the evacuation from Kharkiv, I touched on the topic of migration. People were forced to flee their homes, cities, villages, country in order to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Many have lost everything material – houses, work, their savings. They became refugees (migrants), homeless and poor...

Basically, these are residents of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, where active hostilities or occupation are taking place: Kharkiv, Donetsk, Lugansk, Sumy, Zaporozhye, Dnepropetrovsk, Nikolaev, Kherson, Odessa regions... The massive missile strikes and the consequences that followed them also caused blackouts, in which people in their homes had no electricity, heat, water or communications for several hours a day and up to several days. Because of that people from Central and Western Ukraine were also forced to leave their homes.

From all this, we see how many challenges and difficulties both our people and European countries have faced. But, I repeat, your hearts and homes have been open to us, and Ukrainians have found warmth and safety there!

There is also the problem that not all Ukrainians will return home even after the war. There are several reasons for this: fear of living next door to such a country, fear of the memories that they experienced during the shelling, the fact that everything is destroyed and there is nowhere to return to, the lost job opportunities... and others.

4.7 million internally displaced persons are registered in Ukraine. More than 14.5 million Ukrainians left after February 24, and at least 11.7 million entered the EU countries. 7.7 million are registered in Europe as recipients of temporary protection.

In turn, we, as an AIC Ukraine group, want to help in Western Ukraine, where our groups are located: Transcarpathia, Brody, Bukovyna and Sniatyn. Yana, our president, did great coordination work. AIC assistance to internally displaced persons is in the form of projects aimed primarily at providing housing for displaced persons, as well as providing necessary things. And we began to provide this assistance from the first days of the war, together with the Vincentian Family (Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity, Miraculous Medal Sisters, DePaul):

- ❖ In Zakrapattya, in the pastoral parish centre in Perechyn, about 118 settlers were accommodated, where they were provided with all the necessary things (clothes, sanitary items), as well as food.
- ❖ In Snyatyn, in the house of the Daughters of Charity, as well as the Fathers' pilgrimage centre, about 120 settlers were accommodated, and everything necessary was also provided.
- ❖ In Brody, a large room was made available at the boarding school for housing immigrants, about 1348 people in total. Here too, people were also provided with everything they needed...

Only one person, the most persistent, because everyone was evacuated, remained from the group in Kharkiv: Victoria – she is here among us. And throughout this time, together with



Vincentian Fathers and in cooperation with DePaul, she daily delivers hot food and humanitarian aid to those in need in Kharkiv and the de-occupied villages. After the end of the war, we plan to help people rebuild their homes and help them buy what they need. We have already started with roofs and windows.

In the end, I just want to say that despite the cruelty and the size of the army of the enemy, we believe in victory and peace. And this is also due to the solidarity of European countries, which have been present in Ukraine since the first day and are helping us! Without your support, without joint efforts, we will not be able to resist this terrible evil that destroys all of us in its path, destroys life... I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to speak at this meeting, at the international meeting of the AIC, to express my gratitude and the gratitude from those people whom we can help because of your donations and also to attract your further support to help restore our country and human lives.

The path to effective charity

Father Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, CM

The moment of truth has arrived. In the language of St. Vincent de Paul, it is time to make charity effective, to organize it, to sacramentalise the *Kairos* of these days of Assembly and this charismatic and foundational Pentecost with the ripple effect of new and effective commitments.

1. Synodality and attitudes

We will begin by once again examining the significance of the three moments that have sustained the methodology of this Assembly, due to their always projective nature:

1.1. Listening

- a) Listening as a method corresponds to the first moment of the process, that is, to the preparation of the Assembly in groups around the world. It corresponds to Seeing reality: listening to contemporary voices, to the cries of the earth, the cry of the poor, the cries of inequity and injustice, the sounds of dehumanization and mistreatment.
- b) Listening as an attitude is an on-going process that leads to concrete commitment to reality, especially when that reality has been wounded by any kind of abuse that affects the harmony of human relationships with God, nature and one's brothers and sisters. Only the volunteers who listens, like God at the time of the slavery of his people in Egypt, are able to lower themselves to approach God and commit themselves, thus becoming a liberating agent of the slavery of the earth and of the poor.

1.2. Discernment

- a) Discernment as a method corresponds to the second moment of the process, that is, to the International Assembly itself. Bearing in mind that Discernment corresponds to judging and that judging, in the concluding document of Aparecida, is equivalent to an evangelizing gaze. This second synodal dynamic is rooted not in a cold and dogmatic doctrinal framework, but in the thoughts of God expressed in his saving gaze, and in our case in a worldview that contributes to the evangelizing mission of the Church.
- b) Discernment as an attitude gives to what could be only a mental exercise of reflection, an undeniable practical projection. In the light of Isaiah 55:6-9, discernment refers not only to thoughts, but also to the concrete ways of God: to think like God in order to act like God. It is a matter of detecting God's will in every circumstance, in order to bring it to life, in other words: listening to the Word of God and putting it into practice. A way of thinking, which emerges in discernment, is dependent on our way of acting. In other words, to the degree that discernment clarifies our principles, so also our convictions, our choices and our practices become clearer.

1.3. Ripple Effect

- a) The ripple effect as a method is present especially in the third moment of the process, post-assembly, as a renewing projection, through paths of life, truth and freedom. The ripple effect corresponds to the proposal of Pope Francis of a Church going outwards, in our case an Association going outwards. The Pope insists that: “Let us go out, let us go out, without delay, without disgust and without fear”, but presupposing that this going out is only possible from an “itinerant intimacy” and a “missionary communion”⁵² . Hence, the ripple effect as a method must mark a projection not only *ad extra* but also *ad intra*: to live on the inside in order to live on the outside.
- b) The ripple effect as an attitude implies an open mind and a ready will, a sensitivity to the signs of the times, a keen intelligence to recognize our shadows and a strong ability to work as a team. Only in this way can we make real the prophetic affirmation of Benedict XVI: “the Church does not grow by proselytism but by attraction”⁵³ .

2. Dreams and paths

Yes, as we conclude today’s reflection, neither the Pandemic nor the pandemics have the last word. It is up to us now to speak out and to ensure that our words and our actions give echo to the cries of the poor, allowing ourselves to be led by the dreams of Pope Francis.

2.1. Pope Francis’s dreams

They are simple, realistic, purposeful:

- a) A poor Church, *for the poor, like the poor, with the poor, of the poor*⁵⁴ .
- b) A Church going out: *Let us go forth, then, let us go forth [...] I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security*⁵⁵ .
- c) A Church caring for the Common Home: *No branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. The Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to various syntheses between faith and reason*⁵⁶ .
- d) A Church at the service of Universal Fraternity: *The Church has a public role [...] she works for the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity. She does not claim to compete with earthly powers, but to offer herself as a family among families, this is the Church, open to bearing witness in today’s world, open to faith hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love*⁵⁷ .

⁵² EG, #23.

⁵³ EG, #14.

⁵⁴ Only the first specification in italics belongs to the Pope, the others were suggested to him at the private Audience with the Presidency of the CLAR, June 13, 2013.

⁵⁵ EG, #49.

⁵⁶ LS, #63.

⁵⁷ Francisco. FT, 276.

2.2. Paths

a) A poor Church, through:

- A sober lifestyle close to the poor.
- Living evangelical poverty as solidarity with the poor.
- The methodology of systemic change when working with the poor.
- Institutional and economic support for projects of economic solidarity.
- Reflection on the anthropology of the poor.
- The dimension and insertion of our works in popular and rural environments.
- Righteousness, sobriety, solidarity and fairness in the management and use of material goods.
- A commitment with civil organizations in favour of JPIC, in welcoming migrants, supporting homeless individual and struggling against human trafficking.

b) A Church that reaches out by means of:

- Going out to those farthest away and approaching those farthest away
- Moving out to the geographical and existential peripheries
- The dynamization of works through missionary presence
- A disciple-missionary formation
- The replacement of provincial paradigms with network paradigms.

c) The care of the common home, by means of:

- Linkage to the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Commitment to JCoR workshops and campaigns (where they are being promoted).⁵⁸
- Prophetic denunciation of the abuse of natural resources
- Participation in campaigns, state policies, UN agencies that engage in the struggle for ecology, etc.
- Consumption of natural products
- Replacing plastic bags, plates, cups and cutlery with biodegradable material, eliminating the use of bottled water and reducing paper in our meetings, sorting waste, reducing air conditioning, disposing of electronic waste in the right place, using public transportation.

d) Universal Fraternity, through:

- The spirituality of communion
- Prioritizing the human person in our apostolic projects
- The use of ICT as instruments for *intra* and *extra* community relations, communication and solidarity with the poor.
- The humanization of formation and animation processes
- A charismatic fraternity that integrates us with the entire Vincentian Family
- Intercontinental bridge building with groups from all countries and continents.

⁵⁸ Continental level: Latin America and the Caribbean; regional level: East Africa (Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe); country level: India.

Conclusion: Lent and Synodality

Finally, I mention the Holy Father's Lenten Message for this year, because of its relationship to this Assembly and its purposes.

Inspired by the story of the Transfiguration, the Pope speaks about the *retreat* of the Master with his disciples, to anticipate the effect that will follow his death on the cross. Retreat *to the mountain*, the place of the experience of God. Retreat, *an uphill journey, a mountain trek, an ascent, a climb*. Retreat marked by synodality: that of Jesus and the disciples who accompany him, that of the characters who appear with him, Moses and Elijah, that of Jesus and the disciples as they descend the mountain in order to follow the path of discipleship.

In the same way, Lent, the upcoming Synod and this AIC Assembly are a journey that calls for *a desert place, walking alongside those whom the Lord has placed among us as fellow travellers*, together, with the effort of the ascent that sometimes becomes arduous and *disconcerting*. But the goal is not the splendid vision of glory, nor the contemplation of marvellous experiences of conversion, nor the intensity of some spiritual moments, but the following of the Master to the point of giving one's life as He did, in the passage from death to life, from sin to grace. That is why the best delegate was not the one who spoke the most, the most eloquent, but the one who converted the most. We must therefore avoid the danger of immobility, the temptation that Peter had to build three tents in order not to complete the journey.

The same message proposes two paths that are related to the methodological proposal of this Assembly:

- a) Listening: to the Master, to the Word of God, to our sisters and brothers, *especially in the faces and stories of those who need help*, to the Church, *mutual listening remains always indispensable in the method and style of a synodal church*.
- b) Following the Master, but not only in the glory of the transfiguration, but also on the way to the cross, *in the daily struggles, hardships and contradictions ... all of which lead us to the celebration of Easter*.

Let us *come down*, then, from the mountain of the Assembly to the *plain* of action, and may the grace that we have experienced sustain us and enable us to be artisans of synodality in the everyday life of our communities.

Friday 24th March

Theme of the day: The future of AIC – Getting down to action!

1. Workshops: Priority Lines of Action 2023-2026
2. The President's Farewell speech
3. Statutory Assembly
4. Conclusions

Key theme, 24th March

Guillermina Vergara Macip, AIC Mexico

We have reached the end of our meeting. This is the moment of truth, when everything we have heard and discerned throughout the assembly must have a ripple effect, must “overflow” into new and concrete commitments.

This assembly is our moment of discernment; we are now ready for its ripple effect to be made tangible, following Pope Francis’s proposal of a Church going outwards, or in our case an AIC going outwards, living inwardly in order to live outwardly. Having a ripple effect implies opening our minds to acknowledge our shadows, reading the signs of our times and being ready and willing to work together as a team.

The pandemic burst onto the world stage three years ago, destabilising it and highlighting our vulnerabilities and the apparent lack of the control we humans thought we had achieved. Following this initial pandemic, others have now spread throughout the world, more disastrous and insidious, affecting our relations and social structures: self-centred projects, false securities, selfishness leading to exclusion and inequalities on all levels.

But AIC must not let itself be paralysed by fear. Now is not the time for division but for finding together a new direction in life, allowing us to transform whatever happens into good, from a perspective of faith, because we know we are in need of salvation. Salvation brought to us by Christ when he embraced the cross, inviting us in turn to embrace hope.

If none of this has filled our hearts and minds when we return home, then our participation in this assembly will have been in vain.

Let us ask Saint Vincent and Saint Louise de Marillac to accompany us and to help us to succeed in our work today.



Workshops on the Priority Lines of Action 2023-2026

During the four days of the assembly, the volunteers were invited to “walk together” to reflect on the future of AIC. Our main speaker, Father Naranjo, had participated in the preparation of the training reflections sent out in September 2022, November 2022 and January 2023, which were also designed to help us prepare for this process of reflection.

The aims of the assembly were to strengthen the sense of belonging to a single international family, to re-energise volunteers after the pandemic, and also to identify Priority Lines of Action. These will guide us over the next three years as we bring ourselves and our associations up-to-date and put into action all that we have listened to, shared and discerned during the assembly. In order to do this, Father Naranjo’s lectures alternated with the presentation of numerous local AIC experiences and times for reflection in groups guided by questionnaires.

Erica Melloni, a professional facilitator, gave us her support and expertise in drawing up the next Priority Lines of Action. She suggested that we work in four steps:

- 1) The participants were invited to project themselves into 2026 and imagine an “ideal” flourishing AIC, guided by a few questions:
 1. *What is the general objective that motivates us as AIC members?*
 2. *What are the main challenges we have faced and how have we overcome them (examples: education, food insecurity, migration, sustainable development, etc.). Be concrete and specific.*
 3. *What are the key factors that enable and facilitate our work (examples: governance, training, etc.)? Be concrete and specific.*
 4. *What are our main Priority Lines of Action for 2023-2026?*
 5. *What will be the role of each of us in implementing them (national and local presidents, spiritual advisors, volunteers)?*

After a period of personal reflection, the volunteers joined different working groups by language where they were able to share their answers and reflections and then define together three priorities for 2023-2026.

- 2) A team analysed the proposals put forward by the various groups. The team then summarised them to produce the three Priority Lines of Action for 2023-2026:
 1. Rooting ourselves in the Vincentian charism
 2. Moving forward together
 3. Being open to and welcoming the change that is essential to get through crisis situations
- 3) The volunteers were invited to reflect, this time in their national delegations, on how to put these Priority Lines of Action into practice, based on the following question:
 - *How, in concrete terms, can we apply these Priority Lines of Action in our own association?*
- 4) Each participant was invited to make a personal commitment to put the Priority Lines of Action into practice and to write it down on a card that was then given to the organisers.

Farewell speech from Rose de Lima Ramanankavana

My dear sisters, AIC Presidents and volunteers,
Dear Fathers and Sisters,
Dear collaborators and interpreters,

The time has come for me to say goodbye: this afternoon the national presidents will elect a new Board and a new president.

In the summer of 2019, when some Board members and friends in AIC came to ask me to stand as International President at the Assembly in Bogotá, I refused several times.

I had just finished my term of office as head of the Systemic Change Commission and I had said to myself, "It's time to take a step back!". But they were so insistent that I asked them for some time to reflect and pray to the Holy Spirit.

How could I, so far away from everything, living in a country as poor as Madagascar, become International President?

I refused several times, while praying that the Holy Spirit would guide me. For a few years, I had been further away from AIC, being involved in the Vincentian Family.

Friends, AIC members and my family encouraged me and finally, like Mary, I said "YES", knowing that it would not be easy, but I had confidence in Providence and in the support of my friends at AIC, whom I would like to thank very warmly.

Some volunteers were already on their way to the Bogota Assembly when the pandemic struck. The borders were closed and the Assembly was cancelled.

My election took place online.

What adventure had I embarked on? How was I going to work? Blessed Virgin, come to my rescue!

The first online meetings began: we set the Board and distributed the responsibilities among the members.

Everything was done in an atmosphere of solidarity, friendship and respect.

Despite the dark years of quarantine, restrictions and difficulties, we continued to move forward, with Providence watching over us!

These last three years have been complicated, but the spirit of cooperation has prevailed, and I'd like to thank my friends in the Permanent Committee and the Executive Board, all the coordinators, and the members of the Secretariat in Louvain-la-Neuve, headed by our dear Bénédicte.

Thank you to all of you who have really supported me all this time.

Today I'm passing on the torch, and I'm delighted that younger volunteers are standing for election this afternoon to take on responsibility for AIC. This will ensure that AIC continues its mission to help the poorest of the poor.

Dear Tayde, you have accepted to be a candidate for the presidency. I am happy that you are continuing this wonderful AIC adventure. I have every confidence in you and I will always be available for you and for AIC.

Our meeting is coming to an end: what a pleasure to have been able to enjoy this time of work and friendship together!

Together, we've been looking for a new "path", and we're going back to our associations with firm determination to:

- Pass on everything we have learnt during these days of working together: to respond to the cries of those living in poverty and of our planet and the challenges to be met
- Put into practice the new commitments made in our Priority Lines of Action.

We have been entrusted with a GREAT MISSION.

With the Church, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, we will journey towards a world of HOPE.

Have a safe trip home.

May the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Peace, accompany you!

Rose de Lima Ramanankavana
AIC International President



AIC Statutory Assembly 2023

Frascati, Italy, 24th March 2023

The Statutory Assembly was chaired by Christine Peeters. At the start of the meeting, 31 full-rights member associations were present. 6 full-rights member associations had given a proxy and were validly represented.

The Executive Board's activity report for 2020-2023, the profit and loss accounts for 2020-2022 and the provisional budget for 2023-2025 were approved.

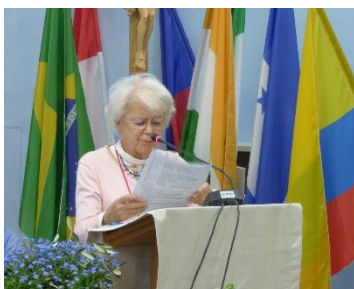
In line with the suggestion of the outgoing Board, the annual membership fees remain unchanged at €1.50/volunteer (or its equivalent in USD) for countries whose GDP does not exceed €12,000 and €4/volunteer (or its equivalent in USD) for countries whose GDP exceeds €12,000.

AIC LAOS, a group in-the-making since 2012, was admitted as a full member. The Board then introduced a new group in-the-making: **AIC INDIA**. AIC now has 56 members, including 45 full-rights members, 38 of whom were present or validly represented.

Various amendments to the Constitution and Canonical Statutes proposed by the Board were approved. The main purpose of these amendments was to bring the association's Constitution and Canonical Statutes into line with new legislation and regulations. The Board also took the opportunity to propose a number of new provisions of interest to AIC.

During the Assembly, the 10 members of the Executive Board 2023-2026 were elected. The new Board is made up of the following volunteers:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| - Tayde de CALLATAY (AIC Belgium) | President |
| - Milagros GALISTEO MOYA (AIC Spain) | Vice-President |
| - Guillermina VERGARA MACIP (AIC Mexico) | Vice-President |
| - Gloria Amparo BENITEZ (AIC Colombia) | Member |
| - Josephine EDUN (AIC UK) | Member |
| - Florence Odile ENGANE BEN (AIC Cameroon) | Member |
| - Suzanne JOHNSON (AIC USA) | Member |
| - Lisette MAILLET (AIC France) | Member |
| - Lucia Ines SANCHEZ (AIC Argentina) | Member |
| - Melba T. VERA CRUZ (AIC Philippines) | Member |



Message from the new President Tayde de Callataÿ, International President

Dear friends of AIC,

First of all, I would like to thank you for the confidence you have shown in me today. I hope to be worthy of it throughout the term of office you have just entrusted to me. Rest assured that I will dedicate all my strength and all my heart to serving AIC.



I would also like to thank all the people I have had the opportunity to meet at AIC since I joined our wonderful association: volunteers, Spiritual Advisors, collaborators and of course my dear friends at the International Secretariat with whom I have been lucky enough to work for so many years.

Thanks to all of you, I have gradually gained a deep knowledge and love of our association.

You have enabled me to discover and appreciate the immense richness of our AIC network:

- Deeply committed, creative and generous volunteers who work as a team in a spirit of fraternal and spiritual communion;
- The impressive work carried out at local level, day after day, all over the world, for the benefit of our most disadvantaged brothers and sisters;
- The wonderful Vincentian charism, which shows us the way forward and unites us in such a special way.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the last international presidents with whom I have had the privilege of working closely for several years: Laurence, Alicia, Rose... you have each taught me so much and in so many areas. Each of you, in your own way, is and always will be a precious source of inspiration. Thank you for everything you have contributed to AIC. We will continue to nurture together the seeds you have sown.

Of course, I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who have agreed to stand as candidates for the new Board. Thank you to each of you for your willingness to take on tasks at international level. You are all very welcome to join our international AIC team. We really need you! That's why you've all been invited to our first Board meeting. I'm really looking forward to working with you all!

Finally, I would like to thank the Lord for the immense gift he has given me by inviting me to follow him in the magnificent work that the Holy Spirit inspired in Saint Vincent de Paul over 400 years ago.

As we know, the current global context is worrying in many ways, particularly for the most vulnerable people we serve. We have mentioned this several times during this meeting, and the testimonies from the local level have confirmed it.

Within our association too, we face major challenges if we want to be able to continue our mission, now and for many years to come.

Yes, there are many challenges, but today I want to share with you a message of confidence.

Confidence first of all, because we know that the Holy Spirit inspires us and guides us in our wonderful Vincentian mission so that we can, day after day, bring the Gospel to life.

Confidence because we can count on the example and teachings of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. The charism of our beloved founder nourishes us, puts joy on our path, and gives us the strength, determination and passion we need to rise to the challenges we face, no matter how daunting.

Confidence too, because when faced with the many crisis situations we encounter at local level, we as AIC volunteers are able to demonstrate an extraordinary ability to adapt and be creative. The testimonies shared during this meeting have once again proven this.

Confidence because, thanks to our AIC network, we can join forces, bring together the countless gifts and talents of nearly 100,000 volunteers around the world (in 56 countries as of this afternoon!), and put them to work every day for the benefit of our disadvantaged brothers and sisters, in order to build together a better world for everyone.

Confidence because we can count on and help each other, not only within our AIC family but also within the wider Vincentian family.

Confidence, finally, because the most disadvantaged people we support in our services have admirable strengths of their own, and sometimes all it takes is a sympathetic ear, a look, and some encouragement from us to help them discover these strengths and put them to good use.

For all these reasons, I am very happy to continue, with all of you, our beautiful Vincentian journey, united in trust and Hope, and to prepare together, with the grace of God, a bright future, a future full of promise for AIC.

Thank you, everyone!

Conclusions of the Assembly

Tayde de Callataÿ, International President

Dear AIC volunteer friends,
Dear Sisters, Dear Fathers,

The time has come to bring this Assembly 2023 to a close.

Throughout these days of work, we have journeyed together, learning to get to know each other better, sharing our cultures. We have been united by our work, our exchanges, our festivities, and supported by our prayers.

The theme of our Assembly 2023 will carry us through the next three years:

“Citizens of the world, walking united in hope”

YES, we are all responsible citizens of the world:

Firstly within the Church: Mr Bonaventura reminded us on Tuesday of the importance that Pope Francis attaches to the preparation of the synod, which is a spiritual experience with the Holy Spirit, a path on which we allow ourselves to be led. Your responses, presented by Alicia, are an important testimony to this path that AIC is taking *in the Church* in the different continents.

One of the high points of this Assembly was the audience with Pope Francis and his call to holiness. He reminded us that evangelisation is a demanding path of ongoing conversion illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Above all, the world needs us to be witnesses of personal encounters with Christ, which is what we as Vincentians do with and through the most disadvantaged people.

Cardinal Tagle challenged us with Jesus’s question: “Do you want to be well again?”. The answer He expects of us is that we act using our strengths, supported by the faith we have in Him, to help our most vulnerable brothers and sisters to rise up as beloved children of God.

I would like to thank Father Naranjo for everything he has given us in his speeches and in the preparation of our Assembly, as well as all the priests and sisters who have accompanied us over the last few days.

I would like to remind you of some of the many ideas we have shared.

We are called to:

- Contemplate the mystery of God in the Creation;
- Adopt a more modest lifestyle that respects our “Common Home”;
- Experience two-way encounters, because we all carry within us seeds of God that bear fruit and nourish the other;
- Be overflowing with the joy of sharing who we are;
- Draw the positive out of every situation, based on faith.

Together we have discovered many AIC actions and initiatives being implemented in different contexts and areas of service within our large AIC network. We are now invited to draw inspiration from them to set up similar actions in our respective communities. Being a living network, made up of such rich and diverse associations, is a strength of AIC that we can always count on. Let's not forget that!

The Priority Lines of Action that we have defined here will guide our work over the next three years:

- **Rooting ourselves in the Vincentian charism**
- **Moving forward together**
- **Being open to and welcoming the change that is essential to get through crisis situations**

Three priorities, three directions that you have begun to take in many ways this morning, in order to put them into practice in the contexts of your respective associations.

We return to our AIC associations convinced that, yes, we can make a difference in the lives of the most disadvantaged people. It's not an easy road, but it is possible.

When returning to your groups and associations, you will share not only the rich content of all that we have received and exchanged, and in particular our new priorities, but also the spirit of fraternity and communion that has inspired us during the assembly.

I hope that you will be able to bear witness in your own countries to the richness of sharing cultures and enthusiasm as we have done during this meeting, both personally and for your association. Let us pass on the joy of having experienced that we form one big family, united by the same faith and the same ideals.

We are fortunate to be inspired by the charism of St Vincent as we carry out our AIC activities, the charism that is our light.

Before concluding, I would like to thank each and every one of you very warmly for your participation.

I would also like to say a very special thank you to:

- The members of the international secretariat, who have accomplished a huge amount of work, always with discretion.
- All those who have contributed their testimonies and project presentations. You were asked to carry out an almost impossible task: to present such rich projects in such a limited amount of time.
- The Fathers and Sisters who have accompanied us with their prayerful and benevolent presence.
- And of course AIC Italy:
A huge thank you to Elena Capra (who has become a very dear friend) and the whole AIC Italy team, who worked for months with such energy to help us organise this assembly, which will remain an unforgettable moment for everyone. And of course thanks also to Erica, who has offered all her expertise and enthusiasm to accompany us as we move into the third phase of our Assembly's synodal process, which will put

into action all that we have explored through listening and discernment, thus giving meaning to what we have just experienced.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Let us return home with the conviction that AIC is a force at the service of the most disadvantaged people and that we support each other throughout the world.

I ask you to pray for me and for the new Board. I will be thinking of you all in my prayers, day after day.

May Saint Vincent and God's Holy Spirit be with us.

I must not forget Maristella and our interpreter friends: you are very loyal friends of AIC and I'd like to stress just how precious your voluntary contribution is, quite simply because without you we couldn't do our work. That's why I'm calling on you last and asking you now to join us here in the meeting room.

Have a safe trip home and best of luck in your work!





The International Association of Charities

An international network of more than 100,000 volunteers, mainly women, who act locally in 56 countries to fight against poverty.

Founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in 1617, to fight against all forms of poverty and injustice and give women an active and recognised social role, in a spirit of solidarity.

Following this International Assembly of Delegates, AIC adopted the following **Priority Lines of Action 2023-2026**:

1. Rooting ourselves in the Vincentian charism
2. Moving forward together
3. Being open to and welcoming the change that is essential to get through crisis situations

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