



Paris, June 30th 2009

**CIRCULAR LETTER
TO MY DEAR COLLEAGUES,
MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCES
OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AROUND THE WORLD**

Dear friends and fellow-members,

This year, if we want to help in bettering the world, when it is suffering such a serious situation of economic and financial uncertainty, the President General, to whom you have entrusted responsibility for the Council General, cannot, must not and would not wish to forget so many families whose situation has worsened.

Throughout the 175 years of our existence, ever since the birth of the Conferences, wherever we have practised our vocation, with truly humble means but always with great determination, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has constantly strived to adapt to changing times.

The current times are no exception to this rule. The enormous and profound economic and financial crisis that is currently affecting the whole of our highly interdependent and globalised international economy must not be forgotten in the service that we owe to the poor. In other words, our Conferences cannot and must not exist without constant concern for the suffering that this new situation is causing among the weakest of our brothers and sisters.

The greed of a few, a lack of business ethics and a search for quick profits over and above any moral considerations, in short, sin itself and also the structures of sin¹ have brought despair and suffering to millions of people all over the world. This is particularly true in the developed world, however it has a domino effect on all economies due to the globalisation that I mentioned earlier. This profound economic and financial crisis is driving millions of people all around the world into unemployment and family hardship. Furthermore, the number of people living in poverty and suffering has been added to by many who just a few months ago were able to control their financial situation with relative ease and were even able to devote part of their income to helping others in need in their own country or in

(1) It is nevertheless an indisputable fact, as I have often pointed out, that the interdependence of social, economic and political systems creates multiple structures of sin in today's world. (Catechesis of Jean Paul II, Audience of Wednesday 25th August 1999).

other, poorer parts of the world.

I am particularly concerned about the effect of this global crisis on those who were already very poor at the start². Indeed, the wealthier economies which have, until now, been able to help less developed countries, either through government channels, associations or at a purely individual level, may have to reduce or even suspend this kind of aid. Aid which is so necessary to the world's poor. The crisis could have a devastating effect on large parts of the world.

For this reason, the poor are now poorer and their suffering is greater, wherever they may live. The challenge to reduce poverty, taken up a few years ago by various international organisations, now appears more and more remote each day. As a result of the current crisis, the number of people who lack the most basic resources has not decreased, as was hoped, but instead increased.

The Conferences and their supervising Councils, wherever they provide their services, must now think very seriously about how they are dealing with the effects of the global crisis. They must look at how they can help to fight its effects, no matter how modestly, without forgetting its causes. In other words, we must purposefully concern ourselves with the people who need immediate and urgent help with basic necessities. There can be no doubt about this. However, at the same time we must also think about the future and seek to change the situation in which they are living. It is true that Conferences must always direct their efforts towards changing the lives of the poor but this is especially important now when even extreme poverty is affecting people who just a few months ago had comfortably secure lives and could even provide help to others, as I mentioned before.

Indeed, if we work together in the hands of such a large institution as the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, we will be able to find countless

(2) In a recent report, the World Bank estimated that during the year 2009 the number of people living on less than 2\$ a day will increase by 53 million.

ways of tackling the effects of this global crisis. However, this will only happen if we are generous and determined enough to use and share all our resources, if we are able to dream and find ways of realising our dreams.

During my travels around the world, visiting fellow-members and Conferences, I have seen places where this ability to dream, so alive ever since the beginnings of the first Conferences, has led to the creation of small businesses, modest businesses, which have nonetheless created thousands of jobs throughout the world. It is true that these jobs are humble but they have succeeded in saving many human beings from situations of extreme poverty.

Now is the time to spread hope, but it must be active hope, as the Holy Father reminded us in his recent Message to the Young³. A hope that will enable us to work for others, to give them what they need from us: help to find a decent way of life and recover the personal dignity that they have so often lost.

We must never forget, dear fellow-members, that each poor person who remains in poverty after receiving the fellowship and help of the Conferences, any such continuity, should be experienced by each member, each Conference and each Council as a painful failure in our vocation⁴. Our vocation must be bound to the utopia of eliminating poverty, never limited to providing temporary relief. However, we should not forget that, to our great sorrow, such relief is at times the immediate and sole solution. Nevertheless, we must always dream of strengthening the potential of each human being

(3) My dear friends, follow the example of Paul and be witnesses to the Risen Christ! Make Christ known, among your own age group and beyond, to those who are in search of "the great hope" that would give meaning to their lives. If Jesus has become your hope, communicate this to others with your joy and your spiritual, apostolic and social engagement. Let Christ dwell within you, and having placed all your faith and trust in him, spread this hope around you. Make choices that demonstrate your faith. Show that you understand the risks of idolizing money, material goods, career and success, and do not allow yourselves to be attracted by these false illusions. Do not yield to the rationale of selfish interests. Cultivate love of neighbour and try to put yourselves and your human talents and professional abilities at the service of the common good and of truth, always prepared to "make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 P 3:15). (Benedict XVI, Message to the Young, 22nd February 2009).

(4) Vincentians endeavour to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community. (The Rule of S.S.V.P., Art. 1.10)

that we meet, of helping them to overcome the situation in which they find themselves.

"To serve in hope" of the Conferences, and the Councils that unite them, must always seek to provide liberation and overcome the situations of poverty that are brought to our knowledge⁵. It is not and never has been enough to fight only the effects of this suffering without committing ourselves to the ongoing battle against its causes. It is true that we have limited resources. However, the resources that we do have must be used unreservedly to serve towards liberating those that suffer. Indeed, only in this way can we be true followers of Christ, He who suffers in the man in whom he is reflected.

By way of example, how many Conferences and Councils have financial reserves set aside, misled by the promise of future services to the poor which so often never materialise?⁶ Those that have such reserves, part with them now! Use them in real and direct service to the poor, use them to provide modest solutions to those that need them.

How often do we talk about micro-credits as a truly dignified salvation for so many families? How many micro-credits, how many grants for small businesses could we provide with our reserves, thereby creating jobs and preventing the destruction of others? These reserves that are kept for the poor but so often fail to reach them. I have no doubt that the Conferences and Councils that are currently hoarding financial resources, whatever they may be, rather than fighting to change the situation of the poor, are perpetuating a sinful situation for which the Good Lord will call us to strict account. Those that behave in this way are maintaining a situation as unfair as that created by those who have brought the world

(5) The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope. (The Rule of S.S.V.P., Art. 1.2)

(6) Money must not be hoarded. Decisions regarding the use of money and property are to be made after reflection in the light of the Gospel and Vincentian principles. (The Rule of S.S.V.P., Art. 3.14)

to its current predicament through selfishness and malpractice. Obviously, we will not cause as much harm as they have caused. That is true. However, we will not be doing all the good that is within our reach.

My dear friends, it is not only anonymous financiers and obscure entities that are guilty for causing the distressing situation that we find ourselves in. The guilt also lies with those of us who forget the strength that we have in He who remains by our side, those who cease to act as He would wish: with generosity and with all our intellectual and material resources, to fight the suffering that is to be found nearby and further afield, without keeping anything back for the future when so many people are suffering now.

Above all, we should do this through social projects that employ paid staff, wherever they may be. We must not only guarantee the jobs of those who are already employed. We must go further and work to hire others so that they can receive the benefits of a decent and dignified job.

This year, dear fellow-members, my Circular Letter is shorter than in other years. It does not need to be any longer in order to make us reflect upon on what we can achieve if we work together, to think about what we must aim towards in each of our Conferences and Councils.

The wine had run short and She took pity on the couple⁷. She asked Him to help. Right then. Not later. Not the next day. When it was necessary. As could only be the case, He agreed.

Will we have Mary's confidence? Will we be able to do what is needed, as She did when she saw that it was necessary?

The ability to dream, the ability to alleviate so much poverty is now in our hands. We simply have to put all our resources, every single one

of them, at the service of those among us who best represent the Good Lord: the lowly, the forgotten, the abandoned, those that suffer. In short, the poor.

Under the guidance of Mary, let us start work. Let us unite our strengths, all Conferences together, all Councils together. Let us give of ourselves and offer everything that the Society represents, everything, to serving the poor that are by our side. Many will suffer less and will recover the personal dignity that belongs to the children of God.

May She help us to achieve this by touching and illuminating our hearts.

With my prayer and affection,

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV. President General
(I.N.E.D.)

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(7) John 2, 1:12.