



Paris, 31st January 2018

CIRCULAR LETTER TO MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, CONFERENCE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN THE WORLD

2018 – International Thematic Year on François Lallier

1. Introduction

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

My dear fellow members, dear new members, employees in our offices and special works, dear collaborators and volunteers, Vincentian friends: I am happy to send you the second Circular Letter of this mandate¹, hoping that these lines, full of a renewed hope, will reach the Vincentian conferences of the various Superior Councils where the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is present.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported the actions and global initiatives of the International General Council. In these initial months of the mandate², we have made important progress towards a more efficient, dynamic, renovated (or can use the word, 'rejuvenated') and modern Society, in order to offer better service to those in need, without ever losing sight of our roots and our fundamental characteristics.

I offer my heartfelt thanks for the support that we have received from the Superior Councils and for the prayers of the Vincentians from around the world for the International Board. It is this support that continues to bless our Vincentian journey and to always strive in favour of those most in need. Rather than go too quickly, we proceed with purpose, always making sure we are heading in the right direction. The reports

received from your countries assure us that we are on the right path, going forward for the greater glory of God, and maintaining what was achieved in previous mandates.

Circular Letters began in 1841, when the 1st President General, Emmanuel Joseph Bailly de Surcy, had the great idea of writing them. Since then, successive President Generals have used this fantastic channel of communication, in which they speak, frankly and directly, to all the Vincentians in the world. I resort again to using this important tool.

It is my wish as President General that the Circular Letter be read and pondered in the meetings of Conferences and Councils, at all levels of our institution. I suggest dividing the Letter into two or three parts, so that the Vincentian community around the world can think about it calmly. I thank you for reflecting on and discussing the Letter in your groups.

2. Overview of the General Council

In the first year of our mandate we launched the strategic plan presented during the electoral process, with dialogue and in a democratic spirit. The plan includes 10 points and each of them will have, from now on, specific goals and assigned officers for each of the important strategic objectives until 2022, when this mandate comes to an end.

I take the opportunity to introduce to you the text of the new vision of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul: **"To be recognized as a global organization that seeks the integral dignity of those in greater need"**. The mission of our institution has become clearer: **"To be a network**

¹ Last year, we created a specific e-mail address (cgi.circularletter@gmail.com) in order to receive comments and suggestions on the topics for the upcoming Circular Letters. We continue to publish the Circular Letter in seven languages (French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, Arabic and Italian). "Thank you" to the countries that have translated the text into other dialects and languages.

² "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (St. Matthew 9, 35b) is the motto for the term of office 2016/2022.



of friends, seeking personal holiness³ through service to the needy and in defence of social justice". Our values are: "service, spirituality, humility, charity and empathy⁴". Thank you to all Vincentians around the world for submitting approximately 5,000 suggestions for improving the concepts of vision, mission⁵ and values. These were submitted to an international public consultation for review and consideration. You should therefore feel that you are the real authors of this work. Congratulations and thank you very much!

In addition to strategic planning, we are implementing a series of programs and ideas, such as the "SSVP Plus Project", which consists in spreading the SSVP to most of the countries where it is not yet present⁶. We also set up the "Fund for International Solidarity (FIS)", which aims to help the regions of the world affected by natural disasters and concerned with social projects. We highlight, among so many positive aspects, the creation of the "International General Ombudsman" process, which is addressing a number of cases that have not been adequately settled at national level. As for the role of the Ombudsman, we noticed that most of the cases that have come to us are about the disparagement of a person, aimed at finding a harmonious solution, without winners or losers, but where the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is always the beneficiary.

I have here a very important comment to make: the Structure is the heart of the International General Council. Through it, all the departments, consultancies and commissions offer services, resources and projects for the entire Society of St. Vincent de Paul all over the world. The Structure is the Council in motion, and is currently made up of the 12 International Territorial Vice-presidencies,

with the assistance of 23 Zone Coordinators. This service team, made up of Vincentians from the five continents, collaborates with the work of the President General and the International Board, as required by the Rule⁷.

The President General cannot be everywhere in person to visit all the Superior Councils in countries where the SSVP is located; but the members of the Structure can indeed do that! The Structure is the gear system that makes the CGI work properly; it plans for the future and provides more services. Given all this, the strategic decision has been made to strengthen and develop the CGI International Structure so that the SSVP can grow and develop around the world. Therefore, the General Council has just acquired group travel insurance for all those who serve in the International Structure.

Another aspect that deserves mention is the transparency that the General Council offers with the live broadcast of the main international meetings, the latest newsletter, "Ozanam Network", the broadcasts of "Ozanam TV", and the dynamism of the social networks. I am very happy with the "translators' club" that we are launching, made up of Vincentians from all over the world who collaborate as volunteers with the CGI in the translation of texts, news items and reports published on the website (www.ssvpglobal.org), the new presentation of which will be launched in the first half of this year. Translation costs are very high and any reduction in expenditure is welcome! We recommend that all Vincentians around the world regularly access the website of the General Council in order to stay informed of what is going on. Furthermore, we ask the Superior Councils to help us by adding a link to our website on their own websites to spread the international news.

The always generous regular donations⁸ (of any value) made by the Superior Councils to the General Council make possible the many initiatives of the International Commission for Aid and Development (CIAD) and of the International Commission for Fraternal Assistance ("Twinning"). I mention

³ This process of developing our own holiness takes place, fundamentally, through the communal prayers of every Conference (Refer to Articles 2.2, 2.3 and 3.3 of the International Rule).

⁴ Empathy means the ability to feel what another person would feel, if I were in the same situation. It consists of trying to understand feelings and emotions, seeking to experience in an objective and rational way what another individual feels. In other words, it is "to put oneself in the position of the other".

⁵ About the mission, I recommend reading the book "Faces of Holiness" (2009), by Father Robert Maloney (CM), Spiritual Advisor of the International General Council, and 22nd Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. In it, we find details of the action of advocating for social justice developed by Ozanam.

⁶ We know that there are countries where the Catholic Church is not allowed to function. Therefore, in the "SSVP Plus Project, we will prioritize the nations where the environment for our mission is more favourable and friendly to us.

⁷ Articles 3.23 and 3.24 of the International Rule.

⁸ The Basic Requirement n^o 20, laid down in the International Rule as a guide for drafting the Statutes of the Superior Councils, establishes that in the third quarter each country will take up a voluntary secret collection among all the fellow members, in order to send these resources to the General Council to cover the operational costs of the headquarters in Paris and the expenses resulting from the international structure.



especially the Superior Councils (whether Central, Metropolitan, Regional, or Particular) having a surplus of funds, asking that they pass them up to help our brothers and sisters suffering beyond their borders. Pass ups can be made through the Superior Council to the 'Fund for International Solidarity'. I also thank the countries who make up the "Concordat" (the generous group of Councils that make regular annual donations to the General Council) for keeping the CGI fully operational and meeting its economic commitments.

In these first months of work, the International Structure of the General Council has visited dozens of countries, participating in ceremonies for appointing new officers, or in important events and national assemblies. As President General, I personally had the joy of visiting 16 countries, taking a message of peace, unity and fraternity to all the Vincentians in the world. Unity has always been the most important aspect of the President General's mission since the beginnings of the SSVP. We are grateful to the Superior Councils that invited us, and for sharing the costs of food and accommodation.

As you know, I am not retired (I work 8 hours a day in my government job, in Brasilia) and for this reason it is not easy for me to undertake international journeys. I really appreciate the understanding and unconditional support that I receive. I cannot always stay for many days in the same country, because my own holiday entitlement and professional freedom are limited and I prefer to visit more countries in a short period of time. In 2018, I will visit, God willing, seven countries in Africa, the continent where the SSVP is growing quickly.

During my institutional visits, I have seen what a wonderful job the SSVP is doing in many parts of the world. They tell me that the President General comes to teach, but I tell you that the President General is the one who learns more when he travels. The SSVP all over the world has a great reputation and credibility, with the Church and with governments; so I get a close look at the quality of the charitable service performed all over the world, and I am proud to thank you for so much dedication, love and fraternity. The language, uses, culture and the local reality may change, but the Vincentians and the charitable service they give are the same.

In contrast, I have also seen inappropriate situations⁹, like disputes, lack of dialogue, conflicts, lack of charity among the members¹⁰, difficulties in relating with the clergy, hoarding resources¹¹, jealousy and vanity, faults in Vincentian training, problems with interpersonal communication, problems in Conferences and Councils, personal resistance and disagreements, among other things, that unfortunately sadden me. Human miseries also afflict our SSVP. To escape these evils, we need to pray more, to recycle our expertise in the training opportunities that we have, and seek reconciliation among ourselves. In spite of all this, the positive aspects outweigh immensely the negative issues and, thank God, our institution moves forward despite adversities. The Ombudswoman, for example, has helped greatly in settling a number of cases around the world. In all these situations, I always repeat that the quest for holiness is what is going to lead us to Paradise, not only in heaven, but also here on Earth.

We are setting a new pace in the establishment of international cooperation agreements, as well as other agreements and alliances with entities that carry out social work complementary to ours, contributing to the reduction of material and spiritual poverty in the world. This year, we encourage the Superior Councils to voluntarily sign an agreement for institutional cooperation with the "Sovereign Order of Malta" to share experiences in projects earmarked for the care of children, youth women at risk, old people and refugees. We all win with these agreements.

In the area of youth, all is positive. July 4th was set as the International Day of the SSVP Youth, and for June 2018 we are organizing the 2nd International Youth Gathering of the SSVP in Salamanca (Spain), where we want to bring together young people from all the Superior Councils. I congratulate the Councils that have

⁹ I suggest reflecting on the following biblical passage: Ecclesiastes (Ecc 27, 33 - 28, 9).

¹⁰ In the Circular Letter of 1st December 1842, our fellow member Emmanuel Joseph Bailly de Surcy, first President General, made it clear that we should "resolve differences" among the members of the SSVP, so that these situations do not become public, but are settled internally, with charity. "Our entity exists to unite, not to divide", our dear Bailly pleaded.

¹¹ I suggest reading point 3.14 of the Rule of the International Confederation of SSVP that explicitly reads: "Money should not be hoarded". Likewise, the 2nd President General, the brother Jules Gossin, in his Circular Letter of 1st November 1847, specified that "the Society does not hoard resources, but gives them according to its capabilities".



already appointed their national delegates for children, teenagers and young people, to take advantage of this important event within the Vincentian organization. I express my gratitude to the countries that have been extremely generous in paying the expenses of the youth attending from nations that do not have the funds to cover the airfare to Spain. I joined the SSVP through the Vincentian youth¹², when at the age of 16 I began to take the first steps in the field of charity. Therefore, you can expect much of a President General who began in the SSVP Youth. We are also shortly preparing a project for the youth whereby we will select volunteer interns to assist in the Vincentian work at the Paris head office.

About the Canonization of Antoine Frederic Ozanam¹³, the current Board considers it a priority to identify new cases of possible miracles anywhere in the world, and to process them so that the Vatican can decide according to the rules of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Our team from the Canonization Department and I are very committed to this issue and we hope that the canonization is close, considering the seriousness of the cases under study and the prayers of all the faithful to Ozanam¹⁴ in the world. I feel it in my heart. This dream is not only mine, but that of all 800,000 members of our institution. Last October, I had the joy of meeting His Holiness Pope Francis to hand him a dossier with information about the canonization of our fellow member Ozanam, listing the cases of alleged miracles analysed by the Holy See. Keep praying because the more devotees of Ozanam there are, the more our prayers will be heard by God!

Finally, I would like to remind you that last year the General Council launched the regulations¹⁵ for the award of the Medal "Charity in Hope", a simple initiative that aims to honour international bodies or individuals who carry out works similar to those of the SSVP, throughout the world. Each Superior

Council will propose an individual or institution, and the award ceremony will take place, in June 2018, in Salamanca. This medal is a way of expanding the institutional relations between the SSVP and all those who seek to build a better world here on Earth, as our Lord Jesus Christ asked.

We have many successes to our name, for the greater glory of God, but we still have many challenges ahead. However, our success comes only through the supreme desire of the Divine Providence, as it is the Lord who governs us and He decides our future¹⁶. Once again, I request your prayers for the success of all these initiatives. May the Lord fill us with blessings so that we keep going forward, with creativity and innovation, serving in hope.

Furthermore, we stress that 2018 is a vital year for the work of the General Council, because we are commemorating 15 years since the creation of the International Confederation and the adoption of the new International Rule. We thank God for all those who worked, and still work hard, for the modernization of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

3. Recommendations to Vincentians

Let me share with you, from the President General's perspective, some of my 32-year experience as a fellow Vincentian. I hope you do not perceive it as presumptuous.

As a result of its international mission, the General Council exerts a preponderant role in leading the work of the SSVP throughout the world, keeping the Confederation united and spreading. On the other hand, what I am going to say may surprise some Vincentians: In my opinion, the most important Council, in the whole service structure of the SSVP, is the Particular or Zone Council¹⁷, which is the closest Council to the Conferences, since it gathers and encourages the Conferences of a given area. It has the responsibility of coordinating the Vincentian action, ensuring the Society of St. Vincent de Paul travels the right road at the local level.

¹² One of the best books on the history of the Vincentian youth, both in Brazil and in the world, is entitled "The young face of the SSVP", written by fellow member Mário Maríngulo (2014). Colección Vicentina, nº 48, Brazil.

¹³ A very thorough study of Ozanam, available in different languages is "Frederic Ozanam: An intellectual at the service of the poorest" by Gérard Cholvy (1932-2017).

¹⁴ I reiterate the recommendation to read the book "Frederic Ozanam: his numerous facets", published by the SSVP Central Council of Medellin, Colombia (2013).

¹⁵ In the regulations, the deadline to propose individuals or entities is 28 February 2018. The first medal will be awarded in June 2018.

¹⁶ "Many are the plans in the heart of man and woman, but what prevails is the will of the Lord" (Proverbs 19, 21).

¹⁷ Also called in some countries Zone Council, District Council, Area Council or even Regional Council.



In the same way, the most important Vincentian leader in the organizational structure of our entity is the President of the Particular or Zone Council. This President General addresses a very special and heartfelt message to my dear Presidents of Particular / Zone Councils: please, closely support the works of the Conferences in your area, because you are responsible for the development of our institution. You have the mission of breathing encouragement, joy and enthusiasm into the Conferences, so that the Vincentian work fosters personal improvement among the fellow members themselves. The President of the Particular/Zone Council has also the function of encouraging the "second network of charity"¹⁸ that we need to weave among the members of our Conferences.

I give some recommendations to the Presidents of Particular/Zone Councils: never allow the closing of Conferences without having tried all possible alternatives. Be creative! Also, guide the Conferences so that they have an appropriate number of members (in some countries, we have seen Conferences with too many members, which does not contribute to an efficient service of charity). Support the Conference Presidents, since they rely on you. Follow the example of our founders.

Likewise, I take this opportunity to comment on the essential role of Conference Presidents, on whose leadership¹⁹ depend all the work of the group, the action of charity to those they care for, the relationship with the Church and interaction within the structure of the SSVP. A good Conference President²⁰ opens doors, does not judge, does not exclude anyone, does his/her best to engage the

members in the decision making, is concerned with the health of his/her members, and with the personal life of fellow members. Presidents acting like this cultivate harmony within the Conference and avoid problems. Conference Presidents also have the task of requesting the Letter of Aggregation from Paris. I had the noble position of Conference President in the city where I live, and I can assure you that it was a wonderful experience. It was a time of prayer, conciliation, harmony, tolerance, patience and learning. I wish you all the joy of performing the function of Conference President, serving our brothers and sisters in need and the Vincentian members themselves.

A big part of the conflicts and troubles within the SSVP relates to the inadequate preparation of our Conference and Particular/Zone Council Presidents, for responding to the need to resolve confrontations among Vincentians, with the Church or with other sectors; the Presidents need to be constantly trained in issues like crisis management, institutional action, personal relationships, relationship management, ethics and social co-existence, since all these are important in resolving problems. In addition to mastering the topics related to the Rule and the biography of our founders, the leaders also need more professional management training.

We notice that where leaders are appropriately trained, problems are settled more quickly and without damage. On the other hand, where leaders do not have these qualities, problems tend to grow and multiply, causing harm to the SSVP's image and unfortunately causing members to leave, which no-one, least of all the President General, wants. Dialogue, warmth and politeness are paramount characteristics in dealing with others, and Vincentians should be no different. Let us avoid unnecessary conflict. This is my heartfelt request. Try to seek harmony and union through prayer, humility and the sacraments.

The home visit is also worth mentioning²¹, it is the main activity of the SSVP around the world, according to the teachings of our founders. It is true that the visit is not the only Vincentian activity carried out by Conferences; but, following the tradition of our founders, it is the main one, and

¹⁸ I have adopted this expression in the article "The two networks of charity": "Without charity among the Vincentians, the Conferences would not have remained united for such a long time. Without it, maybe there would not be so much respect among individuals nor the ability to forgive. Without charity among us, the Conferences would not follow the hierarchy of love which means that the SSVP can work properly in favour of the poor. Without the second network of charity, there would be no organization and those in need would not receive the assistance that they receive today. In other words, without that network of inner, domestic charity, the other network, the exterior toward those in need, would not be feasible".

¹⁹ As for this issue, I recommend reading the trilogy "Mystic Leadership", "Evangelizing Leadership" and "Vocational Leadership", written by fellow member Eduardo Marques de Almeida, published by 'Colección Vicentina', Brazil.

²⁰ Adolphe Baudon (3rd President General), in the Circular Letter of 1st January 1877, expressed the concern of the General Council about Vincentian work, in the chapter "Comparing a half-hearted Conference and a zealous one", discussing appropriate and unadvisable practice in the daily life of the Conferences.

²¹ One of the best books on the home visit is the "Manual for Visits to those in need", because it describes the qualities that the visitor should have. Written by Concepción Arenal (2009), Bilbao, Spain.



most faithful to the original spirit of our organization, since it gives us personal contact with those who suffer. Conferences making home visits should ensure these are made regularly and without interruption, since the destitute really need the "Vincentian friendly hand", not only for donations of material goods, but also for the moral and spiritual support that they receive. Stand firm and do not get discouraged when, perhaps, the visits do not bring the expected results. God is on our side, and He is transforming the hearts of the person who receives the Vincentian visit²², even when we do not perceive it. The home visit is the Vincentian practice that I appreciate most.

Similarly, I ask that Conference meetings should take place regularly. I myself, as President General, attend the meetings of the Conference of which I am a member. No Vincentian leader, regardless of his/her hierarchical level, is exempt from attending the meetings. It is in the Conference where members seek personal sanctification in contact with their fellow members, through the generous secret collection, in prayer and in the letting go of our own opinions²³ during the decision-making process.

The way our Conferences operate needs to be updated and modernized²⁴. Our old traditional practices do not always produce the best results and do not help us to face the problems related to the various forms of poverty today, like the lack of education, unemployment and the problems of public health. It is necessary to form a new vision. It is true that material poverty needs to be tackled, but we cannot overlook action aimed at mitigating spiritual poverty²⁵, probably the most difficult task undertaken by the Conferences. Our groups are not always ready for this challenge! The absence of

Christ is probably the worst form of poverty²⁶ we meet, and therefore, the members of our Conferences, all over the world, need to be open to new ideas, enlarging our network of relations, looking for strategic alliances, in favour of the poor people that we assist. Holding events with a spiritual and family character is a useful way of helping to meet this objective.

In nearly all the continents I visit, I am asked how to recruit and keep the young in the SSVP. There is no "ready-made" answer for this huge challenge, but we can give some hints. First, we all know that younger people join the SSVP later, after they have settled the aspects of their personal life, like marriage, children, employment and housing. Such behaviour is natural, and we should accept it. Above all, we have to present the figure of Ozanam²⁷ as a model of a young man, and show that our main founder grew both in his personal and professional life alongside his commitment to the faith and the Church. Secondly, we can highlight that the young will only remain in the Conference if we offer them a favourable space for the development of the Vincentian virtues. If young people do not find this propitious and cosy atmosphere, it is unlikely that they will remain with us. Therefore, let us ensure that Conferences are holy, pleasant, joyful, motivating, harmonious and above all youthful places²⁸.

Another issue of vital importance for our Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the strengthening of relationships with the different branches of the Vincentian Family in all the continents. In some places the SSVP is quite well organized and solid and, therefore we should help the other branches of the Family that are in the process of formation. On the other hand, for developing the "SSVP Plus Project", we will need the support of the Vincentian Family to spread the SSVP in the various countries

²² *The service of the Holy Virgin, when she visited her cousin Elisabeth, represents the visit paid by the Vincentians to the ones in need (Luke 1, 39).*

²³ *"We have to understand this, my brothers; we can never carry out the work of God if we do not have a deep humility and a humble personal opinion of ourselves" (Saint Vincent de Paul).*

²⁴ *Despite the modern times in which we are living, it is worth remembering some timeless recommendations that help us keep the Vincentian spirit in unity. For this purpose, I recommend reading the chapters "Handbook for the Vincentian" (pages 859-863) and "Some ??? advice to the Vincentians" (pages 875-877) of the excellent book "The Lay Handbook", produced by the Superior Council of Spain (2008).*

²⁵ *About the topic of spiritual and material poverty, it is worth reading the book "Poverty", by Father Cantalamessa (2003), Publishing House Ancora, Milan, Italy.*

²⁶ *Message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the 34th Gathering "Friendship among peoples" (18th August 2013).*

²⁷ *In my humble opinion, the book "Frederic Ozanam, professor at the Sorbonne: his life and works", by Kathleen O'Meara, translated into Spanish by Francisco Javier Fernandez Chento (Publishing House "Somos Vicencianos" [=We are Vincentians], Madrid, Spain, 2017), is the first and best work on his biography. We can find in it not only amazing aspects of Ozanam's life, but also meet Amélie Ozanam-Soulacroix (1821-1894), the faithful wife who preserved Ozanam's memory so well.*

²⁸ *I have written much about the need for a harmonious atmosphere in our Conferences, in relations with the ones in need and among us, the Vincentians. I recommend reading the book "Passionate about charity and justice" (2017), published in Spanish by the SSVP Superior Council of Spain.*



where we are not yet present. Ultimately, within a family, everybody must collaborate and help one another. In a symposium the Vincentian Family organized last year²⁹ at the Vatican, we could see how united and full of hope for the future the Vincentian Family is³⁰. We are a great family, following the charisma and spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul. There is no Vincentian Family without cooperation. As President General, I exhort you to keep alive this initiative, and to seek that the joint projects move from theory to reality. Combining our strengths will guarantee more effective action in favour of those who suffer. United, we are much stronger.

Finally, my last recommendation: the international anthem³¹ of the SSVP, entitled "The Light" (with wonderful lyrics and music), should be sung at all Vincentian events, so that it becomes well-known and reaches our hearts more and more.

4. International Themed Year of François Lallier - 2018

As 16th President General, I announce that 2018 is the INTERNATIONAL THEMED YEAR OF FRANÇOIS LALLIER. On **8th February 2018**, the International General Council will launch the International Competition, for monographs on "The First Conference - Lallier", in order to delve into the biography and works of François Lallier, one of those responsible for the collegial foundation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, in 1833. Awards will be granted to the academic works that seek to present new or less well-known aspects of the personal, professional, Vincentian and family life of Lallier, with the aim of highlighting his contribution to the birth of the first Conference and to the spread of the SSVP throughout the world.

François Lallier (1814-1886) studied with Ozanam at the Faculty of Law in the Sorbonne. They were very close friends, Lallier even being the

godfather of Marie Josephine Ozanam, Ozanam's daughter. He married in 1839, and had a son (Henri), but suffered the pain of losing his daughter Julie. He was one of the most active during the debates in the Conferences of History, and also very active in all the foundation stages of the Society.

In 1837, Lallier was appointed general secretary of the Society, in charge of drafting circulars and letters. He was the youngest founder, and the last to die. He was a living witness of the innumerable events involving the new entity.

In the SSVP, Lallier was one of the main advisors to the Conferences and during discussions about establishing the Society in other countries, he always kept in mind the origin of the institution. He founded many Conferences. Besides working with those in need, Lallier was actively interested in archaeology, as a member of the Society of Archaeology in the town of Sens, France. He prepared reports about his discoveries and took part in archaeology conferences, in addition to publishing various social and political studies.

One of Lallier's most outstanding works was the writing of the booklet "Origins of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, as remembered by its first members", in 1879, at the request of the 3rd President General, Adolphe Baudon. On that occasion, he met the remaining founders still alive (Le Taillandier, Lamache and Devaux) to prepare this document, which was published in 1882 and is kept in the library of the General Council, available for consultation.

With this rich biography, the International General Council believes that the International Competition for monographs on "The First Conference - Lallier" will be a great success as it was for the Year of Bailly (2017), the prizes for which were awarded to Vincentians from different parts of the world. This is just what we wish: to know more detail about the life and works of our founders, their qualities, virtues and imperfections, since they shaped the DNA of our organisation, and we feel their energy and their blood in our veins.

The rules for this competition will be available on the CGI's website in the forthcoming weeks; keeping the general guidelines used for the 2017

²⁹ On that occasion, Pope Francis addressed beautiful words to all the Vincentians in the world, urging them to three actions: to worship, to welcome and to walk.

³⁰ The project "Alliance of the Vincentian Family for the Homeless" has the total support of the International General Council.

³¹ Composed in 2010 by the fellow member Juan Tirado and available in the CGI's website in six languages.



competition, cash awards will be given³² both for the winning authors and for the Conferences to which they belong. We are sure that the academic works about Lallier will be as rich as those about Bailly, offering interesting and fascinating detail about the life of this man who was so important in the history of the SSVp.

I invite all Superior Councils to publish articles and reflections focused on the leading role of François Lallier in the foundation process of the SSVp, encouraging the study of his life and work, his personal, professional, academic and Vincentian aspects, thus contributing with the General Council to the launch of the International Themed Year, 2018.

On 8th December 2018, the closing date of the "International Themed Year of François Lallier", we intend to celebrate holy masses around the world for the founders of the SSVp, especially in memory of François Lallier.

5. Conclusion

Dear Vincentian brothers and sisters, the world lives today with huge challenges – many of which are moral and spiritual – which we face everyday. The Conferences, Councils and our Vincentian works constantly endeavour to provide loving, fraternal and caring support, bringing hope to those without hope, love to the abandoned and affection to those excluded from society. The youth, the children, the sick, the elderly, the lonely, the immigrants, the refugees, the families displaced by war, religious or political persecution, the individuals living deep in depression or drug addictions, all are the object of Vincentian support. No work of charity is beyond the scope of the Society's work³³.

We have to remain united and vigilant in this humanitarian and social role. The SSVp joins all charitable institutions in creating a culture of peace³⁴, which seeks harmony among peoples and quality of life for everybody. However, civil society,

ever more distant from God and sacred things, presents us with an unfavourable and even inhospitable environment for the practice of charity. In many parts of the world, charities are expelled by the short-sighted decisions of certain authorities. Urban violence in many parts of our cities, religious intolerance, serious warlike tension between countries and separatist movements are other aspects that cause greater instability in the world.

But our Lord God will not abandon us, even in the most difficult moments, because He knows that we are part of the "holy army of charity", established by Himself to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ in every corner of the Earth, helping anyone who needs it, whatever they need.

This world, complex and anti-religious as it is, insensitive to human suffering, destructive of the environment, whose atheistic materialism is opposed to the sacred and is not family-focused, is where the Vincentian Conferences are located. Therefore, stay together, attentive, connected and stubborn in pursuit of the prophetic and historical mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, bequeathed to us by our founders. Divine Providence will help us overcome the difficulties encountered. Have faith, strength and courage to move forward!

I ask you to join me in the following reflection: what is the use of living well if my brother, next to me, is suffering and in need of everything? It is a "false joy", a "false pleasure". This position of indifference will prove to be very expensive; it is already paying the price, increasing the levels of violence, intolerance, family disruption, drugs and social despair. It is urgent that all parties involved (governments, parliaments, business, religious institutions, etc.) combine their efforts to provide effective responses to these evils that plague many of our brothers and sisters. And it is essential for our Conferences to develop systemic change projects, as proposed by the Vincentian Family, to combat all these modern forms of poverty.

It is why I often say that "being a Vincentian means making people happy"³⁵. The Vincentian is eternally blessed. He/she is, by nature, a vocational

³² We thank the General Council of South Tyrol, in Italy, for the generous and regular assistance that allows the International General Council to award the prizes.

³³ Point 1.3 of the Rule of the International Confederation of the SSVp.

³⁴ One of the objectives set by the Organization of the United Nations (UN).

³⁵ Speech of our fellow member Renato Lima de Oliveira in Rome (Italy), on 5th June 2016, after announcing the final result of the election for the presidency of the International General Council.

missionary. He/she is dedicated to altruistic causes, discreet and sensitive when reaching out to the one in need. He/she has friends in all corners of the world. He/she is an advocate of the family and the values of the Gospel, a person of faith, a person of goodwill and an advocate of the Church. He/she is a person of prayer and action, always available and supportive, creative and innovative, spreading the culture of peace. He/she is a justice-loving person, challenging social injustice. He/she spreads the Social Teachings of the Church, always attentive to others' needs, a volunteer by nature, always seeking to educate. He/she is committed to building a better, more just and equal world, with opportunities for all. These are some of the qualities of a Vincentian. Therefore, I reassert that "the Vincentian is eternally blessed", always.

Once again, I ask you to pray for me and for the leaders in the different positions of the International General Council, as well as for the officials at the headquarters in Paris and for the Presidents of the Superior Councils. I thank you in advance for suggesting topics and issues for the Circular Letter of 2019, which will be the anniversary of the 180 years of existence of the General Council. Your suggestions can be sent to the email address: cgi.circularletter@gmail.com

With filial love to the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the light of the Holy Spirit, I *thank you* all for your attention. Receive my affection. Your servant, always serving in hope,

"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all"

(Saint Mark 9, 35)



Brother Renato Lima de Oliveira
16th President General



*2018 – International Themed Year
of François Lallier*