



Confederation International
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Council General International
16th President General

Migrants & Refugees Meeting – 15 April 2021

“Migrants & Refugees Section”

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development – Vatican

1. Based on the current context of migration, what are the challenges encountered in building a Church that is truly catholic (communion in diversity)?

Good morning. First of all, on behalf of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP), of which I have the privilege to be the 16th President General, I would like to thank the “Migrants & Refugees Section” for the invitation to participate in this debate. For us Vincentians, it is a great honour to assist the Holy See in all matters relevant to Catholic doctrine, faith and practice.

At the request of Father Tomaz Mavric, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, I would also like to speak on behalf of the international Vincentian Family.

About the question (building a truly Catholic church under the focus of migration and diversity), I think that we have many challenges (**indifference, prejudice, discrimination, fear, lack of respect**). We have to show to the world that migrants and refugees are just seeking for better conditions for themselves and their families. So, in response, the most important thing is to **give witness to Christ** before people who suffer any kind of poverty.

The condition of migrant or refugee is, in essence, the same condition in which the poor people of the host country live, in other words, this is the focus of the charitable work of our Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We experience this reality every day, when we make home visits to needy families, even in pandemic times

Therefore, to give **witness to Christ** to those who suffer, to extend a helping hand, to fight for human rights, and to welcome those in need irrespective of origin, for me, constitute a concrete response to the construction of a truly Catholic Church within the environment of migration and refugees, in the spirit of the Gospel injunction to all Christians: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25, 35).

2. Based on the current context of migration, what are the challenges encountered in building a human family that embraces all of humanity?

This question may seem to be easy, but it is not.

Many people say that they have faith and that they are Catholic, but they don't always give a fraternal witness. Many of us, without realizing it, are also prejudiced. We think that these migrants and refugees will compete with us, with our children, for jobs and other social services.

Some Catholics live their faith when at Church; many leave their faith and convictions when they exit the Church. For some, it can be challenging living their faith fully in everyday life.

Pride and selfishness are obstacles. These are sins that take us away from God. Therefore, the first person to change must be MYSELF, OURSELVES.

While we are Catholic, and believe deeply in our faith, it may be difficult for some to remember or accept that other faith traditions have also deeply held convictions. Mutual respect is important. This is in the Bible, this is Christ's teaching and this should be our daily practice. As Vincentians, we try to welcome all suffering people, no matter where or who they are.

So, my response to this question is: our greatest challenge is to overcome **selfishness** and **pride**, seeking **real solidarity among people**.

Here I see great opportunities for Catholic formation to go in this direction.

3. What concrete actions have you undertaken that could be seen as a model for responding to the challenges identified above?

To achieve these objectives, Pope Francis in his Encyclical FRATELLI TUTTI provided one model for us. In Section 129, he states: "Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate".

It is possible to act on several fronts.

In many places in the world (United States, Spain, The Netherlands and Italy, for example), our Vincentian Conferences have **legal services** to support migrants and refugees in the process of regularization. Besides this kind of service, we also provide food and other benefits (housing, access to education, furniture and jobs). Humanitarian aid eases the refugees' plight.

DePaul International, for instance, a Vincentian Family member in Ireland, supports migrant families to move from State reception centres to independent housing and integration with local communities.

Another example: with the **mass media**, promoting awareness campaigns on the subject, aimed at softening the prejudice that migrants and refugees suffer.

Another idea would be to involve the big **international foundations**, banks and private companies to form a **GLOBAL FUND** that can be used by countries or NGOs to receive refugees, giving them dignity and stability. In Section 132 of FRATELLI TUTTI, the Pope sets out some interesting ideas for the development of a form of global governance for movements of migration.

Our focus – as SSVP and Vincentian Family – at the United Nations is **homelessness**, which is totally linked to migration and refugees concerns. Our global campaign **13 HOUSES** has provided more than 5,000 houses to people in need, and our goal is to achieve 10,000 houses by 2025.

We believe strongly in having people experiencing the issue we are discussing at the table with us.

"**Don't talk about us without us**" is our motto to understand better the refugees' problems. Only the people with lived experience can speak fluently of the problems that arise.

Respecting those with lived experience is key to **open dialogue**, approaching them as true sisters and brothers. This is also key to our achievements. We are one family.

4. Beyond the actions mentioned above, what pastoral responses should the Church, at various levels, plan and implement in order to respond to these challenges?

The Church at all levels should practice what it preaches, globally, as best it can.

When migrants arrive, and local parishioners are fearful, the Priest may help the parishioners remember we are all God's children, and we are loved equally.

At local parishes, the Priest and other Parish members might present programs explaining the plight of migrants and refugees, to educate the parishioners. Formation, indeed!

They may organize fund raising efforts for the newcomers in their community.

Perhaps organize a program for families to get to know each other, a local family could "adopt" a migrant family (as we do as Vincentians when we adopt the poor families), be there to explain the local customs, assist the newcomers with applying for social service assistance. If there are children in the families, the local children may befriend the new children. **A simple act of kindness will go far.**

It is based on the **virtue of simplicity** that we, as Vincentians, try to solve the problems that are presented to us, day by day, by our friends in need.

Like this, I believe the Church could do the same: simplicity, Christian welcome, respect for differences, and support for the basic needs of the human being. This is our response as true Catholics.



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