



Rome, 19 September 2022

FEAST OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

**FROM A VINCENTIAN FAMILY STRUCTURE TOWARD A
VINCENTIAN FAMILY MOVEMENT**

**VINCENTIAN CENTERS OF SPIRITUALITY AND FORMATION
AROUND THE WORLD**

To the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world

Dear sisters and brothers,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

We are fast approaching the Feast of Saint Vincent that officially falls on 27 September, but, given the reality of a country, the celebration may be held on some other day to allow the greatest number of persons to attend.

We are seeing the return to in-person gatherings, which bring us joy and encouragement, since we are able again to witness as family, as persons of faith, participating in the Eucharist and other celebrations that a year ago were still hampered by the pandemic. This is an additional reason for us to put all our efforts and talents into making this observance of the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul a memorable one after these past few years of very limited gatherings or their prohibition.

In fact, the whole month of September is called a Vincentian month. Depending on the structure and program of the Vincentian Family in a given country, different events, gatherings, and initiatives may be offered throughout the month. These might include days of recollection for youth who are discerning a vocation to the consecrated life, as well as formation and charity initiatives to deepen our Vincentian spirituality and charism. We also invite others, who may

not know Saint Vincent de Paul and the other Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family, to get to know our Vincentian spirituality and charism through our words and deeds.

The title of this year's letter for the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul is, "From a Vincentian Family Structure toward a Vincentian Family Movement" and "Vincentian Centers of Spirituality and Formation around the world."

Not so long ago, the international leaders of the different Vincentian Congregations of Consecrated Life and Lay Associations began to gather every year to build closer relationships and collaboration, as belonging to the same spiritual and charismatic group, even though each one retained its own specificity and uniqueness. This group began to be called "the Vincentian Family" and was symbolized by a tree with many branches. The central part of the tree with its roots is our common Vincentian spirituality and charism, and each branch represents an individual Congregation or Association. That is why we often use the word branches, having in mind the beautiful symbol of a tree.

The Vincentian Family, this lovely tree, has been growing throughout the years, and continues to do so. Upon discovery of new Congregations and Lay Associations that are living and carrying out the Vincentian spirituality and charism, we invite them to join the Vincentian Family, adding new growth to this ever-larger tree.

Uniting groups, no matter their origin, in collaborative service is part of the Vincentian tradition. Consider the introduction to the regulations for the Ladies of Charity at the court:

The Company of the Ladies of Charity will be instituted to honor that of Our Lord and His Holy Mother and the women who followed Him, furnishing what was necessary for Him, His company, sometimes the crowds that followed Him, and poor persons. It will do so by being a patron of and assisting the Companies of the Charity of the Hotel-Dieu, the Foundlings, the convicts, the little girls of Mesdemoiselles Poulaillon and de Lestang, the poor young women serving in the Charities of the parishes, the women at the Madeleine, and all the good works instituted by women in this century.¹

Recently, in many countries of Central and South America, so-called Vincentian Confraternities have started to emerge, such as the Confraternity of Vincentian Lawyers, Vincentian Teachers, Vincentian Translators, Vincentian Specialists in the area of Communications, etc. They bring together other persons who live the same spirituality and charism and feel part of the Vincentian Family. The service of the poor unites them.

¹ CCD XIIIb, 441, document 199, Regulations for the Ladies of Charity at the Court (Between 1640 and 1649). CCD refers to the collection, *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIIIb, p. 441 (hereafter, CCD, followed by the volume, then page number).

The structured groups of Women's and Men's Congregations, and Lay Associations presently number 165. In addition, many other people, attracted and inspired by the person of Saint Vincent de Paul and the other Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family, do not belong officially to any of its branches. They are drawn to the Vincentian spirituality and charism through books, articles, the internet, radio, television, and social media. They would like to further their knowledge of the Vincentian way of thinking, speaking, and living, thus becoming active participants in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, having the right to be called "Vincentians." Already, a large number of persons who do not belong specifically to any group, because of their way of living out their lives, serving, thinking, speaking, and acting, embody the Vincentian spirit and charism. Here I see the further development of the Vincentian Family and this wonderful Vincentian Tree into what is becoming a so-called "Vincentian Family Movement."

What instruments can we use or are we already using to offer to the structured groups, as well as those persons who do not belong to any group within the Vincentian Family, spiritual encounters and courses in Vincentian formation, involving them actively in different initiatives and projects within the Vincentian Family?

In many parts of the world, this is already a reality or is slowly becoming one. Teachers; professors; families of students in Vincentian schools, colleges, universities; alumni of these different institutions; hospital and health center workers; other members of the staff with their families; social workers; parishioners from Vincentian parishes, and individuals, through the different means of communication or otherwise, are getting to know the Vincentian way. The international website of the Vincentian Family, famvin.org, already has many materials in the area of formation in Vincentian spirituality and charism. Likewise, other websites within the Vincentian Family offer similar formation resources through social media to anyone in any part of the world.

Many Women's and Men's Congregations are forming the lay staff in their respective institutions to continue the Vincentian spirit and charism. When the time comes that the sisters, brothers, and priests leave a school, college, hospital, health center, etc., the lay collaborators will be ready to continue the education, health, and social service in the Vincentian tradition.

In addition to all the above-mentioned persons, there are many other groups or individuals living out the Vincentian spirituality and charism but not always linked to the Vincentian Family, this beautiful tree! How can we help them?

This is the second part of this year's title for the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, to organize "Vincentian Centers of Spirituality and Formation" in the different countries in the world where the Vincentian Family is present. In some countries, such Vincentian Centers of Spirituality and Formation already exist, or different branches offer courses in this area already.

Contacting the already-existing centers would allow us to learn what materials are available on the level of the whole Vincentian Family. We then can invite other countries and

areas to open Vincentian Centers of Spirituality and Formation where they do not exist, sharing together the abundant materials already prepared for such centers.

Saint Vincent stressed the need to be formed in order to form others, telling a confrere:

I praise God for the number of priests the Bishop of ... is sending you. You will have plenty of them if you take the trouble to form them in the true spirit of their state, which consists especially in the interior life and the practice of prayer and the virtues. It is not enough to teach them chant, ceremonies, and a little moral theology; what is important is to form them to solid piety and devotion. To do that, Monsieur, we must be the first to be filled with the above, for it would be almost useless to instruct them on these things without giving the example. We must be full reservoirs in order to let our water spill out without becoming empty, and we must possess the spirit with which we want them to be animated, for no one can give what he does not have.²

In the month of November, the Vincentian Family Executive Committee is going to discuss this topic during its annual meeting in Rome.

I would like to encourage all the international, national, and regional leaders of the structured branches of this beautiful tree called the Vincentian Family to invite as many members as possible of the Confraternities and the collaborators who do not belong to any specific group to participate in the different events that will be organized in the various countries throughout the month of September.

Please send us pictures and videos of the various celebrations you organized throughout the Vincentian month of September, or short articles about them, to these two email addresses, and we will try to share the information through different means of communication.

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May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul and all the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family, intercede before Jesus for us all!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM

² CCD IV, 570; letter 1623, to a Seminary Director.