With us in prayer
Belgium, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Curaçao, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Guyana, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Laos, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Ukraine, Vietnam.
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Father Eli Chaves dos Santos, AIC Spiritual Advisor

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Alicia Duhne, Associate President and AIC Regional Coordinator for Latin America

With the generous support of:
**Introduction to the Assembly**

*Laurence de la Brosse, AIC International President*

Dear Yolanda,

Thank you for the warm greeting. On behalf of all the AIC members, it is truly a great joy to be here in Guatemala, such a beautiful country.

Thank you Sister Elena Herrera, Visitatrix of Central America and administrator of this House who has received all of us in the same way as any Sister... thank you for making our stay here such a pleasant experience.

We are aware of all the work that has been done and all effort that has been exerted during the past year in order to make this Assembly a successful event and so we thank you from the bottom of our heart. We thank all the AIC Guatemala volunteers who have been a part of these preparations as well as all the members of the International Secretariat.

Strong bonds have always united AIC Guatemala with AIC International and at this time I would like to give special recognition to María Luisa Castillo de Mata, known by everyone as “Güichita”... since 1971 she, together with Claire Delva, has been a great promotor of AIC in Guatemala. She was also a member of the AIC Executive Board from 1976-1985.

Dear AIC Presidents and Volunteers,

Dear Members of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity,

Dear Translators,

I thank you for your presence here. As AIC volunteers, each one of us is an important link in this chain that has continued to be formed for almost four hundred years.

I now want to address those volunteers who are participating in an international assembly for the first time: you are the future of the Association. Allow me to share with you a personal experience that occurred here in Guatemala some twenty years ago when I participated in an AIC assembly of the for the first time.

I returned to France with great awe and great enthusiasm as a result of the reality that I saw in the many national groups that were serving our less fortunate brothers and sisters. I hope that all of you who are participating in this Assembly for the first time will return home to your groups convinced and proud to be a member of AIC.
At one time we spoke about “self-development” which for us, the volunteers in Europe, was a new concept. But this concept of self-development came from you, the AIC volunteers in Latin America. You developed this concept from your own experience and conviction, that is, you came to an awareness that people living in the midst of situations of poverty have the right to participate in their own development. Today we would say that not only do such people have a right, but they have an obligation to participate in their own development.

Since 2011 AIC has focused its ministry on education, an essential means in the struggle against poverty... more specifically we have focused our ministry on the education of women (women represent 80% of the persons with whom we minister).

Oliver Schuter, the UN Special Reporter on the right to food has highlighted the fact that as women become more educated and informed and as they attain a greater understanding of their rights, their children experience less hunger.

The theme of the 2015 Assembly is:

*By valuing our strengths,*

*let’s become agents of education as a two-way process.*

**To value the strengths of each person:**

I recently read a book written by the French economist, Xavier Fontanet, and I was fascinated by his insight: *No financial crisis, and that includes the present crisis, has been resolved without the participation of everyone. Every member of society (regardless of where they reside) is indispensable and even the most humble tasks have a profound significance. Therefore, each person should be convinced of the fact that he/she has an important task to fulfill and society needs them and needs their contribution... It is important to cultivate “our garden”... and that, at the very least, is our responsibility. In conclusion, then, every person ought to take responsibility for their life, since it is only in that way that people reveal their dignity.* That analysis reflects our own convictions and furthermore, such an analysis reflects the Social Doctrine of the Church.

As members of AIC, education that occurs in the context of situations of poverty is not simply providing knowledge to people to order to fill some void. Education must always involve “enlightening” people and valuing their ability to act on their own behalf. Every person has a unique strength and has something to share with others.

In order to change situations of poverty we, rich and poor alike, ought to support one another and value one another as individuals.

Education, then, means that *we view reality in a new way,* that *we focus our attention on men and women,* on their strengths and their dreams (and not on their weaknesses or the defects that they must overcome). This process involves positive thinking and implies a change in the way that we act and in
the manner in which we view situations. The International Secretariat Team will guide us with the “Constellation Method”.

This method consists of supporting people’s strengths so that a common dream can be realized. It is hoped that we will experience this during the Assembly.

2017 is approaching: in two years we will celebrate 400 years of following Saint Vincent de Paul as we continue to accompany persons who are spiritually and materially poor. We, therefore, pose the following questions: what do we want with regard to the future of AIC? What resources do we have in order to make that dream a reality?

Our ministry is an integral component of the Church’s mission: to proclaim good news to those living in poverty and to promote a just society in which all people can live with dignity.

From the XIX century, the time when industrialization created a series of new problems, the Church has promoted what has been called the Social Doctrine of the Church. We could say that the social doctrine updates the message of Christ as it applies to the social and political activity of the members of the Catholic Church (in other words, to each one of us) so that all people can live with dignity. The Church’s Social Doctrine is based on the principle that all people are personally loved by God and enjoy the same equality. **The human person is at the very center of the Church’s Social Doctrine.**

In his Lenten message Pope Francis presented us with the following principle: *In this communion of saints, in this sharing in holy things, no one possesses anything alone, but shares everything with others.* Those words, *shares everything with others*, refer to all our material resources as well as all of our efforts and abilities. Every afternoon Father Eli Chavez, our International Spiritual Advisor, will help us to reflect on our activity and to situate our ministry within the context of the Church’s Social Doctrine. In this way our ministry can become clothed with a universal dimension.

In order to give some further clarity to this reflection I would like to place before you the words of Cardinal Decourtray, the Archbishop of Lyon (France):

*There was never a man who showed greater respect toward others than this man.*

**Jesus always saw hope in every person that he encountered... he saw promise and extraordinary possibilities. He saw a person who, despite his/her limitations, sins and/or crimes, was called to greater things, called to a better future.**

**Jesus did not say:** This woman is unfaithful, stupid, marked with the religious and moral attitudes of her environment, just another woman who is not to be taken seriously.

**Rather Jesus asked this woman to give him a drink of water and he engaged her in conversation.**

**Jesus did not say:** the one who tried to touch my cloak is nothing more than a hysterical woman.

**Jesus listen to her, spoke with her and healed her.**
Jesus did not say: these children are a nuisance.

**Jesus said:** Let the children come to me... for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Jesus did not say that the Centurion was an invader.

**Jesus said:** in no one in Israel have I found such faith.

Jesus did not say: this braggart is nothing but a renegade.

**Jesus said:** Peter do you love me?

We know that as we participate in this Assembly we are enveloped in a cloud or prayer... the prayers of all the friends of AIC who accompany us at this moment in our history. We know that we can also rely on the intercession of our heavenly patrons, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac.

Enjoy the Assembly!
Introduction to the Facilitator Methodology

Secretariat Team

The members of the Secretariat presented a methodology that had a powerful impact on the manner in which the members of AIC would act and live... it also had an impact on the personal life of the volunteers. Here we shall refer to it as the facilitator methodology.

This method was initiated by a Belgian doctor. In order to better understand this process a very concrete example was placed before us. With regard to the problem of malaria, various groups distributed thousands of mosquito nets and with the exception of a few cases the results were not very positive. What then was different in those few cases where the results were positive? In those communities the people themselves confronted the situation and sought a solution to the problem using other means.

What does this experience tell us? In our ministry, do we not at times attempt to impose solutions without taking into consideration the people who are in the midst of those situations? Are we not guilty of telling people what they have to do?

The facilitator methodology reminds us of the fact that we must take into consideration some important steps:

- The participation of the beneficiaries of our ministry... we must take the time to speak with them before initiating a project;
- The beneficiaries ought to be motivated and we must help people discover their abilities and talents;
- We must trust in the ability of people to decide for themselves and we then ought to support their proposals;
- We should not become discouraged, one person will sow the seed but not all the seeds will take root.

The facilitator methodology enables us:

1) To change our attitude and to put aside our custom of being “an expert”;
2) To value and to trust in the beneficiaries and their abilities;
3) To know people as human beings and to allow ourselves to be known as a human being... this allows for an encounter between equals.

When we visit the beneficiaries of our ministry we ought to see them as friends, we ought to learn from them and see them as human beings who have a past and a future and who also have dreams.
The gaze of Saint Vincent was one that was appreciative of God and so we ought to be more attentive to listening to people in order to learn from them. The primary characteristic of a facilitator is to know how to listen and only after listening does one speak about oneself and share one’s dreams.

I heard a person say: one day someone told me I has certain abilities and gifts... that was the first time that anyone had said that to me and now I use those abilities and gifts. At times we may not be able to identify people’s talents and abilities are but everyone has some gift and ability. After discovering those talents we can begin to speak about our dreams and about what we want to achieve together. We help people discover gifts and abilities and in this process we are all teachers and we are all learners... this is a two-way exchange. This process is simple and effective and can be utilized wherever we are... no resources are necessary and the only thing we have to do is to change our attitude.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to forget what we have already learned. Today we need to listen to others and exchange and share ideas with others. Someone once said that we are stronger and wealthier as a result of the experiences that we have with other people. To share and exchange with other men and women makes us stronger as individuals. We must be convinced that everyone is gifted and has different abilities. Therefore, we must take time to get to know people, we must change our attitude and have a stance of gratitude.

**Workshop: getting to know one another – revealing our strengths**

We formed five groups of about twenty-five persons.

The objective of the workshop: to learn how to discover the other as a human person and to learn how to listen to the other so that we can identify, appreciate, and reveal that person’s strengths (thus we avoid focusing on a person’s weaknesses).

✓ **First stage: who are we?**

The participants were invited to form groups of two and to introduce themselves to one another in a very familiar and human way, that is, without using titles and referring to their studies. This exercise enabled the participants to reveal strengths which they then wrote on a piece of paper. Then in the group each person presented the strengths of the person with whom they had spoken and placed on a poster board the piece of paper on which those strengths were written.

There was then a dialogue about the process of moving from being “an expert” to being a facilitator.
We share here some of the comments: “it is a good exercise because we were able to speak about our strengths and our life... and we have few opportunities to do this especially in our ministry with those living in poverty”... “it is good to engage in this practice and to continue to do this in our ministry with those living in poverty and with one another”.

**An experience of this method in the ministry of AIC**
A summary of the subgroups (3 or 4 persons) was presented to the larger group so that all of this could be applied to the people whom we accompany. One person said that she would apply this dynamic to the parents with whom she ministers at the day-care center. Two other people spoke about using it while people are playing games, throwing darts or playing cards, etc. Another person suggested conducting a survey with the parents of the children in school by asking them three questions: what is your dream for your child when he/she becomes an adult? What are you doing now so that the dream can become a reality? How can we as volunteers help you in this matter?

Throughout the four days of the Assembly we experienced the facilitator methodology and the different steps in that process:

First day: **we discovered who we are as human beings and came to understand that we all have strengths and talents and we were able to identify and appreciate those gifts and strengths**: here we spoke about the strengths of AIC, the strengths of the Executive Board candidates, the strengths of the AIC network, the strengths of each participant.

Second day: **We dialogued with one another about our strengths and our dreams** (our dream is a motivation for change and allows us to project ourselves into the future)... in a workshop we were able to dialogue about our strengths and about AIC’s best practices (projects, the diploma program, advocacy and fundraising).

Third day: we spoke about the **AIC’s dream and plan of action (where we want to go and how to get there)**: the path to the 400th anniversary of our foundation, AIC’s financial resources and AIC’s legal framework.

Fourth day: **Let’s act!** We came to a deeper understanding of our strengths as members of the AIC and we elected a new Executive Board.

**Exchange of strengths, an experience in Colombia – AIC Colombia**

AIC-Colombia presented the story of Jacqueline Moreno as an example of valuing and appreciating and sharing of gifts and strengths.
Jacqueline works in the district of Bella Flor, a very poor area of the city of Bogota. Her experience in life made her aware of her gifts and the gifts of others. Based on that experience Jacqueline developed a philosophy of community development that was based on an exchange of abilities/strengths... and this led to the creation of “talent swapping banks”.

The objective of those banks was to help marginalized people discover their strengths and accomplish their dreams. She promoted a human environment in the marginalized neighborhoods thus preventing the disintegration of society by helping people recover their dignity through the promotion of equitable actions. Everyone was invited to participate and become a community agent. The essential element was that the community believed in itself and was convinced of its own strength. According to Jacqueline we all have strengths and through the sharing of those strengths we can realize our dreams. It is this sharing of strengths that becomes key to fostering entrepreneurial activity.

The participants were invited to reflect on the following questions: What strengths do you see in Jacqueline? When have you experienced such a sharing of strengths/talents/abilities? What strengths have you shared?

Various groups of volunteers in AIC-Colombia gave witness to this sharing of strengths in their centers. As a result of this sharing we were able to see that the sharing of strengths allows us to realize our dreams... and yes, it is important to dare to dream; it is important to know ourselves better; it is important to trust others and to not forget those who are near to us.

This presentation was concluded by reminding us that God has given talents to everyone... these are gifts from God who asks us to be responsible for those gifts and talents.

**Workshop on the sharing of our strengths – Carmen Duhne**

This session began with people working individually. Mindful of the fact that we are all created by God, we are all works of God’s hands and as such we have strengths... therefore each participant was invited to reflect on his/her mission that is, on the mission that had been entrusted to them (your passion is your mission). The participants were also invited to reflect on the things that they had learned and on the gifts that God had given them in order to fulfill their mission.

One of our tasks is to develop the attitude of a facilitator, that is, we must be people who value the strengths of others as well as our own strength. We must be in a relationship with others and have a positive and an appreciative attitude. We must also be able to accept the fact that others can help us
to grow and in this way we are able to live better lives... we are able to be more charitable and deepen our spirituality.

In order to become more aware of those realities we engaged in two different exercises in groups of three. We were asked to take on different roles so that we could represent the different persons who were presented in the different stories that we listened to:

1. In the first exercise, A was a beneficiary who spoke about his/her problem and B was a volunteer who had to listen and accept what was being said, C was an observer. In light of the problem that was being related the volunteer had to express three different attitudes: pity, culpability and offering assistance in order to find some alternatives. The participants changed roles so that each person had to the opportunity to take on each of the different roles. At the end of the exercise the participants shared in the larger group what they had experienced and observed.

   Among other things the following were observed: pity did not seem to help the situation; anger seemed to impel people to move forward; there is a need to allow people to express their feelings in order to be able to heal them; forgiveness is a process that can take a long period of time; acceptance of the other is of vital importance.

   In order to find new paths it is important to consider first the relationship and not the situation itself or the problem. We attempt to help people discover how they themselves can confront the situation, in other words, how they can resolve the situation and ultimately resolve other similar situations.

2. In the second exercise, A was the beneficiary who spoke about an important challenge that he/she had to confront; B was the volunteer who had to listen to and accept the other; C was the observer. The volunteer (a) had to listen attentively, ask questions but not offer advice; (b) had to ask: what do you want? What is your dream? What do you want as an outcome? (c) had to help the person to find the strength to confront the challenge; (d) seek **alternatives.** In light of your strengths, what might you be able to do? Are there some viable alternatives? How can we move forward together?

The workshop ended with the participants once again working individually. Each participant was invited to write on stars that had been created beforehand the names of the people who they felt had helped them to value their own strengths. All the stars were then placed on the wall so that people were able to visualize the impact that we can have on one another.
March 23rd: We all have strengths and abilities

During this Assembly, AIC wants to reflect upon and develop two important themes that are like two large pillars:

1. **Education**: AIC is convinced that education, understood as a two-way process, is one of the key elements in preventing poverty and in the struggle against poverty. This is especially so in the case of women.

2. **The celebration of AIC’s 400th anniversary**: AIC wants to deepen its understanding of the Vincentian mission of service on behalf of those living in poverty and in a renewed manner wants to further develop its ministry within the church and society.

The AIC wants to seek guidance from the **Social Doctrine of the Church**. That doctrine contains a set of values and principles that are grounded in the **gospel** and the Catholic Church’s **magisterium** and are related to the social, political, economic and cultural reality. The social doctrine, then, could be viewed as a gospel proposal with regard to building a civilization of love from the perspective of a holistic and fraternal humanism\(^1\). Therefore, the social doctrine of the Church is indispensable to guiding and to providing gospel consistency and relevance to the ministry of AIC as it attempts to fulfill its objectives in the area of education and in celebrating the 400th anniversary of its foundation.

We can highlight two important elements of the church’s social doctrine:

- **Human dignity**: every human person, created in the image and the likeness of God and destined for eternal life in communion with God, possesses a dignity that makes him/her superior to other created entities. Every person, regardless of any distinguishing characteristic, is worthy of respect. Every violation of human dignity is an offense against the Creator.

- **The principle of the common good** affirms that all goods are intended for the use of all people. The common good is always oriented toward the progress of the person: the social order and its progress should be subordinate to the good of the human person and not the reverse. The common good supposes the need to create structures that promote social justice and a community approach to human life.

The dignity of the human person and the principle of the common good ought to orient the ministry and the forward thrust of AIC. In its struggle against the various forms of poverty and their causes, in its attempts to promote education and renew the Association, AIC and every volunteer involved in this work should not minister from the perspective of a single focus. Rather all the members should seek a broader perspective which is the development of life and respect for the dignity of all people, but especially those who are most poor. Therefore, all our efforts, in our private lives and in our life as members of AIC, are for the common good and should be utilized for the building up of the common good of AIC and of those men and women who live in poverty.

_March 24th: Exchanging ideas in order to make dreams a reality_

In the _social doctrine of the Church_, **solidarity** and **the option for the poor** are two extremely important teachings. Catholic social teaching proclaims that all people are to care for creation, for our brothers and sisters, especially for those brothers and sisters who are most poor and vulnerable. We are a human family and we live in an interdependent world. Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of each and every individual, because we are all really responsible for all. The mutual interdependence of people confers upon each individual an ethical obligation with regard to others, to the community and to the task of establishing a more human and just society. As we work for the common good, the protection of the poorest and more vulnerable members of society is a fundamental demand, especially if we are to have any hope of maintaining a balance in social relationships and in the search for a dignified life for all people. Becoming fully immersed in the human situation should lead us to greater solidarity and to preferential activity on behalf of those who are negatively affected by the absence of power and the presence of deprivation.

In Jesus, solidarity and the option for the poor were not simply some human feeling, an ethical demand with regard to seeking the common good and social justice. Jesus broadened the human horizon and revealed that solidarity and preferential concern for those living in poverty is rooted in God’s love. In the light of faith, the poor are the privileged beneficiaries of God’s love since Jesus identified himself with them and therefore solidarity takes on specifically Christian dimensions of gratitude, charity, forgiveness and reconciliation.

When solidarity with those living in poverty is lived in light of the gospel, then that solidarity leads us to charity, the love of God and the love of neighbor, which is the meaning of the Christian life. Solidarity and the option for the poor are above all else a manifestation of justice that is intimately related with charity. Expressions of solidarity and commitment on behalf of those who are most poor suppose that we are engaged in work that seeks to eliminate those structures that generate poverty and social exclusion. We are called to be servants of Jesus’ love and self-sacrifice which transforms people, which encourages us to create a new world, another world that anticipates and prepares people for the coming of the Kingdom of God and his justice.
Today we have reflected on and nourished the **dream of the AIC network as it celebrates its 400th anniversary.** Two elements of the Church’s social doctrine (closely related to one another) can help us to be enlightened and to make that dream a reality: participation and subsidiarity.

**Participation:** it is important and necessary that all people participate and together seek the common good and the well-being of all people, especially those who are most poor. The social teaching of the Church affirms that participation is part of our very existence and consists of a commitment to promote a society that is in greater conformity with gospel values. Participation is a responsibility of all people as they engage in a process of building a more just society.

**The principle of subsidiarity** deals primarily with the responsibilities and limits of individual persons, social groups and governmental organizations with regard to their right and duty to participate. This principle affirms that a higher authority should not perform a function that can be exercised effectively at a lower level. The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level authorities and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfill their duties.

In order that these principles of participation and subsidiarity might be concretized and produce fruit among us, I would like to highlight the need to focus our attention on three areas:

**a) With regard to the human person,** participation and subsidiarity suppose a participative and responsible attitude (here personal possibilities, one’s institutional responsibility and one’s level of activity within the group or institution must be taken into consideration). Participation is essential for the success of any initiative or project.

There are innumerable benefits to all of this: people are no longer passive and become active agents who are willing to express their opinion and make a positive contribution to the task that is under consideration; it facilitates committed action that is effective, participative and transparent; it avoids individualistic actions that are manipulated by one or two persons in order to control a project; it creates an environment for better decision making and for the development of an action plan; it creates a stimulating environment of collective searching and creativity; all involved are able to learn as a result of an exchange of ideas and abilities; it leads to dynamism, development and on-going evaluation in order to achieve one’s objectives.

Responsible participation of people is most important. Also in AIC, as a group of volunteers engaged in action, it is important to encourage and value individuals and it is equally important to promote joyful participation that arises from a human and spiritual understanding of life. In AIC spiritual and technical training, as well as encouraging new volunteers, is all indispensable for high quality and creative participation.
b) With regard to AIC’s action itself, responsible participation (mindful of its finality being the common good) ought to develop a spirit of collaboration which in turn is expressed through the establishment of relationships with other people (social agents)... this collaboration should move in two directions.

First, in a vertical direction (“ad intra” - action proper to AIC), thus there is the need to reflect upon and develop a series of actions, attitudes, and means that will enable the volunteers to become engaged in well-organized, articulated and renewed work, a work that is in accord with common objectives. Subsidiarity respects the right to act on each level of authority but this does not deny the need for coordination and mutual collaboration. The various levels of AIC (the local level as well as the national and international level) have to accept their specific tasks and ought to help one another in accomplishing those tasks and therefore they ought to work together as a team.

Second, on a horizontal level (“ad extra” and with regard to participative action and subsidiarity), the broader and more complex these realities become only means that other people will necessarily become involved and thus new relationships of collaboration will also be established. As a charitable association, AIC ought to relate to those living in poverty in such a way that they become more aware of the need to participate in the process of development as subjects and not as objects of charity; as an ecclesial association, AIC should act in accord with the Church and while safeguarding its autonomy, AIC should nevertheless participate in diocesan and parish pastoral planning processes; as a Vincentian association AIC is called to collaborate with the Vincentian Family; as an organized group that operates within society, it should be recognized there are many possibilities for alliances and collaboration with other social groups and governmental organizations that promote human and social development.

c) With regard to methodology – the dynamic of responsible participation requires a communal and participative methodology. AIC is called to follow the example of Saint Vincent who knew how to engage in large communal and participative projects, who was able to engage in such projects with a team approach. We must begin to lay aside our individualistic and sectarian ways and learn how to embrace collaboration as a way of life and a strategy for our activity. In those situations where the AIC’s activity is being done by one person or a few people (people who view themselves as “proprietors” of the work) and where the participative methodology is not utilized, AIC has little future and can easily become asphyxiated or can die of anemia. Participation on the distinct levels is indispensable when considering a commitment that involves accomplishing some project, when considering the cultivation of a spirit of communion and when considering team work - all of which will provide AIC with a harmonious and fruitful functionality.
Introduction: The dream of the AIC network as it celebrates its 400th anniversary

We are approaching the 400th anniversary of our foundation and we should take advantage of this opportunity in order to share with others that which drives and encourages us. This means that we should share our dream of being part of an AIC that is committed, lives in solidarity with others, is prophetic and lives in accord with the spirit of Saint Vincent.

Many of our contemporaries are searching for some meaning in their life and we have the opportunity to place before them what we ourselves have found.

If we are convinced about what we are doing then we can convince others to participate with us. Our best publicity is our own witness: 150,000 volunteers in the world ministering in order to create a better world, ministering on behalf of those less fortunate members of society, providing social services. All of us together form this constellation of AIC.

How to make AIC known: Moving toward our 400th anniversary – Maru Magallenes

We begin by placing before you the program that was prepared by AIC for the celebration of the 400th anniversary of our foundation:

2013-2014: Internalize our charism through
- The spiritual training booklet of October 2013: “Be enchanted by poor people with Christ”
- Training booklet 2014: “Let us be enchanted by St Vincent’s project”

2015-2016: Communicate the reality of an AIC that is enchanted through:
- The International Assembly of Delegates
- The Charter that speaks about our identity

2017: 400th anniversary, let us celebrate with enthusiasm: an AIC that is enchanted and enchanting and that breathes the perfume of charity.

Let us place ourselves in the present moment of 2015-2016, a time for communication. From AIC’s perspective, communication, internal as well as external, has always been one of its priorities. Communication is a process of interaction between “I” and “others”. There is a sender and a receiver and of course, there is a message. For some time AIC has highlighted the importance of communication. This is evident in the resolutions that have been approved in this area during the International Assembly in Chantilly, France (1985), in Assisi, Italy (1990), in Antigua, Guatemala (1994), in Escorial, Spain (2011). For AIC the importance of communication is at the present time unquestionable and is in fact seen as “a strategy for action”.

Moving toward our 400th anniversary

Laurence de la Brosse
Visibility: its meaning – what is or what can be made visible; what can we see. We can make visible the wonderful ministry of AIC; we can make known the activities that the volunteers are engaged in; we can seek ways to be interviewed on the radio, television and we can utilize the social networks for communication.

Objective: to become more visible in order to promote the Association and to make others aware of our values, our outreach and our activities.

Why should we make our ministry known to others?

1. Because our projects are valuable and very necessary.
2. Because the activities of AIC touch the very heart of our society.
3. Because we need to insure the fact that our Association will be able to continue its ministry.

It is important to develop a strategy to make AIC known. The objective should be: to make our ministry and our principles, Vincentian ministry and Vincentian principles, known to people throughout the world, to the people in our own country and in our local area. We do this in order to motivate the members of society to embrace and support this ministry on behalf of those living in poverty.

Specific Strategies: On an international, national and local level we want to make known our spirituality, the characteristics of Vincentian ministry, our successful projects... we do this with great joy as we celebrate the fact that with the help of God we have been able to engage in this ministry on behalf of those living in poverty for 400 years.

Some interesting proposals were made in this regard, among which was: to design a logo that would highlight 400 years of charity.

The presentation was concluded with:

✓ The words of Pope Francis: (which seem to have been written specifically for the volunteers of AIC): We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness. We must never forget that authentic power is service. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about (Homily of March 19, 2013).

✓ Biblical references: Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house (Matthew 5:15); If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31); I have the strength for everything through him that empowers me (Philippians 4:13).

✓ Words of Saint Vincent: Give me a man or woman of prayer and they will be able to do anything (CCD:X:76).

MAY OUR WORKS REMAIN MONUMENTS TO THE GLORY OF GOD!
Our future, an opportunity and an occasion to be re-enhanced

Father Eli Chavez

AIC wants the celebration of the 400th anniversary of its foundation to be an opportunity to become inspired anew and to project itself into the future.

Four hundred years after the spiritual experience of Vincent de Paul that gave origin to AIC, this charitable association wants to be inspired anew in its Vincentian vocation of service on behalf of those living in poverty and wants to continue to exist for many years into the future. This desire means that AIC is willing to renew itself in the mystical and charismatic inspiration of its foundation and is also willing to reaffirm that inspiration as the fundamental orientation for its life and work, in this way and in accord with the words of Saint John, our Association will not lose the love that we had at first (cf. Revelation 2:4).

1. **In light of its first love, AIC is challenged to develop an on-going process of conversion and renewal.** In light of the present changing situation and the new historical needs, it is necessary to return to the sources in order for the institution and its members to renew themselves from the perspective of the vitality of the original meaning of its foundation and objectives and in order to overcome routine and to implant in the midst of the association the newness of the heritage that has been passed on to it by its Founder. This process demands conversion and change in both the individual and the structures and also requires a reinterpretation of the meaning of its sources. Then, in light of that reinterpretation, the members must seek effective operational methods that can be applied to the present reality.

2. **The AIC is invited to drink from the authentic source of its inspirational Vincentian experience...** for it is only in this way that the members can courageously reproduce the boldness, the creativity and the holiness of its Founder (and do this in harmony with the present cries of those living in poverty). To serve the poor in Christ and Christ in the poor is the first love that ought to inspire, animate and renew the life and the activity of AIC. This love, lived with humility and simplicity, provides us with new strength, enlightens our crosses, fills us with hope and gives meaning to all our dreams and work. Such is the fundamental experience, the ultimate and absolute meaning that will allow the members to be inspired anew. Therefore it is essential that we renew our experience of encountering Jesus, the servant of the poor. If we lack this spiritual experience, we lack everything and then, AIC’s vocation loses its evangelical vitality.

3. **A passion for Christ in the poor and the poor is Christ enables AIC to be inspired anew.** Saint Vincent was captivated by the poor and he viewed them from the perspective of God and with the esteem that Jesus had for them. The poor became the sacrament of Christ and therefore, it is essential to reach out to them, to know them, to become their brother/sister and friend, to insert ourselves into their world and to participate in their life. The poor and their world are the
place where the life and the activity of AIC is developed. According to Saint Vincent the poor are a school; they evangelize and they create the possibility for a two way process of giving and taking, an exchange of ideas and gifts. AIC members are inspired anew when they encounter and dialogue with those living in poverty who always have the potential of evangelizing us. It is also in the midst of this encounter and dialogue with the poor that one also develops a mystical encounter with God who, in Christ, makes the volunteers participants in his life and mission and prophetic ministry, which in turn makes the volunteers friends who act in solidarity with the poor and servants who embrace the cause of justice.

4. In order to be renewed in its first love and in order to project itself into the future AIC needs to be an association “that goes forth”. As an ecclesial association, AIC is called to embrace the proposal of Pope Francis and become “a church that goes forth”, that abandons the attitude that says, “we have always done it this way” and thus develops its mission in a creative manner that at the same time responds to the demands of the process of evangelization (cf. Evangelium Gaudium, #20-33). A charitable association or a group of volunteers that becomes enveloped by its structures and self-interests would in fact be a group that exists for itself and would betray its call to be the servant of the poor. Charity implies a movement toward others, toward those who are living in poverty; it implies a critical and prophetical insertion into society. With the inspirations of Vincentian spirituality and with the principles and values of the Social Doctrine of the Church, it is necessary to seek new attitudes, structures and coherent activities in order to avoid engaging in routine action, insignificant and uncreative activities, activities that lack the power of transformation and that do not respond to the present cries of the poor.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis: “the poor are the privileged recipients of the gospel... may we never abandon them!” (Evangelii Gaudium, #48). In light of the present historical challenges and possibilities, those words affirm the core of our Vincentian vocation and are also a warning to the members of the association.
Statutory Assembly 2015
Tayde de Callataÿ, General Manager

The Statutory Assembly was held on March 26, 2015. Thirty-five associations with full rights were present or represented.

The report on the activities of the Executive Board (2013-2014), the financial report and a provisional budget for 2015-2016 were all approved.

In accord with the proposal that was submitted by the members of the departing Executive Board it was decided to modify the membership dues system (something that had not been done for a long time). Therefore, those countries whose GDP does not exceed 8,000 euros will pay an annual membership fee of 1.5 euros per volunteer (or its equivalent in US dollars); those countries whose GDP is greater than 8,000 euros will have an annual membership fee of 4 euros per volunteer (or its equivalent in US dollars).

The Assembly took notice of the fact that the AIC-Malta is no longer a full-rights member association and also noted that the group in Ghana is no longer in existence. The Executive Board presented two groups that are being formed: AIC-Egypt and AIC-Ireland.

Various modification of the Constitution and the By-Laws were approved. Those modifications were proposed by the Executive Board so that those texts could be adapted to the evolution and also in order to ensure the better functioning of the institution. More specifically those modifications adapted the texts to reflect the reorganization that took place on the level of the International Secretariat and reduced the number of the members on the Executive Board in order to decrease our costs. There was also a proposal that introduced the possibility of utilizing electronic voting when necessary.

During the Assembly the members of the Executive Board (2015-2017) were elected. The Executive Board is composed of the following persons:

- Alicia DUHNE President
- Maria Eugenia MAGALLANES NEGRETE Vice-President
- Aliette de MAREDSOUS Vice-President
- Anne BEMMO Member
- Elisabeth GINDRE Member
- Gayle JOHNSON Member
- Sumaia SAHADE ARAUJO Member
- Selina Antonia SUAREZ FERMIN Member
Dear Friends,

Before anything else I want to thank all of you for the confidence that you have placed in me to represent you as a member of AIC.

As volunteers we face many challenges and I believe that united together and with the help of Our Lord and Saint Vincent we can confront all those challenges.

I want to tell you that when several of you who are present here (and some people who did not come to this Assembly) invited me to be and suggested that I accept the role of President, my first reaction was to say “absolutely not!” Like all of you, I became a member of AIC to serve those living in poverty directly and not to take on a position such as this. I know and I continue to be aware of the fact that I am lacking in many areas. But at the end of it all, as you well know, I accepted this position telling you and Christ that I will contribute my five loaves of bread and my two fish... and you will do the rest.

I share now with you my dreams for AIC, hoping that they will also become your dreams.

I dream of a committed and a responsible AIC. Aware of the great injustices that are committed and perpetrated in this world, let us be willing to engage in actions that will allow all people to live with greater dignity.

I dream that every volunteer will be fearless and will deepen their spirituality... mindful of the fact that it is Christ himself whom we serve and who accompanies us in every act that we engage in as Vincentians.

I dream that as volunteers we will be people of integrity, that our lives will give witness to a Christian life.

I dream that we will always be passionate about our Vincentian ministry and that we will always want to develop and form ourselves so that we can be better people. I dream that we will always be proud of AIC.

I dream that we will never lose our joy and our optimism so that in this way we might attract others to join our ranks. May we always confront every situation in a positive manner!

I dream that the teaching of our Founders, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, as well as the Social Doctrine of the Church... I dream that the will be always be the strong pillars that will enable us to learn how to become better Vincentians.
I dream that day by day, in our Vincentian ministry, we will be ever more creative as we engage in our activities of empowerment. May we always minister together as a team and with those who are to benefit from our services...

I dream that all the volunteers will be able to discover the strength that they have within themselves and will also be able to help their brothers and sisters do the same.

Yes, I dream of many things! The list could go on and on... I dream that you dream with me, I dream that we will always be able to dream and that we will always be passionate about our ministry... I dream that each day we will have a greater love for our charism.

Thank you very much for inviting me to minister with you. I will do this as best as I can and I will always attempt to draw closer to you so that “shoulder to shoulder” we might forage a new path along which we can journey together.

I ask for your prayers so that the spirit of Christ and Saint Vincent might accompany me during the time in which I exercise this role of service that has been entrusted to me.

Receive my warm embrace and my heartfelt love.

Thank you very very much!!!