Education, a two-way process:
educate ourselves to work together
Education, a two-way process: educate ourselves to work together
Under the patronage of UNESCO, Fondation de France and Missio, 120 AIC women volunteers coming from over 20 different countries has met in Bangkok, Thailand, for the International Assembly and Training Seminar of the anti-poverty network AIC.

AIC is convinced that education, especially that of women, is key to poverty reduction. In the over 13,000 local projects that AIC volunteers are engaged worldwide, they have observed that education of women, with reciprocity at the basis of the process, has a long lasting impact on the community’s development.

National Associations that were present:

AIC Brazil, AIC Colombia, AIC Ecuador, AIC France, AIC Germany, AIC Guatemala, AIC Indonesia, AIC Japan, AIC Laos, AIC Madagascar, AIC Mexico, AIC Peru, AIC Philippines, AIC Spain, AIC Taiwan, AIC Thailand, AIC UK, AIC Ukraine, AIC USA, AIC Vietnam.

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My dear presidents and AIC volunteers,
Dear Fathers of the Mission and Daughters of Charity,
Dear Interpreters,

I am so happy to greet you and welcome you in the name of the office of the President and of the Executive Board of AIC to the opening of the AIC assembly 2013.

This is the first time in our AIC history that an international assembly will take place in Asia. This is a unique opportunity for us in AIC.

In the course of this gathering, we will live through sharing, our membership of AIC. We are one great family, happy to come together and get to know each other better and united by our common goal which is our dedication to those most in need. We do this according to the principles of St Vincent de Paul and our faith in Jesus Christ, Servant of the poor.

You are aware that this is a year of Faith: our Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, gave this extraordinary present to the Universal Church.

In his Lenten message, the Holy Father Benedict XVI explored the connection between Faith and Charity. For me, this message seems to be intended for us. Let us listen to this quotation: “When we accept God’s love, we become like Him, we participate in His very Charity. Leaving ourselves open to his love means we welcome Him to live in us and leads us to love with Him, in Him and like Him. Only then does our faith become truly driven by Charity and lives in Him.”

St Vincent de Paul understood this perfectly. He started each day with an hour’s prayer and then, like Jesus, could serve the weakest.

How does AIC work to help those most in need?

In each assembly, the delegates, our national presidents, reflect on how to evolve our actions and vote on Operational Guidelines (OG), i.e. specific ways in which to advance the war against poverty.

This is how AIC has evolved in the way it deals with those most in need - by moving from assistance to participation to self-promotion and on to empowerment (allowing each individual to achieve their own potential).

For several years now there has been an increase in poverty among women. Over 70% of the world’s poorest people are women. This has led us to concentrate our efforts on poverty among women.
One of the major causes of poverty among women is the discrimination to which they are subjected. This discrimination starts very early in their lives – in primary school. Young boys are more likely to get the chance to go to school than are young girls.

According to latest UNESCO figures (2008), world population has reached 6.7 billion and there are almost 500 million illiterate women.

In all the work carried out on the ground by you, AIC volunteers, you underline the fact that education is essential in conquering poverty; it is a preventive action against poverty among women.

Last year, on March 8th. - International Women’s Day - Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, noted: “The more women are educated and their rights acknowledged, the less their children go hungry.”

Since the AIC 2011 Assembly we have decided to develop the theme of education: “Education, a pathway to build together”.

(We know that, often, our AIC associations have to respond to urgent needs by distributing food, clothes and medication.

However, AIC also wishes to work in the long-term to help disadvantaged persons to escape from poverty. This is why many AIC projects throughout the world are promotional in the sense that AIC volunteers accompany persons living in poverty by offering them the means to become independent. St Vincent said “give them the necessary means.”)

1. We have seen that, for AIC, to educate someone, is to unleash the best and unique part that everyone has within her/himself. To do this we have to think positively. This has been expressed in different ways: to see how the other person is capable of developing; having confidence or “having a heart which sees things in the way God sees them.”

Our Operational Guidelines have taken up this idea in this way:

**To identify and value skills and potential**

2. We have seen that for AIC the teacher-learner relationship can be expanded. There is, of course, the pupil and the teacher, those who teach and those who learn. But when we are dealing with adults, which is often the case, as in groups and in AIC projects, the relationship can be different. Each individual may be an actor, take an active part and learn from the other as much as teaching the other.

Our Operational Guidelines have taken up this idea in the following way:

**Encourage interdependence: “we need each other”**

3. Having acknowledged that each one of us has individual strengths and that these strengths can be shared we want to participate, together, in a common project, together we can build a more just society. Together means us, AIC volunteers, and the people in difficulty whom we meet in our work with AIC (this is more inspiring than talking about fighting poverty.)
Our Operational Guidelines have taken up this idea in the following way:

**Promote co-creativity**

4. We are dealing here with a huge programme, a totally changed situation. It can be called a systemic change since both rich and poor are called to build a more just society together. We are well aware that this programme is totally beyond us if we rely solely on our human resources. I have already quoted Pope Benedict XVI and I would like to remind you of a passage in his first encyclical: “As far as looking after those who are suffering or are in need, professional competence is absolutely necessary but it cannot be enough. Those who work in charitable Church organisations must have, above all else, training in matters of the heart. People should be brought to meeting God, in Christ, which evokes love in them and which opens their spirit to others.” (God is Love, p.31)

Our Operational Guidelines have taken up this idea in the following way:

**The need to strengthen spiritual, ethical and Vincentian training.**

Today, in March 2013: how have we applied these Operational Guidelines in our AIC projects?

By analysing the feedback from visits to your associations, the questionnaires which you have returned, the reports from EB members and from continental coordinators, we have concluded as follows: in order that **education** is experienced as a **reciprocal exchange**, we must accept that we need to change ourselves and to allow ourselves to be changed by others. We must educate ourselves to work together on our projects. Therefore we are the ones who have to change.

This explains the choice of this theme, **education**: a reciprocal exchange, educate us to work together.

For these 2 training days we have decided on a practical approach: exchanging real experiences, time for personal reflection, working in small groups.

The aim of these days is to make real progress on the path to **education as a reciprocal reality**. We believe that the person who is living in poverty is a social player in every aspect. If this person is given the opportunity to develop his/her own talents he/she will be able to take their place and fulfill the role proper to all human beings.

This approach gives another understanding of Justice and development: a contributive rather than a distributive justice.

I say this with conviction:

“LET US DARE to implement a new form of development for those who live on the edge”.

I wish you all a fruitful assembly.
As you could see already in your programme, we have chosen a special headline for this afternoon: “Let us be transformed”.

You may ask yourself, why a Forum with such a title?

I shall try to answer this question before we start. Two years ago during our last International Assembly in Madrid, Elena Lasida gave us important advice about the relationship between persons, who need support from others and persons, who want to support those people. She spoke about the reciprocity in their relationship. This was quite a new way of viewing social work, our work. She directed our way of thinking away from the traditional basis for our work: we have to give something to them and they only have to receive something from us.

We were so impressed by her revolutionary thoughts, that we chose them as our new guidelines. Laurence will go into more detail on these guidelines hereafter.

Let me come back to the headline for this afternoon: “Let us be transformed”. We are quite sure that our association needs to be transformed in order to be able to follow these new guidelines. This transformation has to begin with a personal evaluation of:

- **Our motivation for the work**: Do we still have the same level of motivation as we had at the beginning?
- **Our relationship to people in need**: How do we treat them?
- **Our gain from the engagement with others**: What can we evaluate as positive, what as negative?

And finally, after true and honest answers to ourselves and in exchange with the others, we are able to convert to Elena Lasida’s way of thinking and to take appropriate measures as a result of the exchange during this forum. These results will help us to fulfill the demands of the Operational Guidelines when we are back home and to pass them over to the other members of your association.
As you know AIC Operational Guidelines are voted on by delegates – the presidents of national associations – at the end of each international assembly. These guidelines direct the work of all AIC volunteers.

In 2011 in Madrid the Assembly theme was “Education, a pathway to building together”.

At the end of the Assembly the Operational Guidelines for 2011-2013 were voted on:

- **Education is a two-way process**
- **To identify and value skills and potential**
- **Encourage interdependence**
- **Promote co-creativity**

- **Through spiritual and Vincentian training**
- **And training in communication and visibility**

At this time, we are asking ourselves where we stand with these Operational Guidelines. How are they being applied in our projects?

In order to answer these questions, I am going to talk to you about some of our AIC work and we can then evaluate together.

This evaluation will be to **assess the value** (value is part of the word evaluation) of what new things our Operational Guidelines have brought to our projects, what we have discovered which was unexpected. This evaluation will be qualitative and not quantitative.

I would like to begin with the **strengthening of spiritual and Vincentian training** because this is at the core of the work we do in AIC. In the last two years we have published three Spiritual Booklets: “God educates his people”, “Jesus, Teacher of Teachers” and “Vincentian education”.

On a visit to AIC Kharkov (Ukraine), I saw an icon which showed St Vincent giving bread to the poor.

What is striking about this icon is that the poor person has the same face as the Christ seen in the sky. So eventually, we ask ourselves who is giving bread to whom? If it is Christ who is giving the bread, what bread are we talking about? There is a lot to think about in connection with this icon.

*For me this icon seems to be an illustration of the spiritual basis of our actions and of the two-way process.*

- **Identifying and valuing skills and potential:**
  - Each individual has particular competencies, our AIC groups know how to help people discover these talents (manual, artistic ....)

  One example stands out for me: it is the situation experienced by AIC Italy which is
participating in the social integration of potentially or already convicted minors. They signed an agreement with the Youth Department in the Justice Ministry.

One group in AIC Italy deals with these young people whose conviction has been changed into “put on probation” i.e. they are given the opportunity to take responsibility and strive for personal growth while working within an association. You can imagine the reluctance and the fear of the volunteers to get involved in this project.

This project was beneficial to the young people because they were able to develop their capabilities and was equally beneficial to the volunteers who changed their own attitude towards these young people.

How do we evaluate people’s talents?
   • Recognize talents to be developed and not concentrate on weaknesses
   • Welcome the new and the unexpected
   • Inspire confidence as was done in the example from Italy

- **Encouraging interdependence**
  I need you: you have something to offer me and I can have something to offer you. We need each other.

As AIC volunteers, we know very well that we feel better when we are respected, loved and useful to others. This is true for us and for everybody.

When we tell somebody that we need them it is a way of motivating them and making them grow as a person. In most cases, people living in dire straits cannot even imagine getting out of their situation.

When we say to them “we need you”, this can act as an “electric shock”.

- **Promoting creativity:**
  This means doing new things together, allowing each person to put forward new ways of thinking:

**AIC Madagascar** is working on the educational Tsiry project: volunteers and participants, prior to starting work on the project, will think together as equals, about the progress of the project.

**AIC Mexico** has developed a nutrition project for women in a disadvantaged district of San Luis Potosi.

This new project has been established with the volunteers, the social services and the participating families. I would like to emphasize two points.

Volunteers listened to participant’s needs: the Marillac centre used to open in the afternoon, participants asked for meetings to take place in the morning (this can seem to be of little importance but it illustrate that volunteers were listening and accepted the response, which probably changed their routine.)
In addition the project expanded in scope because the volunteers asked each participant to bring along 2 neighbours, sisters or friends to take part in the project thus giving them an introduction to the centre. They worked in twos, the experienced volunteers becoming trainers to the new ones.

Co-creativity will also result from sharing God's Word. Numerous groups have liturgies with disadvantaged persons. What do our disadvantaged brothers tell us about their life of faith?

_How do we go about evaluating talents?_

- Elicit proposals.
- Listen.
- Allow ourselves to be ‘shaken up’.

**Conclusion:** Reciprocity is a state of mind which results in specific actions. Application is in progress, **AIC’s objective is that reciprocity is present in every project**

This implies a real change in our attitude, it means leaving ourselves open to learning from the poor and changing our ways according to what we learn from them.

Innovation is possible.

**Group work based on testimonies.**

*Christa Foelting invited volunteers to go and read the testimonies posted on the notice boards and to give group responses to the following questions «How do these testimonies change me and how will this affect my work with AIC?*

**Testimonies from the beneficiaries of the AIC projects**

**Testimonial of a young man in prison:** “When you visit me, I feel normal. Talking with you is like talking to my Mum and I can feel calm and ordinary - not someone to be pitied or hated.”

**Testimonial of a homeless:** “I want someone who listens to me!”

**Testimonial of a child:** “Why do you leave me alone? You know to be alone is not good, because if you have to be alone as a child, it is impossible to become a human being.”

**Testimonial of a dying woman:** “Stay with me! I do not only need medicine against my pain, but also a human being by my side.”

**Testimonial of a migrant woman:** “After my arrival in this country I was afraid of all the new things! Nobody understood and helped me, when I had problems with bureaucracy until you came. You are my guardian angel!”

**Testimonial of an old woman:** “I worked hard all my life together with my husband, but now after his death, I don’t have enough money to live and too much to die! I can’t work any longer. If I could not get some food from you, I would die from hunger.”
Testimonies of AIC Volunteers

“At the very beginning of my engagement I was quite unsure on how to start my work with AIC until a vicar told me: “If the Lord wants you, you will be able to take on this job.”

“During my work I have to deal with the persons who are poor and with their requests. They are demanding and persistent. It took many years before I could teach myself to see Jesus in them”.

“I am far from being perfect, but I have learned many things that have enriched my life”.

“I thank God and the Vincentian volunteers to have given to me the opportunity to learn in and by my work, because before I did not know anything”.

“Before, we were insignificant in our local engagement. Now we are free and grown up in our self-determination”.

“Before I became a volunteer, I had a lot of problems, because I could neither read nor write. Now, as I am able to do both, nobody can trick me anymore”.

“Being face to face with the poor is most difficult. Since we got married my husband was the outgoing one caring for the poor children and street beggars. I was sheltered from facing them”.

“With our Scholarship Program, we sponsor only 3–4 students but sometimes we go over the limit because we feel sorry for all the candidates and end up supporting them all...God always provides for this good cause”.

“Being recently widowed is not an excuse to just stand still, feeling lonely . . . God knows how to use each one of us according to our talents”.

“We can say that each member is like a different finger which together forms a hand. With this hand we can do much more than we can imagine”.

Report on group work.

Christa Foelting presents the principal elements and invites each participant to make a paper boat and then, write on it the ideas she will bring back to her group. The different coloured boats will then going to be floated on the river when we go on our tourist trip around Bangkok. Here are some ideas:

• Without education one is simply an object, therefore vulnerable
• When we work as a team each person plays a part in the work
• Teamwork allows us to respect diverse opinions
• Group training is absolutely necessary so that each individual can use his/her talents
• Create an atmosphere of mutual confidence to encourage a feeling of belonging within the group
• Be aware of people’s needs, show sensitivity, live simply
• Nothing is as effective as a personal visit to discover which needs have to be met
• See Christ in the poor: be humble, simple and practical in our charitable work

What must be done?

• Reach out a helping hand
• Listen to others
• Work in the bosom of the Vincentian Family: with God’s help a solution will always be found.
• Work on our structures to achieve social justice for the poor.
I. Added Value of the AIC’s grassroots actions

The 53 associations in the AIC network currently have more than **13,800 projects fighting against poverty**. These projects have the **added value** of:

**Local roots**
Projects in the field are initiated exclusively by local volunteers, structured into AIC teams. The volunteers, mainly women, are experts in the fight against poverty. The fact that their activities take place in their immediate environment gives them knowledge of the local reality. This expertise is often recognized by public authorities and local and international partners.

**Poverty affecting women**
Whether it be in the North or the South, women and their children make up 80% of the target population. The elderly, very often women, are also a vulnerable group who are a target population of AIC projects. Reports from AIC member associations underline that global population aging is an important challenge in the fight against poverty today.

**Attention to the person as a whole**
AIC projects place fundamental importance on the person. Volunteers establish individual relationships with the people they work with. They follow methods taught by their founder, Saint Vincent de Paul: attention given to the person as a whole, respect for their cultural identity, ongoing concern for their self-promotion, and understanding of the necessity of fighting together against poverty and injustice as well as the importance of knowing the economic, political, social, and religious realities of each community.

**Creation of social links**
As several studies reveal, the causes of poverty are not only economic. Poverty is also caused by isolation between people. AIC projects, beyond responding to basic needs, have the objective of reforming social links.

**Training – an investment in human capital**
The activity reports of AIC associations reveal the essential place devoted to education in their activities in the field. Whether it be by formal or informal education or by skill, experience or knowledge acquisition, the majority of AIC projects have an educational dimension, which is indispensable to the prevention of and fight against poverty, especially that affecting women. Thus, local activities become an opportunity for reciprocal exchanges between volunteers and those they serve, with the goal of working together to escape poverty.

**Solidarity within AIC**
At the heart of the AIC network, around thirty twinnings between local teams in different countries permit links of solidarity to be reinforced. More than material aid, these links allow the exchange of experiences, a stronger collaboration between volunteers and the building of reciprocal knowledge both of partner groups and of the social, economic, and political context of the countries involved.
II. Local action of the AIC volunteers

In varied local contexts, each project has its specificity, responding to the diversity of the volunteers themselves and of the populations they work with. However, some trends become apparent, all linked to the cross-cutting theme of education.

**Education**

Angelita is a woman who is bringing up four children on her own. For the past two years, she has been participating in a fabric workshop implemented by an AIC group in Ecuador. There she learns to make scarves, ponchos, etc. which are then sold to pupils at a school run by the Daughters of Charity. Three other women involved in the same project have already opened a stall at the local market to sell their products. This is a step towards financial independence and empowerment.

Many AIC projects are based on education and training. For adults, this means above all literacy programmes, professional training projects which aim to get them back into the workplace and educational activities in the form of learning workshops. For children, projects take the form of childcare, pre-school centers, getting children back into school, scholarships for study and homework support.

With the provision of seed capital, some professional training programmes lead to the creation of income-generating activities, often in the informal sector. Other participants in the project find salaried employment in businesses.

**Nutrition**

When Noéline arrives to school after a long walk, she goes to the school canteen where she eats her only solid meal of the day. In this small town in Madagascar, AIC volunteers know that many children have difficulties studying because they are hungry. In AIC school centers, volunteers have opened canteens. It is often the children’s mothers who prepare the produce that they grow in the community plot.

If education is essential to a person’s development, AIC projects often also have a nutritional and health component, as everything is linked. Bad nutrition and poor health are obstacles to receiving an education.

Besides school canteens, other groups of volunteers have set up public canteens which are open to everyone or organize social groceries. Aid in the form of food parcels also has an important place in all AIC groups.

**Health**

Juanita suffers from kidney failure and must have dialysis three times a week. She is part of a group of kidney deficiency patients gathered regularly by AIC Bolivia volunteers. The group represents an opportunity to break the isolation and exclusion which illness can cause, to help one another, and to support the families. Volunteers finance part of the medical material necessary for dialysis and also offer food parcels; an adequate diet is indispensable for the illness’s treatment.

In Thailand, some volunteers from an AIC group use a motorbike to get to out-of-the-way places; they visit the sick, organize medical consultations with volunteer doctors, and bring medicines. In many countries, when there is no social cover for healthcare costs, falling ill quickly becomes problematic. In Latin America, volunteers have opened dispensaries and convalescence homes to
accommodate sick people from rural areas during their treatment or after being in hospital. In Africa and in Latin America, other volunteers have formed health cooperatives where medicines are offered at social prices. In all the countries where there is an AIC presence, volunteers organize visits to the sick in hospitals and bring care to those with disabilities and their families.

**Shelters**

Jessica comes regularly to the St Vincent clothing store open each Thursday by AIC USA volunteers. At first, she used to leave very quickly, embarrassed to be there. However, the warm place, the little café, the welcoming atmosphere and the attentive manner in which the volunteers listen to her have all made her feel at home there. She often finds the same people there and now chooses her clothes at a very low price in an atmosphere of complicity and good humour. Behind the clothes you wear, there also lies the question of your self-image and the way others look at you!

AIC shelters are places of listening and welcome which create social inks. In the USA as in Europe, there are many clothing stores as well as day centers for the unemployed, for migrants, drug addicts, and the homeless, and also for the families of prisoners. In Latin America, many AIC groups have opened retirement homes for the elderly. In Africa, there are also orphanages.

**Individual support**

Anna has been in hospital for several weeks. Each day, she waits impatiently for the visit of an AIC Germany volunteer. It is a moment of exchange, but above all a great comfort. With the volunteer, Anna can speak about anything and also dares to call the doctor to ask her questions.

As for Pauline, she has two home visits a week from AIC France volunteers. Together they speak, read, and sometimes go shopping, to the bank, to the doctor’s, get in contact with her family... Bonds are made; what counts is that you are together, listening reciprocally!

There are numerous individual support projects. They are generally set up at the request of social services. Whether they take the form of home visits, in the main to the elderly, or visiting hospitals or prisons, they are all aimed at breaking the isolation while at the same time giving attention to the person as a whole.

**Presentation of three AIC projects**

**Education and reciprocity**

1. **AIC Madagascar: cooperative for raising farm chickens**

This project is being carried out at Fianarantsoa, 400km south of the capital Antananarivo. It involves single mothers, living in an urban setting with families of 5-6 children. 75% of these are illiterate and their daily income is USD 0.25. There are three specific objectives: to help with the social integration of these mothers, to get them involved in income-generating activities, to educate and raise awareness of adolescents to prevent all kinds of violence. The target group consists of 40 impoverished mothers and 30 adolescents. Activities include: fencing off the area where the chickens will be raised, building the chicken house, giving training to the mothers and adolescents, buying and raising chickens. The chickens lay and sit on eggs. The young are then sold after 6 months. The aim is to increase the number of chickens. And finally, a periodical follow-up and an evaluation will be conducted.
Education, a reciprocal exchange: the mothers share their skills with the volunteers; the mothers have learned all there is to know about the business of chicken farming. Volunteers do not necessarily have all the practical skills/knowledge.

Participation of the beneficiaries: the chickens will be sold on the market and 25% of the value of the sale goes to the mothers who can then embark on other enterprises (restaurants, caterer, boarding schools, etc.). 75% of the profits will be used to buy more chickens to increase the scale of the enterprise.

What have I learned, as a volunteer, from these beneficiaries? Have I been changed significantly by them? We get lessons in facing the difficulties of life with courage, we can learn to be easily satisfied; a slight effort can transform a life. Beneficiaries teach us to be patient and to listen. They teach us simplicity – all qualities which are necessary for the disciples of St. Vincent.

2. AIC Ecuador « with your help and my hands I will weave love”.

The project involves 16 of the marginalized districts of Loja. The concept was instigated by a group of teachers and workers who wanted to set up a Vincentian project under the direction of Sister Carmen Platino. The objectives were to give families dignified employment which would allow them to enjoy a better lifestyle, to come out of their marginalized situation by entering the world of work and to choose self-management to improve their health, food, education and housing problems. The target population includes elderly people, people who are less able-bodied, single mothers and children. The St Vincent de Paul community canteen was set up in November 2008. It provides information, with the aim of promoting motivation, self-esteem, spirituality, business, health, nutrition and togetherness. Training workshops are also offered in cooking, hair dressing, manicures, crafts and textiles. Exhibitions are set up in different places in Loja and products are promoted on a national and international level. The women become independent by setting up their own workplaces and getting into the world of work.

Second phase:

• Emphasis will be placed on the creation of mini businesses. Unemployed people will be able to benefit from the support of persons who are economically active (18 years and over) to promote their projects, such as carpentry, mechanics, diet, etc.
• Develop entrepreneurial potential.
• Setting up businesses which benefit families

3. AIC Taiwan: elderly people revive the culture of aborigine tribes

Targeted group: 30 aborigines aged over 60 years who are isolated and impoverished and who have spent their whole lives within the tribes in the Taitung region of Taiwan.

Specific objectives: to take care of elderly people, physically, spiritually and morally; to promote self-esteem; to rediscover and preserve tribal culture; to create employment opportunities within the tribes.
How were Operational Guidelines applied?

• **By encouraging independence**

Elderly people are invited and encouraged to participate in a program promoting good health and a healthy lifestyle (through conferences and seminars).

The volunteers, who are also aborigines, begin to integrate with the elderly people while checking their physical condition (e.g. temperature, blood pressure) in the care centre where the project is based.

The elderly people and the volunteers discuss various different subjects, especially tradition and culture. Both parties play the roles of teachers and students.

The elderly people rediscover self-confidence and their own cultural identity.

• **By identifying and evaluating skills and potential.**

Being familiar with the local situation and songs, elderly people are therefore valuable assets in their tribes and their skills must be passed on to future generations.

• **By promoting creativity**

Volunteers record tribal stories and write down their findings.

They also record the airs of tribal ballads. They facilitate the reconstruction of historical events and new cultural studies by researching significant historical or geographical elements and record the collective wisdom of the elderly.

The spiritual aspect is not neglected since a spiritual counselor works alongside the participants in this project.

**In conclusion,** Agnès Dandois, Head of the Project Service, emphasized that it is essential to share best practices especially by returning to the secretariat the questionnaires needed to write AIC’s activity report before each assembly. This year only half of the 53 national associations - 28 countries - sent in these reports. This is a pity because the exchange of best practice should be reciprocal.

She reminded everyone of the 2013 Claire & Jean Delva Prize, which is awarded every two years for the creation of new projects which combat violence against women or to existing projects fighting against poverty in which a specific part is dedicated to violence against women. The project must be notified to the secretariat by October 15th 2013.
WORKSHOPS ABOUT THE AIC PROJECTS

Alicia Duhne, Associate President

The aim of these workshops is to see how reciprocity can play a part in the main types of AIC projects: food, shelters, home visits and what concrete proposals could be made to help AIC make progress in this way.

To introduce this work, Alicia invites the volunteers to participate in an «exercise in reciprocity». The object of the exercise is to demonstrate how we feel when we have to ask for help.

The exercise is carried out in groups of three: each one in turn plays the part of the impoverished person who is asking for help, as AIC volunteer, as observer. At the end each person must tell how they felt while playing the different roles.

Examples of some dialogues:
- «I see that you need something and I am here to do whatever I can»
- «I need help, I accept your help but don’t pity me»
- «I need you, I need your help to build something. Can you work with me in this project? Of course, if we work together I can help.»

When this exercise was completed the volunteers went to various workshops where they discussed among themselves how Operational Guidelines were applied in their AIC work on reciprocity. Then they answer the following questions:

In your AIC project:

1) Do you have examples which demonstrate what the volunteers have learned from each other or from disadvantaged persons?
2) Do you have any concrete example which shows that an AIC project has been used in meeting the real needs of disadvantaged persons?
3) What mindset do we need to promote Reciprocal Education?

1. Report from the Spanish workshop «Shelters»

Question 1: We have learned about the joys, fears and loneliness of elderly people who have lost everything. We have had to become closer to God in order to become closer to them. We recognize that they must rediscover their dignity. It is also necessary to involve relatives in this delicate process. We must, above all, accept that success is not always achieved.

Question 2: We were able to see that projects are never static – they must evolve according to circumstances. We must involve relatives in the project because they are the ones who bring love and comfort to the elderly. It must be possible for them to practise their hobbies in the centre itself – cooking, painting, various kinds of work etc. They must be able to share these hobbies with other people in the centre. This makes them feel that they are in their own home and that they are not just visitors.

Question 3: We must make sure that the beneficiaries are an integral part of the project. Working as a team with them is a basic necessity.
2. Report from the English workshop « Food / Nutrition »

Question 1: Targeted training is a fundamental necessity. Free service. And action with public authorities.

Question 2: This is very well demonstrated by a German project. It was discovered, on the one hand, that some children were coming to school without having had any breakfast. On the other hand some elderly people, perhaps because they were living alone, were not eating properly. The aim of the project was to bring these two groups together and invite them to eat with each other. The children very quickly adopted the elderly people they preferred and the elderly, in their turn, became friends with these children. They told them about themselves, their life experiences, life as it was in their youth. They also listened to the children’s problems – many of them had serious family difficulties. These children might never have talked about their problems if they had not found a friend in whom to confide.

Question 3: We must be aware that we all need each other. We need to be humble. We must learn to encourage them and show them that they are capable of doing many worthwhile things – that they are useful. We must never start off with preconceived ideas.

3. Report from the French workshop « Home visits ».

Question 1: Be aware that that home visits are not just for distribution of food – they are an opportunity to establish contact between volunteers and beneficiaries.

Question 2: Operational Guidelines have been especially applied in matters of solidarity.

Question 3: In our projects we must practise respect for others. Fidelity, regularity and equality.

As a result of these workshops, agreed proposals were set out:

• Regular and targeted training must be provided for our volunteers.
• Spiritual training is an essential element and gives us the strength to persevere in our work.
• We need a network which will support us.
• Voluntary help and free aid.
• We must work with public authorities to improve the lives of the poorest people.

Operational Guidelines emerged from this:

• reciprocity, exchange.
• Mutual recognition, confidence.

An example was given to illustrate the idea of systemic change: tools put at the disposal of the beneficiaries allowed for the creation of an autonomous association. Together, they realized they could get out of poverty and social exclusion.

Some attitudes to be respected in order to develop two-way education:

• Accepting and respecting that others are different
• Wanting to get to know others
• Developing tolerance
• Respecting the dignity of others
• Living according to the principle of equality, with the conviction that we all are children of the Father, which is the true foundation of our faith.
First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Laurence de La Brosse. It is a great joy to be here with you, especially on this Feast of St. Louise de Marillac.

Having read your documents, I noted important values that make your commitment effective: dialogue, communication, reciprocal exchange, co-responsibility, participation, collaboration, etc. In other words, these are indispensable elements to building up good “relationships”. In this brief presentation, I would like to reflect on relationships together with you.

I. RELATIONSHIPS

In the time of our Founders, Vincent de Paul asked Louise de Marillac to visit the Confraternities (the communities of the AIC) for two reasons: to strengthen the life and function of the Confraternity, and to infuse it with new energy, through the meetings with the members of the Confraternity and by visiting to the poor. In those days, the members were full of good intentions, like you are today, but there were relational problems, different viewpoints on service and various questions. Louise de Marillac writes in her reports on the visits to a Confraternity. “There seemed to be cordiality among the Ladies, although some of them sometimes criticized the behavior of the Officer” (A53, Notes on the visits to the Confraternities) in one place, an inter-personal problem with the Treasurer at another place. In another place, the Treasurer, filled with good intentions, wanted to do everything by herself. In another place, the Procurator was very autocratic. Louise de Marillac understood inter-relational difficulties, and also recognized the need to have someone who knew how to manage the works. I don’t know whether you have such problems or not, but it is good to reflect on this issue. Let us begin by considering our Asian cultural context which affects our being and doing.

Values which affect relationships in the Asian situation

Asia represents more than 60% of the world population, who inherit ancient cultures and traditions and the diversity of religions. We can easily point out some of our typical cultural values which promote the relationships: respect for elders, harmony, simplicity and mercy.

These values promote good relationships. However, their counter-values may sometimes hinder us from living the Christian values and our Vincentian charisma in our “relationships”. “Respect for elders” may cause a gap between the young and the elderly and new-comers and old members. Maybe we can also add exclusive, coercive, and authoritative attitudes of those who have some kind of power in the group. “Harmony” is sometimes lived in order not to disturb peacefulness or security among people or to avoid conflicts. It might mean “not telling the truth”, because the person is afraid of losing face in front of another. The influence of political regimes such as socialism, communism, and militarism can also be one of the causes. Industrial and economic development more or less affects our mentality with secularization, individualism, materialism and consumerism due to globalization. From this view point, the Asian cultures nurture our mentality and values, and affect our ways of being, thinking, and doing, as well as our attitudes.
Only 3% of Asia’s population is Catholic, and half of them live in the Philippines, which is the only Catholic country in Asia. In contrast with the other great religions of Asia which shape the mentality and cultures of the people, Christianity appears as being imported from outside and alien to the soul of the continent. So the Christian values (Gospel values) take a long time to be rooted in our cultures, and in our daily life. In other words, the process of “inculturation” is very slow as the cultural counter-values have to be purified by the Gospel values. We have to be aware of that.

We are different in so many ways; we are all sinners and more or less immature, with some elements not yet integrated. Certainly, the difficulty may lie in the weakness of faith, the weakness of the fundamental core that unites us. For this reason; first and foremost, it is important for us to be deeply rooted in Christ, the Word of God, in order to resemble Jesus. It is good to deepen our relationships with God by meditating on the Word of God as Pope Benedict XVI encourages us to do, especially as we celebrate the Year of Faith, so that we may transmit our Faith through a witness of Love and Charity.

The famous passage of the Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13 says: “Love is patient...”. This shows 15 points about Love. Love is God, Love is Jesus, and how can we say “Love is myself”, “Love is Brigit... Helen...”. Yes, we can be. Yes, we are! Love is expressed in both interpersonal relationships and social commitments. The life of any Christian groups, associations, religious congregations is a visible and audacious expression of this. In this sense, we follow His commandment as the name of the AIC includes “Charity”, the concrete expression of Love. Finally Love has the capacity to solve all problems.

II. RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY (ASSOCIATION) AND WITH OTHERS

A. The family of the children of God, the Family of St. Vincent: Identity

Jesus stretched us beyond the structure of the patriarchal Jewish family. He came to build a new humanity, the family of the children of God, formed by those who seek and do the will of the Father: “These are my mother and my brothers.”(Mk. 3, 35) Jesus is the center of this family as the unifying power of brotherhood. “Being a disciple” involves inviting people to this discipleship of equals, where preference is given particularly to the weak and the small. All projects for personal growth do not enter this logic. We are members of the family of the children of God and also of the Vincentian Family and we serve those who are especially beloved by God, following in the footsteps of St. Vincent.

B. Sense of belonging

Our commitment within a Group and fidelity to God passes through our belonging to this Group, allowing us to respond to His call. The commitment in the Association (AIC) (sense of belonging) is the visible proof of our invisible identity.

It is true that the quality of a group depends on human maturity and the evangelical quality of life of the people who compose it. At the same time, a good community, in its organization and its style of relationships, encourages the growth of each person and allows processes of personal transformation, even if it cannot touch that inner core where every person grows.
C. Ongoing exodus from ourselves “to forming a good group”

1. Acceptance

As a group of human persons, we gather around the Lord, without choosing each other, and we mutually accept each other. Acceptance is not something reserved for guests only but also for anyone who joins with us. It is Christian love that impels us to accept persons every time we feel they are strangers or foreigners. It is the “accepting according to the heart of God” whose love is limitless. This acceptance requires the elements as follows, for community building:

**Attentive listening:** allowing the persons to express their difficulties and their questions. This listening demands self-forgetfulness, and allows all to have confidence in themselves, for they feel for who they are and for what they are doing.

**Respect with politeness and love for each person** is the reverent acceptance of the “mystery” of the other. People are like rooms whose doors open only from within and therefore, we need to call, ask and search. We cannot enter (break in, dominate) without calling, nor can we judge or generalize. It is simply the way we would like others to treat us. (cf. Mt. 7, 7)

**Compassion** is the acceptance of the weak: the elderly, the sick, the stranger, the unfortunate... or those in difficult situations. The parable of the Good Samaritan ends with the call to compassion: “Go and do likewise”, show compassion, become neighbors to those who suffer or who are at the margins of the society, without turning away, be concerned and involved.

**Reconciliation** is the acceptance that begins anew each morning and does not get tired of the 70 times 7 which Jesus spoke of, that is to say, forever. I do not know in your group whether you sometimes experience the clashes or frictions. Reconciliation involves opening our hearts to those who offend us or even to those who are merely annoying. It means forgiving inwardly, removing one's sandals as one stands on sacred ground and not allowing judgments and prejudices to emerge and to exclude others. Jesus has come to save and not to judge. Reconciliation starts from within.

**Service:** the acceptance which involves personal commitment, goes beyond menial tasks or little favors shared in the community. Acceptance translates into quality service. Someone says: “As worship consists in devoting time and affection to God, true service is devoting time and affection to others.” It is also necessary to be knowledgeable and to keep up-to-date in order to teach others.

If these attitudes are lived daily in the group, they allow us to open doors, and to be an open and welcoming community to those who come to us and those who minister with us.

**Stumbling blocks to avoid**

One of the first stumbling blocks found among those who fully become engaged within an enthusiastic mission is to want to do too much. St. Vincent said: “Our Lord wants us to serve Him with common sense, and the opposite is called indiscreet zeal.” (Letter #58 to St. Louise, 7 December 1630)

Another stumbling block is discouragement in the face of difficulties and failures. St. Vincent said: “Our Lord will perhaps draw more glory from your submission than from all the good you
could do. One beautiful diamond is worth more than a mountain of stones, and one virtuous act of acquiescence and submission is better than an abundance of good works done for others.”  
(Letter #46 to St. Louise, April 1630)

It is also difficult to accept rejection: “St. Vincent told St. Louise: “A truly humble spirit humbles itself as much amid honors as amid insults, acting like the honeybee which makes us honey equally well from the dew that falls on the wormwood as from that which falls on the rose.””  
(Letter #58 to St. Louise, 22 October 1630)

2. Communication

Continuing our desire to achieve unity, we realize the value of dialogue in our journey towards an encounter. Communication is indispensable to becoming a unified group. We need to know and communicate in both breadth and depth. At the same time, we also need silence. We cannot eliminate either of these two experiences. Silence without communication isolates the person, she closes up on herself. On the other hand, the communication of those who do not keep silence is empty and superficial. Therefore, we need to maintain a balance that integrates these two. The exercise that blends silence and communication is dialogue. It is a word that comes from personal depth ready to be enriched by the word of the other. Dialogue bridges gaps, enriches us, and leads us to genuine fraternal sharing.

3. Collaboration for the common mission

In assuming the common mission, our integral service of the poor, we cannot forget “collaboration” which is a contemporary value. Collaboration begins with the cries of the poor and must involve the poor in the process.

The work that was undertaken by St. Vincent was not strictly speaking a personal work, but a work done by a team, by a network of collaborators. Vincent brought together rich and poor, members of the clergy and laity, men and women and involved public officials. Thus, he could establish his institutions (AIC, CM, & DC). He saw that collaboration was the key for success in serving the poor.

“Collaboration leads us to view the poor and other collaborators as persons who have qualities and abilities that can be developed and that can help all of us to grow in charity. A new attitude of reciprocity, interdependence and openness to collaboration with others requires relationships that are free from every form of discrimination and the desire for power. In the humble exchange of gifts, we create the possibility for growth in charity and establishment of a true alliance on behalf of the Vincentian mission.” (Fr. Eli Chaves dos Santos, CM)
Conclusion

Allow me to conclude by reflecting on the importance of prayer for charitable work. We who have devoted ourselves to the work of Charity should understand this vocation and mission in the Church and in the world, and should try to accomplish it. Together we have to live the experience of faith as we commit ourselves to the service of the poor.

I would like to end this talk with the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

“It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work.

Clearly the Christian who prays... seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him (us) and his (our) work... love is always more than activity alone. Practical activity will always be insufficient unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ... Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed.” (Pope Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas Est”

Questions in groups

1. What do we do to listen and understand each other within our team work?

What tells us Jesus through the reactions of the other members of the team, through such or such need of the beneficiaries?

2. What is my attitude towards a disadvantaged person who asks for help?

- Give money and a package
- Listen to them to give them confidence in themselves
- Develop a relationship with them which helps them to regain self-worth.
- Help them to find themselves the best solution to their problems.

3. What strengths can I discover in the poorest I am helping with AIC?

Report on Group Work

Asian volunteers reported having very positive exchanges, despite the large number of languages used. They found new ideas to improve their projects. They saw that they should not expect gratitude from those living in poverty. And, that as volunteers and Catholics, they have a duty towards these people.

It is a fact that in Asia, there are different social levels, and even the language is used with different registers. This leads to extra difficulties for the work of AIC volunteers.

Immigration from other countries, a totally new phenomenon born with this century, also creates problems which were up to now unknown. Volunteers, however, are aware that they are not alone in meeting this kind of difficulties, which also exist in many other places.
They know that to remain faithful to the spirit of AIC, they must put in maximum effort and follow the teachings of Saint Vincent.

For the two final days, they reflected on how to work so that the end users also participate in the projects. How should this be done?

They are happy to have had meetings every two years. Thanks to this, volunteers have understood that charity does not mean distributing food alone. This is why they are planning to continue these seminars in order to prepare their volunteers better.

It is essential to communicate to all the AIC volunteers the idea that AIC does the same work everywhere in the world. No national association is alone in its work.
CONCLUSIONS OF THE ASIA WORKSHOP

Father Serafín Peralta, CM
AIC Philippines Spiritual Adviser

First, I would like to thank Sr. Madeline for her opening remarks. I appreciate the fact that she has put forth the conditions and terms that we need to observe in order for us to work together and to become a good team that is efficient and effective. She has also put forth the conditions that are necessary for us before we engage ourselves in the service of the poor. Education, a reciprocal exchange, can become useful only if we are sufficiently equipped with the traits and characteristics that have been enumerated by Sister Madeleine.

In his Apostolic Letter “PORTA FIDEI”, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says that our life is a journey of faith. It starts with our baptism and ends with our death (PF 1). In the meantime many people are going through a crisis of faith (PF 2).

The AIC today embarks on the conviction that service of the poor is best done through education. It is education where everybody learns, both the educator and the educated, in our case the masters (the poor) and the servants (the AIC). Hence the Operational Guidelines that have been adopted by AIC for 2013: “Education: a two-way process”.

Sometime ago, in the past 10 years or so, the phrase “SYSTEMIC CHANGE” became a byword in the Vincentian Family. We have not really come up with a thorough evaluation of this method/process as a guideline in our service of the poor. But this method/process has taught us many things about the quality and quantity of our service, about the breadth and depth of our involvement in the lives of people. From these, lessons have been learned. We have come to realize that education, if it is to be effective and if it is to produce lasting results must be a kind of a reciprocal exchange where both the educator and the educated learn, where both the servant and the master grow, where inventiveness and creativity are highlighted, and all aspects of human life have been touched if not totally changed for the better.

Thomas Merton, a contemplative Monk, talks about the begging bowl of the poor. He says that when the beggar puts out his begging bowl in front of us, we must not feel guilty nor must we feel that we are being abused. What we put there is not something from us, but something that in justice rightfully belongs to the beggar. In a sense this is education, a reciprocal exchange. The poor not only receives justice, he also practices it with us. The poor person not only receives charity, he also gives it to us. We not only tell the poor about God, they also evangelize us.

In the Philippines, I work with cooperatives. It is interesting to note that the concerns of the cooperatives run parallel to those of AIC, especially with regards to education and the promotion of the poor.

How do I understand the Operational Guidelines of AIC, Education: a reciprocal exchange? Let me count the ways. There are seven ways that I can share with you.

1. It is an invitation to look into the reality of the distribution of wealth. Last week I was kind of scandalized by what I read in the newspaper about the fact that in the U.S.A., the Americans spend $53 billion for their pets (dogs, cats, gerbils, fish, snakes, etc.). This money is spent for their food, medicines, grooming, and other needs. $53 billion is more than the national budget
of my country this year, and it is appropriated for hospitals, education, roads and bridges, social
development, salaries of teachers and other government employees/workers. In my country, 76% of
its GDP belongs to only 40 families. The other 26% belongs to the rest of the population which
has now reached 90 million. Of course it is also a fact that 80% of the world’s goods are consumed
by only 20% of the world’s people, while the other 20% of the world’s goods have to be distributed
to 80% of the world’s people.

2. There is a need to radically change the way we approach poverty. When we are with the poor, we
must not look at them as mouths to be fed, or as bodies to be clothed and sheltered. Rather they
are hands and feet, brains and bodies that can work and become productive if given the oppor-
tunity. They have talents that must be developed. They have potentials that must be realized.
They, too, have dreams that must be fulfilled.

3. All education must lead to development. What is development? It is about men and women be-
coming empowered to bring about positive changes in their lives. It is about positive changes in
their lives. It is about personal growth (the poor and ours). It is about process and the results of
challenging poverty, oppression and discrimination. It is about the realization of human poten-
tial through social and economic justice. Above all, it is the process of transforming lives and so-
cieties (Eade and Williams, 1995: 9). Indeed, development is about transforming lives of people,
not just transforming economies (Joseph Stiglitz).

4. It is to encourage the generation of ideas on policies, strategies, programs and services that
address a basket of issues such as economic, health, education, gender inequality and other
forms of discrimination, disaster/risk/emergency management, etc. It must be people oriented
and must promote human rights, participation of all stakeholders, interdependence, change and
eventually empowerment (Rainier V. Almazan).

5. It is actually listening to Jesus, reflecting on His words and situating them in our relationship
with the poor:

a. Jesus says, “love one another as I have loved you”
b. Jesus says, “what I have done so must you do...wash each other’s feet”
c. At the birth of Jesus, there was an interchange of presence and presents: those who know
   something (the magi), those who didn’t know anything (the shepherds), and He who is God’s
   Word and Wisdom: Jesus Christ. And this interchange was felt and kept in the heart of Mary
   and in the heart of Joseph.
d. Jesus attributed his healings to the faith of the persons healed. Here’s the dynamics: the sick
   begs Jesus for a healing. Jesus responds by healing the person. The healed is grateful to Je-
   sus. Jesus tells that person, “Your faith has healed you.”

6. There is a proverb that goes like this: “One can lead a horse to water, but one cannot make it
drink.” Translate this into our relationship with the poor = you can offer the poor your sup-
port and other opportunities for self-improvement and advancement, but you should not impose
these on them. But, yes, you can listen to them and be open to differences, especially those that
are culture and religion based. With them you can identify strengths, weaknesses, opportuni-
ties, threats.

I teach in the Graduate School of a State University in Manila. At the end of the course my
students would usually thank me for their learning during the period. I would tell them that
I should be the one to thank them because I learned so much more from them. I am only one person teaching them, but there are many of them teaching me. When I put together their ages, their works, their experiences, their stories (successes and failures), I feel so much more enriched by them.

7. And who must be our partners? With whom must we work? With whom must we walk? With whom must we break bread together? There is a sea of humanity out there that is in need of help. The Poor. But who among the poor? Where can you find them? How many are they? The children, orphans, street children, child labor, children in conflict with the law, juvenile delinquents. There are women, mothers, single mothers, women who are victims of violence, sex workers, etc. There are people with disabilities whether children or adults. There are the elders and senior citizens. Broken and separated families, street families (a new phenomenon in the streets of many urban centers). The migrants, the sick, the beggars. And the list grows longer...

Conclusion:

One of the most famous lines that emerged from the 2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines in the 90’s ran like this: “There is no one so poor that he/she has nothing to give. There is no one so rich that he/she has nothing to receive.” I believe this is “education, a reciprocal exchange” at its best.

Again, in this Year of Faith, we are enjoined to bring faith and charity together. This is also “education, a two-way process.” It seems that the magic word indeed for AIC in 2013 is TOGETHER!

Thank you!
CONCLUSIONS

Laurence de la Brosse, International President

First of all, I would like to say a huge thank you for the confidence that you renew in me today.

Be sure that I will put all my strength to the service of AIC for this third and last mandate as international president, and for that I definitely count on your collaboration: on you AIC volunteers, on the members of the international secretariat, and on the members of the Executive Board who were elected today. I am delighted to make up a team with you all to advance AIC in its mission.

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart the members of the Executive Board who have just come to the end of their mandates: Christa Foelting who was vice president for four years, Marlene Burt who was member of the events organization group in Europe, Loly Camacho who was in charge of training, and John Sarasin who was the Coordinator for AIC Asia. That is without forgetting Gayle Johnson, member of the USA Coordination team, and Martine Haouwa, Coordinator for AIC Africa, who were not able to come to this meeting.

Thank you to each of you for your engagement, your faith in the AIC, your advice and your friendship. We have worked together for several years, and today a new path is opening up in front of you in your collaboration with AIC. And we know that Saint Vincent will always be in your hearts.

While working over these days, we have learnt self-discovery; we have shared, danced, and prayed together. Reciprocity has been at the heart of our work.

The theme of our assembly will carry us over the two coming years: ‘Education – a two-way process, teach us to build a project together’.

**Education – a two-way process**

Over the course of this assembly, numerous examples of reciprocity have been presented to us. We return to our respective associations convinced that reciprocity exists, it is not an easy path to follow, but it is possible. Among the concrete examples which were presented to us, which have touched you the most, which will you pass on to your group? There’s something for you to consider in those long hours on your return home!

And, when you make your report on the assembly, why not start by mentioning the dynamic that Alicia suggested to use before the workshops: it is difficult to receive help; it is a lot easier to give someone a hand, so let us say often, “I need you!”

**Yes, I need you as it is together that we can succeed.**

Those living in poverty are our partners in the construction of the kingdom. We are all citizens of heaven. I am convinced that our AIC associations have a prophetic role to play in civil society, they must bear witness that change is possible.
So, what should we do concretely to achieve this goal?

1. Organize actions which bring real social change: over the course of this assembly, we have understood better that, so that situations change, we AIC volunteers need to change our behaviour: as the poorest are our partners and our masters. Let us continue, then, to go into more depth in our work with the Operational Guidelines, to let ourselves learn from the weakest and enter into a reciprocal movement of giving and receiving, it is there that we find a new form of solidarity and, finally, true social change.

2. Develop our fundraising policy: this still remains an urgent need so that AIC can continue to support projects and training in all AIC associations.

   This policy must be carried out collectively at the local, national, and international levels. It will have the following positive effects:
   
   • developing AIC’s visibility
   • attracting new volunteers
   • reinforcing pride at belonging to AIC; we will speak about this with the Executive Board in the coming days and will keep you informed.

3. In 2017 we will celebrate 400 years of the life of AIC,

   Let us prepare ourselves: AIC is a modern organization, strengthened by the work of thousands of volunteers and vulnerable people; this is the chance to deepen our identity, to learn to say what we are doing and how we are going it; it is not about showing off, as we do not like to do that, but about saying how AIC is a transformative force.

   By being clear about our identity and proud of belonging to AIC, we will be able to get new volunteers.

   We wish that in 2017 Saint Vincent’s message will be truly lived by AIC; the educators will be the poor and AIC will be the educated, as Father Peralta was saying.

   We have had the great fortune to live animated by the charisma of St Vincent, that charisma which is ‘enchanting’, as Father Eli, our international chaplain, likes to say...

   Before concluding, I would like to thank each and everyone one of you from the bottom of my heart for your participation:

   The members of the international secretariat who have done considerable amount of work with discretion and while always remaining good humoured.

   The teams that prepared this assembly, who have been able to experience what it is to build a project together!
All those who have taken part through their testimonies, their questions, their presentations of projects.

The Fathers and Sisters who have accompanied us with their effective and loving presence.

And then of course AIC Thailand: Desiree, Joan, Mary, Sister Violeta and all of you who have prepared this assembly over many long months and have welcomed us so well. This assembly has taken place within an exceptional framework and conditions, and we have particularly appreciated your attention to detail, which really smoothed out the path of our work.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I do not forget our translator friends: you are very faithful friends of AIC and I would like to emphasize just how precious your voluntary contribution is, quite simply because without you we would not be able to work.

Let us return home convinced that AIC is a force! Let us use this force, and may Saint Vincent and the Holy Spirit accompany us.

Safe journey back home and good work!

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### 2013-2015 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

**WORKING TOGETHER**

**Education, a two-way process**

**Education: a two-way process:**
- to identify and value skills and potential
- to encourage interdependence
- to promote co-creativity

**Through a personal transformation supported by AIC Training:**
- spiritual, ethical and Vincentian
- in techniques, particularly in communication and visibility
## Thursday March 14

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<tr>
<td>07:30-08:30</td>
<td>Breakfast at King David</td>
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<td>09:00-12:30</td>
<td><strong>Inauguration ceremony</strong> - Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1) <strong>Welcoming words</strong> – Desiree Chotirawe, President of AIC-Thailand</td>
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<td>2) <strong>Opening session</strong> - Laurence de la Brosse, AIC International President</td>
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<td>3) <strong>Presentation of AIC Delegations</strong> – Natalie Monteza, AIC Secretary general and Joan Sarasin, AIC Asia Coordinator</td>
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<td>10:30-11:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>11:00-12:30</td>
<td><strong>Spiritual Contribution</strong>- Father Eli Chaves dos Santos, AIC Spiritual Adviser</td>
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<td>12:30-13:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30-18:00</td>
<td>Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<td><strong>Introduction to the Forum : “Let us be transformed”</strong>– Christa Foelting, AIC Europe Coordinator</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation of the 2011-2013 AIC Operational Guidelines</strong> - Laurence de la Brosse, AIC International President</td>
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<td>16:00-16:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<td>18:30-19:30</td>
<td>Eucharist</td>
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<td>20:00-21:00</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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<td>21:00-22:00</td>
<td>Asian Folkloric night - Joan Sarasin, AIC Asia Coordinator</td>
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## Friday March 15

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<tr>
<td>07:30-08:30</td>
<td>Breakfast at King David</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:00-09:15</td>
<td>Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Prayer</strong> – Maru Magallanes</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Information time</strong> – Natalie Monteza</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:15-12:30</td>
<td>1) <strong>Introduction to the Workshops</strong> – Agnès Dandois, In charge of AIC Project Service</td>
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<td>2) <strong>Presentation of 3 AIC projects about Education</strong> – Agnès Dandois, In charge of AIC Project Service &amp; Tayde de Callataï, In charge of Projects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3) <strong>Exchange</strong></td>
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<td>10:30-11:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>Time</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30-13:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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| 14:30-18:00| **Practical exercise and Introduction to the Workshops by topics:** Alicia Duhne, AIC Latin America Coordinator - Plenary Room John XXIII  
**Workshop “Shelters”:** for Spanish speaking volunteers – Room J203  
**Workshop “Food & Nutrition”:** for English speaking volunteers - Room J202  
**Workshop “Home visits”:** for French speaking volunteers - Room J208  
**Workshop “Operational Guidelines in Asia”:** for Asian volunteers - Plenary Room - Laurence de la Brosse, A IC International President and Natalie Monteza, AIC Secretary General |
| 16:00-16:30| Coffee break                                                                                              |
| 18:30-19:30| **Eucharist**                                                                                             |
| 20:00-21:00| Dinner                                                                                                    |
| 21:30-23:00| **Solidarity Bazaar** in aid of the AIC Solidarity Fund - Margaret Hanson, AIC USA Coordinator and Marlene Burt, Executive Board member |

**Saturday March 16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07:00-08:00</td>
<td>Breakfast - King David</td>
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<tr>
<td>08:30-08:45</td>
<td>Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<td><strong>Information time</strong> – Natalie Monteza</td>
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<tr>
<td>08:45-11:15</td>
<td>1) <strong>Continental Meetings</strong> – The 5 AIC Coordinators of each continent:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Africa:</strong> Martine Haouwa - Room J 203 –</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Asia:</strong> Joan Sarasin - Room J 202 –</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Europe:</strong> Christa Foelting - Room J208 -</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Latin America:</strong> Alicia Duhne - Room J209 –</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>USA:</strong> Margaret Hanson - Room J 207</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Parallel event for other participants: AIC projects in Asia:</strong> Allette de Maredsous, AIC International Representation Coordinator and Sumaia Sahade, EB member - Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Departure for a boat tour in Bangkok with lunch boxes served in the coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:30-15:00</td>
<td>Arrival at the Pier and Boat Trip on the Chao Phraya River</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:30-16:45</td>
<td>Transfer by coach to Holy Redeemer Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:30-18:30</td>
<td><strong>Solemn Mass celebrated by Bishop Philip Banchong Chaiyara, C.SsR</strong></td>
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<td>Offertory Procession to be composed by Asian AIC's</td>
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<td>Prayers of the faithful to be read by each Asian Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:30-19:30</td>
<td>Dinner at the new Pastoral Centre of Holy Redeemer Church (AIC-Thailand Headquarters)</td>
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<tr>
<td>21:30</td>
<td>Back at ABAC Campus</td>
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<td>09:15-12:30</td>
<td>Meeting of AIC National Presidents – Laurence de la Brosse, AIC International President and Natalie Monteza, AIC Secretary general</td>
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<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00-18:00</td>
<td>1) Statutory Assembly – Tayde de Callataý, AIC Legal Counselor - Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<td>2) Parallel meeting for the Spiritual Advisers – Father Eli Chaves, AIC Spiritual Adviser and Maru Magallanes, AIC Liaison Officer with the Vincentian Family - Room J 203</td>
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<td>3) Closing session - Plenary Room John XXIII</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00-16:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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An international network, including more than 150,000 volunteers, mostly women, acting against poverty at a local level in 53 countries worldwide.

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Editor: Natalie Monteza
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Collaborators for this issue:

Redaction:
Aliette de Maredsous

Translation:
Kevin Mac Gee
Philippa Mullins

Layout:
Azurgraphic sprl