

# **AIC: Our Association**

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## Introduction

**1617-2017**

**400 years**

It's a blessing for the whole of AIC to celebrate 400 years of existence!

Let's look at where we have come from: in **1617** an extraordinary man, a priest, Vincent de Paul, gave women a mission in the Church - to support the destitute people around them spiritually and materially; the Charities were born; and for 400 years, all across the world, volunteers have joined the movement that we now call AIC (International Association of Charities).

*We have in our hands a fabulous heritage, a treasure; let's take the time to become more familiar with our association and the spirituality which keeps it moving forward.*

**It's time to Internalise: 2013-2014.**

**Today**, just as St Vincent used to say 400 years ago, "Charity pushes us onwards". Our Pope Francis, like his predecessor Pope Benedict, is constantly inviting us to approach the poorest. We have 400 years of expertise:

*Let us know how to talk about what we experience in AIC, and how projects built using the strengths of each individual can change lives.*

**It's time to Communicate: 2015-2016.**

And **Tomorrow**? AIC is 150,000 volunteers strong, but it can mobilise many others to build a just and fraternal world! "When we are dreaming alone it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality" Dom Hélder Câmara.

*Let us know how to open up our AIC groups to new things, to "**God's surprises**", as our Pope Francis also says.*

**It's time to Mobilise: 2017-2117.**

**Let us build an AIC that is "enchanted and enchanting"!**

May the Holy Spirit be with us!

Laurence de la Brosse



**Map of the countries  
in which AIC is  
present**

## 1. What is AIC?

AIC - International Association of Charities - is an international NGO that fights against poverty. It is an international network made up of 53 national associations which brings together Christian volunteers, mostly women.

Through local actions adapted to the differing situations in each country, the volunteers work alongside the most disadvantaged people, especially women and their children. The objective is twofold:

- To get people living in poverty to be self-sufficient and in control of their future, by accompanying them in order to address their needs on a material and spiritual level.
- To involve society and public authorities in this fight against poverty.

## 2. What do we do at AIC?

- A. Concrete actions in each AIC group
- B. Educating the public opinion
- C. Ongoing training of volunteers

### A. The AIC actions in each group

In the 53 associations that form the AIC network, **over 13,800 projects to combat poverty** are currently listed, offering as **added value**:

- Local roots: it is exclusively volunteers from the country in question, structured into local AIC groups, who initiate and run the grassroots projects. Their knowledge of the local reality allows them to act as facilitators: by relying on the strengths of the target group, volunteers and beneficiaries create adapted local solutions together. This is often recognised by the public authorities.
- Attention to women in poverty: the target group of AIC projects is 80% women. Indeed it is women who are the most affected by poverty and injustice. It is consequently now essential to develop equality and to promote and spread women's rights if we want to achieve social, political, evangelising and Vincentian action. The ever more unstable living conditions of a very large number of women in the world today are a real "sign of the times".
- Taking into account the person as a whole: the volunteers establish individualised relationships with the people they accompany and take into account the entirety of their needs: material, interpersonal, spiritual, etc... following the method taught by Saint Vincent de Paul, their founder.
- Creating social links: the causes of poverty are not only economic, they are further amplified when people are isolated. AIC projects must also help people to escape from isolation and to feel a sense of belonging to a community.

- Education: is a vital component in local AIC projects and essential in the prevention of and fight against poverty. Local action becomes an opportunity for a two-way exchange between the volunteers and the target populations, with a view to developing actions together to get out of poverty.

## **B. Educating the public opinion**

AIC educates the public opinion on the problems of poverty and exclusion.

AIC engages with local, national, civil and Christian authorities by showing them the conditions of poverty encountered by volunteers. On an international level, the AIC representatives act as advocates so that the people living in poverty remain at the centre of international debates (UNESCO, ECOSOC, UN Women, Council of Europe, Cor Unum, etc.).

## **C. The ongoing training of volunteers**

AIC offers specific ongoing training in techniques and human and spiritual matters. Every two years, we revise and update the specific directions of our action, which we call our "Operational Guidelines", on which training is delivered. For the years 2011-2015, these guidelines are education, reciprocity and building together. Training occurs through training documents, as well as national, continental and international seminars.

### 3. What motivates us at AIC?

- a- Called upon by the situations of injustice, exclusion and violence in which so many people very close to us are suffering - especially women;
- b- Called upon by the Gospel: regarding the dignity of each individual;
- c- Called upon by the Social Doctrine of the Church: regarding the responsibility of everybody in the construction of a fairer and more fraternal world; and regarding the right of every person to participate in his or her own destiny;
- d- Called upon by the prophetic intuition of Saint Vincent de Paul:
  - Justice is one of the priorities of Charity
  - Everybody must be able to satisfy his or her material and spiritual aspirations
  - The necessity of organised action
  - The place of women in society and in the Church.

*We act to promote justice,  
facilitating access to independent and dignified living  
conditions.*

## **4. Who are we, the AIC volunteers?**

We are mostly committed, Christian women. We work together and are spurred on by situations of urgency to build a better world. We successfully carry out projects against various forms of injustice - projects which promote the individual, following the example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise de Marillac.

Service to others is offered, without expecting remuneration, out of love, because it is our calling.

"God loves the one who gives gladly." (2 Cor 9:7)

## **5. The origins of AIC: soon to be 400 years young!**

On 20th August 1617 in Châtillon-les-Dombes (France), at the request of the parish priest, Vincent de Paul, more than fifty women responded to the call of and came to assist a destitute family. The priest realised that it was necessary to organise this exuberant generosity to make it efficient and so he founded the first group of "Charities".

On 8th December 1617, the Bishop of Lyon, His Eminence Denis Simon de Marquemont, gave Mr Vincent the decree recognising the new confraternity of Charity, and its regulations.

**"Mr Vincent's" choice:** The evangelisation of the poor and action to help the disadvantaged; such was the twofold project which dominated the life of Mr Vincent. For him, **the purpose of Charity was to serve the humblest, the abandoned** and those affected by physical and spiritual poverty.

**To love is to feel responsible.** This is why he took every initiative that could rectify the poverty he encountered. In 1625, Vincent de Paul created the Congregation of the Mission, a key factor in the rapid development of the Charities, including in Poland and Italy.

In 1629, Vincent asked Louise de Marillac to coordinate and visit the Charities in France. Louise would become part of the Company of Ladies at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris.

Louise and Vincent were aware of the difficulties facing the ladies of charity regarding the demands of serving the poorest people. Their intuition and a meeting with Marguerite Naseau, a young countrywoman from Suresnes, led to the establishment in 1633 of a new company of women, who lived uncloistered and by new Rules, and offered daily and practical services to the poor: the Daughters of Charity, managed by Louise de Marillac.

In this way, "the ladies and the daughters" complement each other in their vocation and their service, while continuing the intuition of their common Founder.

## 6. How does AIC function? Its structure

***a) AIC has a structure which unites the local level with the international level***

- ***The local associations***

- Carry out AIC's fundamental mission within a relatively small geographical area: neighbourhood, district, town, parish, deanship, etc...
- Respond to various conditions of poverty detected among those around them.

- ***The national associations***

Bring together and coordinate the associations or local groups working in a given country; they also represent them in national state bodies, etc.

- ***The international association***

- Coordinates and organises the national associations, provides training.
- Maintains communication, promotes solidarity and the exchanging of experiences among all the volunteers across the world.
- Represents the international association and all the national and local associations in the main international and ecclesiastical bodies.

- Produces spiritual and social reflections which have laid the foundations of its path over the years: numerous documents have been and continue to be published to spread new ideas.

- ***The Vincentian Family***

AIC is part of the Vincentian Family, which brings together all the associations founded by Saint Vincent or inspired by his spirituality.

## ***b) AIC's international bodies***

- ***The International General Assembly***

Is made up of the national associations that are members of AIC; it has the decision-making power that allows it to achieve AIC's objectives.

- ***The international Executive Board made up of 12-16 members elected at the Assembly of Delegates and representing the 53 countries:***

- Implements the decisions taken at the assembly
- Carries out the tasks of organisation, coordination, reflection, representation and management
- Can name a Permanent Committee which takes charge of day-to-day work
- Is assisted by a Father from the Congregation of the Mission, who is the International Spiritual Advisor, and a Daughter of Charity delegated by the Mother General (or by her congregation).

- ***The International Secretariat***, which has its headquarters in Belgium, a central point for communication between members of the AIC network.
- ***AIC Solidarité***, a structure for training AIC volunteers in developing countries, and for supporting the projects that they intend to develop locally (formerly the Project Service).

### **List of member associations:**

**AFRICA:** Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria.

**LATIN AMERICA:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chili, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela.

**ASIA:** Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.

**UNITED STATES:** AIC is present in 22 States.

**EUROPE:** Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Poland, Portugal (Madeira), Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, United Kingdom, Ukraine.

## 7. What does belonging to AIC give us?

The strength of a global network that fights against poverty and the causes of exclusion:

*"The whole is stronger than the sum of the individuals"*

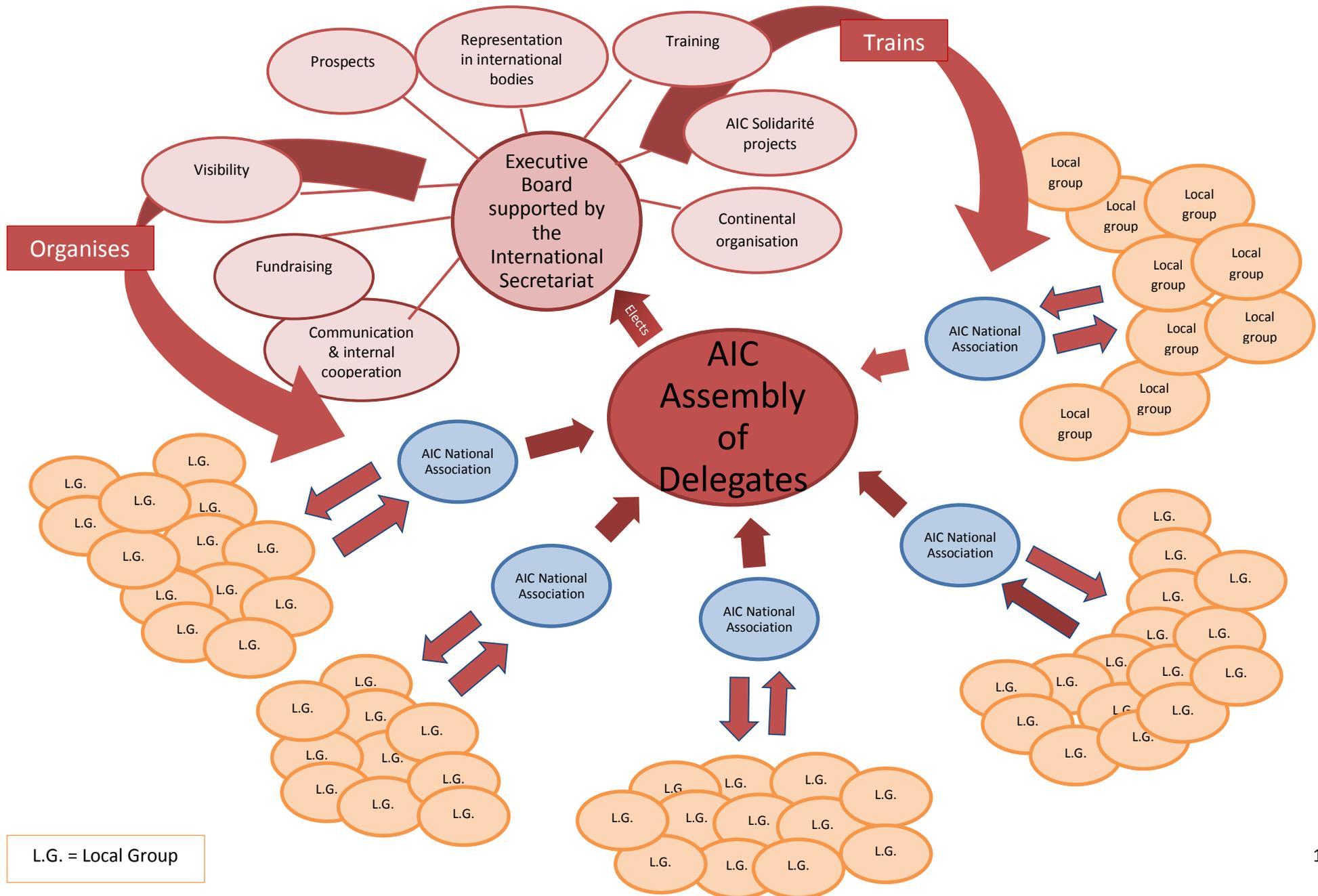
1. The **fundamental project** based on the teaching of Saint Vincent de Paul: a very effective way of fighting against different forms of poverty.
2. **Operational Guidelines** which are constantly being renewed and adapted to the needs of the world today.
3. **Personal and group training** for volunteers from all over the world to improve the actions undertaken at all levels, local, national and international (meetings, assemblies, visits, twinnings between local AIC groups, exchanges, documents, etc...).
4. **Information** about the big trends in international life in the social field, as well as about the teaching of the Church.
5. **Practical help to construct local projects**: the exchanging of skills and best practices and fundraising assistance.
6. **Representation in national and international bodies**, where the work of volunteers is reported.
7. **Partnership** with other associations.

*"3 makes more than 10 when the Lord joins in" Vincent de Paul  
"Against poverty acting together"*

## **8. Questions**

- Describe the concrete actions carried out by AIC locally, nationally and internationally.
- Out of everything that makes up AIC: What did you find the most striking? What motivates you the most? Reflect individually and then in your group.
- In your opinion, what are the benefits that your work brings to people living in conditions of poverty and of the fact that your group is part of AIC International? Reflect individually and then in your group.
- What jumps out at you and your group? What motivated you to choose the project that you have undertaken?
- What can you and your group bring to AIC International?

# 9. Diagram: structure of AIC



# International Association of Charities

An international network of over 150,000 volunteers, mostly women, acting against poverty at a local level in 53 countries.

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The Training Booklets can be downloaded from the AIC website (in PDF format):

[www.aic-international.org](http://www.aic-international.org)

1 year subscription, to be paid to the account of your national AIC association:

- To receive the booklets by post: 10€/12\$

- To receive copies by email: 4€/6\$

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