

INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES

El Escorial (Madrid), 30th March - 3rd April 2011



EDUCATION, a PATHWAY to BUILD TOGETHER



AIC

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30th March 2011

INTRODUCTION TO THE ASSEMBLY

*Laurence de la Brosse,
International President*

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

It is a joy and an honour for me to welcome you, on behalf of the Executive Board, to this 2011 assembly:

« Education – a pathway to build together »

Welcome to each and every one of you!

Warmest greetings to Father Manuel Ginete, our outgoing international assessor and also to his successor Father Elie Chavez.

I welcome delegates representing our 52 national associations. Welcome to your home here at AIC headquarters !

And our dear Carmen – how can we **thank you** for all you and **AIC Spain** have done over the past year in organising this Assembly?

As I said last June, an International Assembly is certainly a heavy burden but it is also a unique opportunity to promote openness and dynamism in our Association. It is an opportunity to share the AIC lifestyle on an international scale through meeting and the exchange of individual opinions. This helps us to improve the work we do with the most needy.

We are all aware of the huge amount of work you have done – including the recent acquisition of visas for our delegates from Peru and Nigeria from the authorities in Madrid. We are also very aware that you will be hosting world youth days this summer.

We can best thank you by making this Assembly a real catalyst towards building together.

I would also like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of this great gathering of kindred spirits - the members of the **International Secretariat**, those who worked in **preparing this assembly** and those who will deal in one way or another with our translator friends.

Firstly a few words of **introduction about AIC** for those of you who do not yet know us.

The introduction of delegates which you have just witnessed, underlines the fact that we are:

- an international network of 52 Countries,
- consisting of 200,000 volunteers, mostly women,
- who are engaged in combating all types of poverty and injustice.

Our volunteers work in locally-based teams to answer the needs of the community.

There are two objectives:

- to empower people living in poverty and put them in control of their future
- to involve public authorities in this war against poverty.

Our origins go back to Saint Vincent de Paul who founded the first groups called « Charities » in France, Poland and then Italy in the 17th century.

In 1971 there were 20 associations coordinated by the French president. AIC International was legally established at this point in time and since then there have been regular international assemblies - just like this one here today.

At each assembly, **delegates consider how they can develop their working techniques and how they can best achieve their objective: « *Acting together against poverty* ».**

Thus, since its foundation, AIC has moved on from helping to participation to self-help to empowerment (which allows each individual to develop his or her potential) and on to systematic change.

At each Assembly delegates vote for the Operational Guidelines – concrete ways in which the war against poverty can be waged.

For some time now the continuous growth in poverty among women – more than 70% of the poorest people are women – has led us to **concentrate our efforts on combating female poverty**.

In the Assembly in Rome in 2007 we looked at the cultural origin of poverty among women. In 2009, in Mexico, we became aware that the discrimination to which these women are subjected is one of the major causes of this poverty.

We know that discrimination starts as early as in primary school where young boys have a better chance of being educated than young girls.

According to UNESCO figures from 2008 world population stands at 6.7 billion. Of these 11% are illiterate – 776 million people. Of these 64% - almost 500 million persons - are women.

That is why the second of 8 Millennium Development Goals ratified in 2000 by 187 countries is « to guarantee **primary education** for everybody ».

In all the work you do, you underline the fact that education is essential to overcome poverty. Education prevents poverty among women.

That is why we have chosen our theme:

« *Education, a pathway to build together* »

Every single word is vital:

Education: What is education?

The UNESCO definition of education states:

- Formal education: received at school, university.
- Non formal education : for adults through training programmes.
- Informal education : passing on values through family and the environment.

For us in AIC, education has a broader meaning:

It means allowing the person to grow in every sense: physical, intellectual, spiritual and in relationships.

It means promoting the talents and the responsibilities of each person (volunteers and recipients, rich and poor) in order to build a more just society.

These objectives can be achieved at any stage in a person's life.

We as AIC volunteers, are therefore personally concerned with:

- What types of education **are we still getting today** intellectually, spiritually and in relationships?
- What type of education can we and **do we wish to share with others?**

A Pathway: Our life is a journey,

By belonging to AIC we accept that we must evolve and move on:

- On this journey, **what steps** can we take personally?
- What type of education can we and do we wish to share with others?

To build: As AIC members we want to build a more just world.

We dedicate our time, our energy and our talents to this end.

What kind of lifestyle do we choose through our actions, our families and our social environment?

Together: No man is an island – we are all involved with each other – the 2 million persons who come to our centres, the 200,000 volunteers throughout the world and all men of good will.

How do we intend to move forward during this Assembly:

You have read the programme which outlines the goals we have set ourselves.

In the course of these three days we can:

1. Live our Vincentian spirituality and our membership of AIC: Father Celestino Fernandez will guide us into St Vincent's mindset. In the course of each day we will pray, and receive the Eucharist. In this context we have asked our former AIC members, our friends and the sisters of a Cistercian convent in Germany to keep us in their prayers.
2. This afternoon we will endeavour to improve the way we work on our projects and see how we can upgrade our projects on the ground.
3. Tomorrow, Thursday all are called to attend the presidents' meeting. We must be informed about our work and the decisions made by AIC International.
4. Friday: consider the theme "Education - a pathway to build together". We will hear accounts of our work in AIC and also be addressed by three outside guests.
5. Having learned from these three days we will look to the future by setting out our Operational Guidelines for 2011 – 2013 and by naming our new Executive Board.

This is a worthy scheme of work for our Assembly!

You have heard our opening anthem but perhaps you have not yet learned the words:

« No matter who you are or where you come from, the door is open, come right in;

Give us your best and you will understand us

Listen to our language of love – it can move mountains!

Our Lord is opening his heart to you. »

I invite you to consider and absorb these words during our time together here.

Let us allow ourselves to be guided and changed in the certain knowledge that the Lord's Spirit is here amongst us.

Let us pray.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AND EDUCATION

*P. Celestino Fernández, CM
National Spiritual Adviser of AIC Spain*

In literature on the history of education you will probably not find any reference to either St Vincent de Paul or to St Louise de Marillac. Should you ask a distinguished academic from the world of teacher training, he/she will probably give you a strange look and will have no idea of the role played by either of them in the history of either education or pedagogy.

This is easily explained: we normally associate the word “education” with teaching, with teaching methods and with schools and colleges. In other words we tend to look on education as something which is perfectly structured. It is obvious that the founders of our Association do not fit into this pattern.

It is however no exaggeration to say that both St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac are closely associated with education and education theory, provided it is understood that we are talking outside the purely technical and academic. We refer to education in the broadest sense which shapes both the individual and society. In this sense we can understand how St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac are among the greatest educators ever.

I would like to point out that, contrary to what the title of this Assembly might suggest, my treatise does not deal uniquely with St Vincent de Paul. The creativity, the work and the theories put forward by St Louise de Marillac are equally considered. In the field of education, as in many other contexts, St Vincent de Paul would never be dissociated from his valued and irreplaceable collaborator Louise de Marillac.

STARTING POINT: EDUCATION IN THE MOST LITERAL SENSE

If we look up the word “education” in a thesaurus we will find a long list of alternative terms and meanings. ‘Education’ incorporates the whole personality of the man or woman - the physical as much as the spiritual – in all aspects and in every dimension. Synonyms for ‘to educate’ are: to develop, to perfect, to make aware.

This is why Vincent de Paul’s idea of ‘education’ is closely linked to the development of the whole person. Methods used depend on the circumstances but the objective is always the same: to give back to whoever it may be – man, woman, child – their dignity as children of God and as individuals and that those who live forgotten or on the margins can find their place at the banquet of life.

KEY NOTION: THE POOR AND THE MARGINALISED

Compared to other major spiritualities, the difference in Vincentian spirituality is that it deals exclusively with the poor. Everything, of necessity, must lead to the total liberation of the poor. The poor are the focus of what Vincentian Institutions do. They are their “raison d’être”. They are the present and the future of these institutions and of their work.

In education, according to Vincentian spirituality, the poor are equally the focus. They are in fact the backbone of every aspect of Vincentian education and educational theory. Everything instigated, created and developed in the field of education by Vincent de Paul is geared to serving the poor, the marginalised and the forgotten members of society.

We must not forget that education was not a personal right as it is today. It was provided as a charitable work. Two fundamental facts drove Vincent de Paul in his work: *'the ever-growing number of poor who do not know what to do nor where to go are my burden and my sorrow'* and *'we are guilty if we do not dedicate our whole life to the education and spiritual welfare of the poor.'*

CENTRAL POINT: IGNORANCE BEGETS POVERTY

It has been said that when the history of education, of illiteracy and social integration is written, that this account will be incomplete if what Vincent de Paul has achieved – along with Louise de Marillac, “les Confréries de la Charité” (Brotherhood of Charity) and “la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité” (The Company of the Daughters of Charity) is forgotten. Specific reference must be made to the growth of the “petites écoles vincentiennes” (Little Vincentian Schools), and the “écoles de la charité” (Charity Schools).

It is true that the works written on education in the XVIIth century barely mention the schools established by the Vincentians. This is possibly because the founders’ work mentioned above is not as significant as the work of other congregations whose ministry was principally or exclusively education and teaching in major centres. (De La Salle, Ursulines, Jesuits).

In addition, Vincentian work in education was based in the wider global context of service and dedication to the poor. Vincent’s dedication to the poor was all-inclusive. He was omnipresent where the dignity, freedom or defence of deprived persons were in question. He was dedicated to abandoned children, the elderly and defenceless, those condemned to life imprisonment, the homeless, beggars, impoverished peasants, victims of war, unemployed male and female youths who had nothing to look forward to in life, the unattended sick etc.

TODAY: EDUCATION AS A FUNDAMENTAL SERVICE

The worth of education in the work done by the Vincentian family is sometimes questioned. We even wonder if St Vincent considered this work to be important. Perhaps, in our desire to reach out more directly to the poor, we have forgotten a very real facet of poverty: ignorance and a lack of culture. Or perhaps we have lost sight of the actual history of what we do as Vincentian.

St Vincent shaped his work and organised it in the “Little Schools”. However, his dedication to the education and teaching of the poor went far beyond what was achieved in these schools.

The philosophy of the “Little Schools” was based on concerns voiced by the Council of Trent and on the then state of ignorance of the population – especially in rural areas.

The “Brotherhoods of Charity” deemed both the education of the poor and visiting the sick to be very important while the “Company of the Daughters of Charity” under Louise de Marillac placed particular emphasis on the education of young women.

As a general rule newly established centres provide care for the sick and education for children and young people in a “Little School”.

FOUR KEY ASPECTS OF VINCENTIAN EDUCATION

Vincent de Paul's objectives in education are readily identified by reading between the lines in the accounts of his conferences with the Daughters of Charity and with the "Ladies of Charity" and by deducing what he intended in his guidelines for the "Brotherhood of Charity". Perhaps his language appears somewhat old-fashioned, which is why we are going to outline four essential elements in the objectives of his education theory.

1) Education as a means of evangelisation

Vincent de Paul speaks of « *Christian instruction* », « *teaching the Catechism* », « *educating in the love and the fear of God* », « *instructing people in the faith* », « *training students in piety and devotion* », « *promoting good practice* ».

Naturally, Vincent de Paul used the language of his time. He could not use today's theological terminology, his scholastic theology was that dictated by the Council of Trent.

In today's language however, all his expressions can be translated as 'evangelising the poor'. His priorities are to demonstrate to young people that God loves them, to teach them about our bountiful God's goodness and affection and announce the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We are talking here about a holistic evangelisation rather than a merely spiritualist one. This means making the gospel effective as Vincent de Paul has underlined on many occasions: *'It can be said that evangelising the poor means not just teaching the mysteries necessary for salvation but doing the things foretold and by the prophets, bringing the gospel to life.'* (Coste XII, p.84) It means carrying on the work which the Son of God came to earth to do.

2) Education as a means to give back a person's dignity

Long before human rights were promulgated and laid down everything, Vincent de Paul had a sole objective which he pursued relentlessly: to give back dignity to the poor who had no rights and who were deeply despised by an aloof non-supportive society.

Vincent de Paul discovered that education is one of the most effective instruments in the fight to achieve a « *dignified status for the poor* ». In one sense Vincent de Paul realises that children and young people will be the future Christians and future citizens who will make up tomorrow's society. The future of our society will depend on how these young people will have grown up.

This is where the dignity of women takes on a particular significance – especially those girls and young women who live in poverty and who lack resources. These women are at the top of the Vincentian priority list. It is this focus on bringing dignity to women that makes Vincent de Paul a true revolutionary in his own time as well as in the present.

3) Education as a means of promoting the individual

This aspect of education is linked to the previous ones - for Vincent de Paul evangelisation and personal development go hand in hand.

Vincent de Paul had no difficulty in accepting the content of the text of the Constitution of the Daughters of Charity: *'In the continuous desire to achieve the holistic development of the person, the Congregation does not separate the corporal and the spiritual – the humanitarian and the evangelical.'* (Const. FC, Ct 15).

4) Education as a path to freedom

It has always been recognised that education is the most effective path to freedom for the individual – freedom from all forms of oppression. History has always had its share of theoreticians who support the concept of 'education as a path to freedom' – remember in more recent times the Brazilian Paulo Freire and the Italian Lorenzo Milani.

Vincent de Paul has been ahead of these "teachers" in supporting education as a liberating influence. Let us not ignore the fact that Vincent de Paul lived in a society which – with the collaboration of the official Church – established by royal decree, an Association chaired by Godeau, Bishop of Gras and Vence. The purpose of this Association was 'the imprisonment and confinement of the poor.' Vincent de Paul fought strenuously against this Association and defended the freedom of all people, most importantly the poor.

Of course Vincent de Paul knew that education and culture which recognised the person in his or her entirety were the basis of freedom. We also know that freedom is a gift from God and that it must be cultivated and developed in order for the individual to grow as a person and as a Christian. We also know that nobody has the right to take this freedom away.

SOME FACETS OF VINCENTIAN EDUCATION

It will be well worth our while to recall or to underline certain facets on which Vincentian education is based. What purpose would Operational Guidelines drawn up beforehand serve if we are not motivated, encouraged by attitudes which stimulate us and enthuse us to the point needed to accomplish our task.

Let there be no doubt that these attitudes must be compatible with Vincent de Paul's thinking and lifestyle. Perhaps we will express these attitudes in today's language but their roots will be no less completely Vincentian.

1) Being sincerely convinced of the dignity of the poor

This belief is essential because without it we cannot progress. This means that we must be really convinced, not just in theory, that the poor person is a free human being with dignity, created in the image of God. We must be convinced that that the most insignificant poor person is equally if not more dignified than the most influential, the most powerful of fellow human beings. We must feel this within us because when we do we act accordingly.

2) Become like the poor

We are talking here about the most important task in our lives. This is not just one more job among all the other tasks we have to face. It is not 'one more' of our daily conversions. The path of our true conversion to God passes inevitably through becoming like the poor. Biblical texts support this point of view.

3) Read the Gospel and live life through the eyes of the poor

If we switch perspectives when we look at the Gospel and at reality, we will experience a new kind of life and we will adopt new behaviours.

It is curious that in 17th century France there were two people, both of whom were influential and emblematic, and both of whom read the gospels and saw life from different perspectives. Vincent de Paul saw it as the poor did, through their eyes and from their perspective. Cardinal Richelieu on the other hand saw it through the eyes of a powerful man and one who supported the system. We know very well that their conclusions were very different.

4) “Communion with” the poor

What is essential is that we be “in communion” with those for whom we work and for whom we carry on the fight. Otherwise we fall into a vacuous professionalism or a self-centred short-term routine. If we do not live “in communion” with the poor we might do a reasonable job and even be well organised and structured but that is all we will be – nothing more.

“Communion” means being both well-versed in the problems and needs of the poor, to genuinely meet with them, listen to and talk with them and so discover their values and help them discover their potential, be the voice of those who have no voice to defend the rights of the most vulnerable and make known the legitimate aspirations of the most disadvantaged.

5) Boldness and creativity

From the Vincentian point of view boldness and creativity means “enthusiasm” – the combination of affective and effective love, all-consuming fire which enflames and consumes.

This boldness and creativity breed courage instigated by knowing Jesus Christ and by a passion to serve the poor. This inevitably results in courageous and front-line research to find new methods and new ways to serve. Today, in order to serve the poor, we must change our way of thinking and abandon our usual routine of doing the same things in the same way.

6) Continuous and consistent training

Vincent de Paul had already noticed something which seems now to be obvious: a quality service, a change in thinking and in the way we deal with the poor can only be achieved through training. We need only glance through the rules of the first Charities to realise that Vincent de Paul insists on the importance of integrated training which is professional, Christian and humane.

CONCLUSION

I am well aware that there are many subjects, some more important than others, which I have not dealt with. I do think however that my modest contribution will be useful in the context of our present considerations. Our dear St Vincent de Paul’s AIC must always remain vigilant so that we do not lose sight of our origins and that we will be in a position to adapt these origins to the present.

Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, the first Charities, the first Daughters of Charity, the first Fathers of the Mission opened a path which was broadly based and filled with hope. It is up to us to follow this path humbly and without triumphalism but with evangelical and Vincentian courage. We have adapted the title of Bob Dylan’s *“The answer is blowing in the wind”* to *“The answer is in each one of us”*.

WORKING THROUGH PROJECTS

AIC Solidarité ASBL

*Anne-France Mordant and Michèle Smeets,
Projects Service*

WHO ARE WE? IDENTITY AND MISSION

AIC Solidarité is an Association under Belgian law which was set up in 2004 to cater for the needs of AIC. The mission of AIC Solidarité is to monitor those projects initiated by AIC volunteers in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. The president of AIC Solidarité is Claudette Mouffe, the supervisor of the Project Programme is Anne-France Mordant.

The purposes of AIC Solidarité:

- Supporting AIC projects
- Maximising the capabilities of AIC volunteers in their project work
- Encouraging the national project coordinators
- Promoting north-south and south-south twinning

OUR PROJECT RESOURCES

- A Criteria for project support
- A Form to request support for a project
- A Project report sheet

PROJECT PROGRAMME – A NEW DIRECTION

Objective 1:

Enhancement of volunteer capabilities in the initiation and implementation of their projects through differentiated solutions adapted to different environments.

Specifically:

- The need to go to project locations: since 2009 project visitation has been carried out in Cameroon, Mozambique, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Congo Brazzaville.
- Setting out the work of the Projects Service in geographical zones: since 2009 the Project Programme has expanded and now has the following project leaders: Africa – Michèle Smeets, Latin America – Agnès Dandois, Asia – Anne Sturm.
- Putting forward solutions adapted to the needs of regional projects: training, funding, network setup. An example: Project – training visit to Madagascar.

Objective 2:

Strengthen the AIC Project network

Specifically:

- Strengthen the links between regional leaders and the Projects Service through joint visits
- Support national project coordinators and promote the creation of national Projects Services
- Energize the work of AIC representatives in international bodies

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Three examples based on conclusions and requirements identified during visits:

1. The Jean and Claire Delva Prize 2011
2. Professional training in Fundraising Activities – analysis and suggestions for consideration
3. Natural disasters: AIC in action

1. Jean and Claire Delva Prize

AIC combating violence towards women: a long history...

- 1999: International seminar “Women-Violence-Prevention” organised in Europe and repeated in Latin America
- 2001: AIC manifesto against violence endured by women in the world
- 2002: International Assembly during which volunteers pledge to undertake specific measures for November 25th
- 2003: Inauguration of the Jean and Claire Delva Prize
- 2005: Participation in development of teaching materials for OIC (International Catholic Organisations)
- 2005: AIC Training Booklet “Women and Poverty”
- 2007: International Assembly in Rome on the theme “Women, poverty and cultural diversity”
- 2009: At the International Assembly in Mexico, AIC volunteers undertook, through systemic change, to strengthen their responses to women in poverty

What can AIC volunteers do?

- Become informed about public and private measures in our own countries: national laws, existing refuge centres, specialist services and national awareness campaigns
- Make use of all available facilities: posters, articles, training seminars, counselling when conducting home visits
- Set up a specific project - for example a refuge for abused women

Projects awarded since 2003

- **2003:** Campaign for responsible fatherhood in **Madagascar** – Action against the mistreatment of women among the young people of **Panama** – Training in combating verbal abuse in **Belgium**.

- **2005:** Support for families in the fight against economic dependency of female victims of violence in **Haiti** – Awareness campaign in educational circles in **Puerto Rico** – Promoting empowerment of women in **Mexico**.
- **2007:** Seminar on the empowerment and the professional training of women victims of violence in **Panama** – Economic and social reintegration of 50 abused mothers in **Madagascar** – Awareness campaign on cultural practises which demean women in **Nigeria**.
- **2009:** Training seminar to promote the prevention of domestic violence in **Peru** – Refuge centre for abused women in **Mexico**.

The 2011 Appeal

In practical terms...

- A The setting-up of new projects to combat violence towards women.
- A Work already being done in the struggle against violence towards women.
- A Work already being done in the fight against poverty which includes a specific section on the problem of violence towards women.

Send us your projects, using the usual form for proposals of new projects, before **15th October 2011**.

In this way we can put them forward for consideration on 25th November at the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

2. From Professional Training to Income Generating Activities

Fact: Everywhere there are young, single women with children who have no training. They are a target group. Most of them have the capacity to move on from being helped and progressively to take responsibility for their lives.

What has been done until now:

Temporary projects: AIC sets up an activity generating income to help out mothers and/or children. Mothers continue to suffer in their lives; failure is frequent in the long term.

Usual professional training (dressmaking, hairdressing, catering...) is not enough, failure is frequent, and the potential of the training is not maximised.

Need for help in setting up schemes through capital investment and for support in management

How can this be done?

Preliminary requirements

- Training of some trainers to direct small business projects
- Market analysis to identify product demand and new lines

Set up solidarity groups

- Solidarity Group training and training in tontine micro-saving
- Work out a business plan to choose a project

❑ ***Set out Business Plan in order to identify project***

- Market analysis
- Cost analysis
- Materials or premises needed
- Profit margins
- Repayments
- Group operation

❑ ***Training on two fronts***

- Professional training
- Elementary management and home economics training
followed by Support for setting up via a micro-credit

❑ ***Role of the AIC team***

- Group support and small business management training
- Shadowing of each beneficiary, from the beginning, by a trained 'godmother' volunteer

In order to:

- Ensure that the beneficiary is well-chosen and committed
- Support the beneficiary as she progresses and when she may falter
- Support and advise her for at least one year from start of project

Note:

Many beneficiaries also need nourishment or other support in order to use their loan to the maximum effect!

3. Natural disasters:

➤ **Haiti: January 2010 Earthquake in Port au Prince**

- Two visits from AIC Lombardy in March and May 2010
- Visit by AIC International in October 2010
- Projects undertaken:
 - A Acute emergency aid
 - A Refurbishment of clothes-making workshop
 - A Food programme for 350 elderly persons
 - A Financing of cholera epidemic medication
 - A Finance of scholarship

Working together for Haiti!

Thanks: to AIC Haiti, to the Daughters of Charity and to the Fathers of the Mission living in Haiti, to all national AIC associations (for funding support), to AIC Lombardy and AIC Dominican Republic (both twinned with Haiti), and to the Vincentian family in general (Zafen project).

➤ **Chile: Earthquake in Coliumo in 2010**

- 50 fishermen's families received acute emergency aid which allowed them to live in tented and prefabricated accommodation

➤ **Peru: Earthquake in Pisco in 2007**

- 2007: building of wooden chalets for 35 very poor earthquake-victim families
- 2010: building of 4 wooden chalets for very poor volunteers who had received no aid since the earthquake

Important Note:

Money destined for the poor cannot generally be assigned to volunteers.

However in the case of a natural disaster during which some volunteers find themselves at the same level of poverty as beneficiaries whom they are helping, it has been decided with the Vincentian family that these volunteers – with the authorisation of AIC International – may ask that a portion of available monies be allocated to them.

This authorisation may be approved on condition that:

- *The National Association has the capacity to instigate a proper reconstruction project*
- *The National Association judges that the support of volunteers who are victims of a natural catastrophe will cause no jealousy which may be detrimental to the Association.*

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF ASSETS WHICH HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED TO US
TO PASS ON TO THE POOR

Alicia Duhne
Latin America Coordinator

Before studying the subject properly let us consider together what motivates us in the quest to succeed in our work with the most vulnerable peoples.

Firstly let us think about our 'Vincentian Mission': "To follow Jesus Christ by serving the poor according to the example of St Vincent de Paul". We pursue this mission because we are aware that injustice is everywhere in the world and we want to work towards the eradication of these injustices.

We know that poverty is not simply a question of chance, it is a result of economic, social and political situations and structures which we want to change.

We believe that poverty in all its forms is a violation of human rights.

We know that:

Every day millions of children are exploited and die from hunger when there is enough bread and water to feed everybody.

Many atrocities are committed during times of war.

More than half of all the people in the world have neither shelter nor food; they do not have a roof over them or even a place to lie down in peace.

Many people die because they cannot afford to pay for hospital care.

As Christians and Vincentians, we have undertaken to always be aware of the reality of being poor. This reality is our concern. It is up to us to face up to the challenge.

St Vincent emphasised the fact that '*Charity cannot exist in the absence of Justice*'.

Thus we must always have in our hearts these three concepts:

- Act with justice,
- Fight for justice,
- Expose injustice.

These are the reasons which drive us to work as AIC volunteers, inspired by the words of St Vincent de Paul when he shows us that:

- It is the poor who can lead us to God. They are our masters "*True religion and a living faith are to be found in the poor*" (SVP).
- The poor are the doctors and the psychiatrists who cure our illness while we are tending to theirs.

THE POOR ARE OUR LORDS AND MASTERS.

We therefore wish to act in an ethical manner and to be consistent in our actions. However we ask ourselves “What does “**behaving ethically**” mean?” There are no doubts many definitions but they all have in common the fact that they mean “**to behave properly**”. Then we ask ourselves: “How do we know we are behaving in a proper manner?”

In the first instance, we believe that the principles of the commandments of God’s law have been engraved in our hearts since we reached the Age of Reason. We recognise these norms as being the basis of human coexistence and respect for others. However we do not all hold the same principles to guide us in our actions. I will now put to you some ethical considerations which can act as behavioural guidelines.

Level 1 – Ethics of Reward and Punishment

- The individual does good work in the expectation of receiving a reward.
- He/she does not steal through fear of punishment if caught.
- He/she passes on responsibility to higher authority; this is his/her reference point. For this person, escape is permissible.

Level 2 – The ethic of convenience

- The person judges that whatever is most beneficial to them is morally acceptable. Whatever affects the cost-benefit analysis to their disadvantage is immoral.
- Very often, this ethic dominates behind a feebly benevolent exterior.
- The person does not steal because the risk involved in the act of stealing is greater than any benefit which would accrue.
- People who function at this level are actually motivated by good works rather than out of the fear of having done nothing.

Level 3 – The ethic of filiations (of membership)

- The person regards that what is accepted by the group is moral.
- The group rewards certain kinds of conduct by giving the person an identity and membership of the group. Equally it punishes other forms of conduct by excluding the person or degrading their status.
- The volunteers who find themselves at this level think that taking possessions from the poor is not significant as long as this is acceptable to the group and everybody agrees with it and does it.
- He does not steal because if he did he would be excluded from the group. This would be intolerable because, for him, the group is more important than anything else.
- He is a volunteer because that is where his friends are. It is where he is most accepted by society and by those around him.

Level 4 - The ethic of Legality

- Here the Law determines what is ethical. For persons at this level no law can be immoral. There is no morality outside of the Law.
- They know no other rule outside of that dictated by the Law and by regulation. Whatever is not forbidden is allowed.
- They do not wish to steal because the Law states that stealing is a punishable offence.
- They would be capable of being involved in minor corruption provided that this was not a punishable crime.

Level 5 - The ethic of autonomy

- This person is an introvert. She obeys her conscience.
- Honesty, justice and respect are her fundamental values.
- Persons at this level are capable of standing up for justice and of denouncing all kinds of injustice if circumstances call for it.
- Stealing is not in the nature of these persons because they are convinced that the good of others must be respected at all times.
- They would oppose injustice if their current project required a stand against injustice.

Level 6 - The universal ethic

- This recognises the universality of values. Confronted by a particular injustice, the persons at this level believe that the victim has their dignity but that the perpetrator also has dignity, even if they are unaware of it.
- Jesus is at this level. During his lifetime, all he ever did was ask his disciples to pray for their enemies and as he died, he prayed for his executioners.
- Persons at this level would not consider stealing because they love everybody even those they do not know. They wish no harm to anybody.
- They are prepared at all times to defend victims of injustice - no matter who they are.
- They are volunteers because they feel that Jesus is calling them to support a particular project.

And I ask you:

What motivates you to be an AIC volunteer?

- Are you a volunteer because it makes you feel good?
- Are you looking for praise, prestige, security, altruism, tradition?
- Are you striving for a just society or to follow in the footsteps of Jesus?

Which level are we at?

- Do we want to “earn a little bit of paradise” or are we afraid of being punished if we do not give back to God a tiny portion of the gifts which he gave us. (Level 1)
- Do we just want something to do? Just to feel ‘useful’? (Level 2)
- Or that being a volunteer will mean we are part of a group of friends? (Level 3)
- Do we feel that as a good Christian there are certain things we should be doing? (Level 4)
- Do we not want to respond to the calling to serve God through the poor? (Level 5)
- Are we motivated above all by a deep love of God and of mankind- both good and “evil”? (Level 6)

Whatever our preliminary motivation, we must continue to move forward and grow as human beings, we must move on to the next level. We must not lose sight of the fact that it is Christ who has called us, He has chosen us to do his Work and promote God’s Kingdom on Earth.

He has called us to be Vincentian volunteers and he has given us the means to do this work – namely:

- AIC
- People who support us
- Material goods

I invite you now to reflect on some Christian and Vincentian principles, not through a logical perspective but from a Christian and ethical point of view.

The Apostle St James tells us *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”* (James 1:27)

St. Vincent tells us:

- *“We do not own the money belonging to the poor, we are simply administrators”*
- The goods which the community manages and on which it lives: *“the legacy of Jesus Christ earned through the sweat of the poor”*
- *“...because you administer to the poor you must carefully avoid all unnecessary expenses and everything which surpasses the lifestyle of the poor”* (SVP)

St Vincent insisted that administration be closely monitored. He warned against the danger that the administrator misuses of the goods belonging to the poor and not to him.

The Teaching of the Catholic Church:

- Taking or keeping another person’s property in any way whatsoever, even though it is not in contravention of the law, breaks the seventh commandment: *“Thou shalt not steal”*
- The following are also morally illicit: speculation, corruption, the taking and private use of corporate assets, badly completed work, fiscal fraud, forgery of cheques and invoices, excessive expenses, wastage, inflicting deliberate damage on either public or private property.
- All these are against the moral law and restitution must be made (CIC 2409, p. 526)

We are guardians of goods destined for the poor and we ask ourselves... **What is the most precious thing we receive through these goods?** First of all there is **confidence** – on the part of donors, recipients, the community and other Vincentian volunteers. A strong bond is created between all of us - this encourages us to be involved and obliges us to be consistent.

THE GOODS WHICH ARE ENTRUSTED TO US TO PASS ON TO THE POOR are always gifts (by nature and type) for example from raffles, the sale of certain goods and everything we acquire through the Association. **All this means that whatever we receive or give no longer belongs to us, it is already “for” the poor and “belongs to them”.**

As a result, because we administer these goods to the poor, we must:

- Be good administrators.
- Be honest because everything is for the poor.
- Use money in total transparency, giving information on time, on demand and being rigorously accountable.

- Be efficient in one's work by optimising resources.
- Be hard-working, do not waste.

All the responsibilities which one shoulders in the Association are for the benefit of others. **We are all equally responsible** for the efficient delivery of these services. The fact that at a certain point in time some particular person is responsible does not mean that this person is more important than others. The others must ensure that each individual fulfils her role. As a result:

- By not denouncing something which we know to be illegal, we become responsible and are accomplices to the fact.
- If we know something and do not reveal it, we are committing a sin.
- Being aware of embezzlement and doing nothing about it this makes us equally responsible for the "crime" which has been committed, even if we think we are dealing with a minor offence.
- We must always be aware that something has been entrusted to us – the whole group is responsible for its proper utilisation.

It is equally extremely important that our training is transparent.

The best way to achieve this is:

- Written financial records to be presented each month to everybody involved or to representatives of the centres with which we work. Alternatively make a copy and put it up somewhere in the meeting room.
- All accounts to have two signatures.
- The whole team always supervises administration.
- Money always to be passed over in the presence of a witness.
- Make out simple or deductible receipts.
- When dealing with the transfer of significant sums of money get the agreement of all volunteers at a team meeting.

There are many things which must NEVER be done, even if nobody else could become aware of them.

- Never transact financial dealings on your own.
- Never allow money to build up in the bank while the poor are dying from hunger or have multiple needs.
- Never use money for a purpose not intended by the donor.
- Never use money which has been requested for a particular project for something else.
- Never use money belonging to the Association for personal reasons, family celebrations, holidays or anything outside the work of the Association.
- Never permit volunteers to have a double accounting system.
- Never allow gifts in kind to be taken home for personal use or for the use of one's family.
- Never put money into a personal account.

- Never use money collected for the benefit of beneficiaries (the only exception is in the case of natural catastrophes when a volunteer finds herself in a situation where she is equally as impoverished as beneficiaries. In this situation the volunteer may be given permission by the national or the International President depending on where the funds came from).
- Never remain silent if you are aware that funds belonging to the poor have been misused. The truly honest and right-thinking volunteer will stand up for the rights of the poor and for the proper use of their assets.
- Never withhold monthly reports.
- Never be careless in the control of goods given to us for the poor.
- Never benefit personally from any project in any way.

THE FOLLOWING TENANTS ARE TAKEN ABSOLUTELY FOR GRANTED :

- Assets must be shared with other teams involved in similar work so that funds do not build up unused.
- Assets we have been entrusted with must be administered as efficiently as possible .
- Always fulfil donors' wishes.
- A percentage of available assets should be assigned to volunteer training, if funds allow this.

If somebody has taken something which did not belong to them, the following procedures must be followed:

- Send the person a written notification.
- Demand the return of the misappropriated assets - or their value if the assets are no longer in his/her possession. Current interest rates must be added in the case of repayment.
- The person involved must be expelled from the Association.
- Legal action must be taken in the case of a serious level of asset stealing.

Let us not forget that: when an Association expels a member who has been found guilty of a crime it becomes enhanced in the public eye, because it demonstrates that it is managing resources in a transparent way.

Justice is being practised when we prove that we are being **honest** and **transparent** in our management structures.

Jesus tells us: *'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters; you were doing it to me!'* (Matthew 25:40).

Each one of us must therefore **evaluate**:

- ❖ What he/she has done up until now.
- ❖ What still remains to be done.

PRESIDENTS' DAY

OUR COMMON THEME

Alicia Duhne

Yesterday Laurence gave us an account of our AIC activities worldwide. When we see that our individual projects are not carried out in isolation but are linked to those of 200,000 volunteers in 52 countries all over the world it encourages us and enriches our journey in the knowledge that Christ is present with us and that his work is carried out through us.

He invited us to see education in the broadest sense – that is to learn to develop each individual's potential. We believe that we can only build a better world if each individual - volunteer and beneficiary, rich and poor – becomes responsible.

We believe that to educate is to promote the multi-dimensional growth of the individual – physical, intellectual and spiritual and also to develop in life and in one's environment.

In this gathering of national presidents today we are going to reflect on different ways of approaching our work in AIC so that our mission to support the poor may be most effectively achieved. We will approach this topic from two perspectives: global and continental.

It is an opportunity to exchange points of view. It can be seen as AIC offering us an education at a personal level.

At the same time we are putting into practise our first Operational Guideline: "To encourage personal evolution: each volunteer can see things in a different light and do things differently."

NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' MEETING

The Report on the AIC National Presidents' Meeting will be sent directly to the presidents.

Agenda

- **Report on Executive Board activities**, *Natalie Monteza*
- **AIC Financial report**, *Laurence de la Brosse*
- **Executive Board Action plan priorities** (Training, Communication and Twinning, Fundraising, Visibility, Representations and Advocacy)
- **Meeting of Presidents by continent**

FUNDRAISING WORKSHOP, *Uca Agulló*

The report on this workshop will be published in the next Training Booklet in October 2011.

EDUCATION, A MAJOR CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH

Mgr Giampietro Dal Toso
Secretary, Pontifical Council Cor Unum

(Extracts)

Dear Participants,

(...)

Your chosen theme, education, is a burning question for us today because our tomorrow depends on it. Education is equally a major concern for the Church. I would like to consider some fundamental principles. Kant stated that « *A human being can only become a human being by education. He is merely what education makes of him* » (*Vorlesung über die Pädagogik*). We see education as **a process which produces an adult person** who, thanks to righteousness and liberty, is capable of interacting with the reality which is all around him. A human being with an open mind who can take an interest in his surroundings while reflecting on the meaning of things. A human being who is not confined by existing concepts but welcomes everything new which life implies by virtue of its own law.

Starting out from these few pointers we can immediately see that the question of education is unavoidably linked to the **question of human being**. It is obvious that the answers to our questions on human being are to be found in Scripture and the Church's doctrine. These will be what will guide us in our brief consideration together. I will first consider the concept of human being according to the Catholic Church – a concept which gives a direction to the education which we are trying to follow. What type of human being are we trying to produce? What is the aim of education? If we do not ask this initial question then the work which we are trying to develop has no meaning.

1. According to Christianity what is the nature of human being?

1-1 *The Human Being Created*

One of the most beautiful answers to this question is, in my opinion, “*What is human being that you are mindful of him?*” (Psalm 8:4).

This same scripture answers the question in referring to God the Creator. Even though the human being is such a small creature in terms of the whole of creation, he is as he is because he has been crowned with glory and honour by God: human being was created by God in His image and His likeness and therefore gifted with reason and free will. The human being did not appear by chance nor is he the product of blind evolution. He did not create himself; he is not the cause of his life. No, **he is the end result of God's desire therefore God created him and loved him**. In this way the human being, as God's creation – and God is Sovereign Goodness – is, **in principle, a good reality**. As a being, he is good. Each human being, of whatever culture or race, be he sick, poor or sinner, **deserves love and respect** because in God's eyes he is good. As far as we are concerned, the human being's dignity is born out of this divine origin where all creatures have equal rights and equal responsibilities.

The fact that we are created in a state of rectitude endows us with **a capacity for good**. I mean by that that we naturally aspire to goodness and not to evil. When we are attracted to evil it is because it seems to us to be something good. Yet we are drawn towards goodness.

I believe **we must understand this positivity clearly**. Because the human being has been created in the image and likeness of God he is drawn towards goodness. He carries within him indelible traces of his divine origin and these are expressed in his capacity for good to which he aspires to by natural instinct. It is true that, by his very nature, the human being is bound by truth and therefore by knowledge. It seems to me that all of these considerations **lead us to have confidence in our fellow human beings**. God had that same feeling of confidence in the human being by creating him as a thinking and free agent, allowing him freedom of choice. In this same way our education system must be founded on a profound confidence in the human being.

That being said, I am not saying that the human being in himself is good but that in each human being there is **an essential initial rectitude**. The work done in education by the Church is based on this assumption. The very term e-ducation expresses this – *e-ducere* means to draw out in a human being this state of integrity in which he has been created but which is often hidden under a layer of egoism and mischief. This allows us to clarify the meaning of education: it is **a process which helps us to bring out the best in ourselves**. The human being's reasoning and freedom proclaim truth and integrity. If truth and integrity stimulate his reasoning and his free will then these will respond. It is not true that the youth of today are any worse than those of yesteryear. If today's young people are given what is necessary to evoke in them a passion for truth then they will respond in the same way as yesterday's youth. We must ask ourselves if we are capable of accessing the reason and the free will which exist deep down within the human being or if we are limited to letting him know that economic well-being is the most important value. The task which faces each educator is to **develop integrity** and to draw from it everything which will facilitate the **realisation of the human being's full potential**, his understanding of himself, his relationship potential and his contribution to society.

1-2 The Human Being Fallen

Another determining element which we can infer from this approach to education is the following: the human being did not create himself, he cannot educate himself; he needs an **external incentive** to guide, clarify and motivate him. Education also has a **social dimension**. The Church has always been involved as a leader. We work in partnership with the **family** which, as was emphasised by Vatican Council II, is the **prime educator**. The major theme of authority is of equal importance at this point. It was sometimes believed that real education consisted of simply allowing the needs and the feeling of the person to emerge so that authority was considered in a negative light – as something which was an obstacle to the authentic development of the person. This rejection of authority stopping just short of authoritarianism as it does, denies the rational nature of human being. **Authority** is an external resource, called upon to promote what is good in human being and which helps him to differentiate between good and evil.

The need to have access to external factors for our education is based on a more profound motivation which no educator can ignore: **Original Sin**. I am speaking as a priest talking to people, who because of their beliefs are dedicated to helping other people, allowing them to grow and to strive for perfection. Our work cannot ignore what Catholic doctrine states about the existence of an evil element in every human being. Even though the human being was created as good, since he was created in the image and likeness of God, he lost his state of innocence because of sin - because he disobeyed God. We cannot deny the fact that evil, under many different guises, lives within us and outside of us. Too often however, we blame everyday circumstances, cultural traditions, the influence of society and psychological conditioning as being responsible for this evil. This is all true. But if the biblical human being asks himself about this evil, he will discover that the root of it all is to be found in the human being's disobedience to God, in **his refusal to accept the order** in which he was created. The human being was created by God and in rejecting God he is rejecting the Absolute which gave him life. This is why the human

being experiences suffering, evil and death; when he rejected God he rejected life. This reality of original sin affects every aspect of our lives. It would be unrealistic to deny this. We can see in our own lives the difficulty we experience in achieving the goodness and love to which we naturally aspire.

In my opinion the process of education cannot ignore this fact. As well as the trust which we must confer on our fellow men – as much on children as on adolescents – we must be clear on the fact that **every human being is faced with a radical, existential and critical choice between good and evil**. The fair, serene and clear vision of sin which is present in the heart of the human being must not lead us to look upon the people in our care with pessimism. The perception does however help us to **see them as they really are**. Their fragility and their suffering are also part of this reality. If we consider the root cause of this fragility within a reality which is greater than ourselves it will help us to understand that education cannot ignore the fact that grace, acting in the human being's heart, is necessary for salvation.

This is why **when we consider the question of education we must also consider the question of God**.

1-3 The Spiritual Nature – The Relationship with God

We cannot look upon human being as just a social animal. **We possess an innate sense of God**. The human being's soul is **spiritual in its nature**; deep within himself, the human being thirsts for a spiritual experience. He has a natural desire to see God, to know Him, to experience His presence, to have a relationship with Him. According to St Augustine, the human being is insecure without this contact. This spiritual contact allows the human being to discover that he has enormous potential, a capacity to explore the very depths of his being and to experience a freedom which enables him to overcome the slavery of created elements which often oppress him. The education which we promote in a Catholic environment can never be confined to cultural, intellectual or aesthetic considerations. **If it is to be exhaustive**, education has to reach the depths of the human being, **where he wants to reach God**.

But you know that the face of poverty is changing. Our world is **poor today because God is no longer amongst us**. Today there are many poor people because **they do not have the ultimate answer to their desire for life**. The human being's heart depends on God. We, who work in charitable organisations in the name of God cannot forget Him. Do not imagine that you can carry on the work of education while pushing God to one side because He occupies the key position in the human being's life. Any system of education which does not include God is incomplete because it fails to access the innermost reaches of the human heart.

2. Who are the Educators?

The education process is one which passes from one being to another and the pupil tends to assimilate the attitudes of the teacher. This is why I would like to dedicate this last section of **my thoughts to the educator** – more specifically to the person who works for the Church in a charitable organisation like AIC. This theme has been very adequately explored by Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*.

We must not lose sight of the fact that **the source of our charitable action** is God. The encyclical reminded us that God is love. It is this love that we bear witness to in the way we help, educate or are involved in social intervention. We run the risk of offering only benevolent consolation if the aspect of faith becomes less important. Following the teachings of Pope XVI, our Congregation is evermore convinced that its mission is to remind those who perform charitable works that **the charity we offer is not our own but comes from God**. If this comes from God then it is in His name that we must present it.

However this comes through a personal experience of God's charity. We must all return to this source. The Holy Father wanted to dedicate this year's Lenten message precisely to the **baptismal theme** because this is where our Christian life and our service to others begin. This is **where our charity**, which motivates us to dedicate ourselves to those whose situation is more impoverished than our own, **comes from**. A revitalised spirituality will, above all, help us to **rediscover our strength in God**. God loved us first of all.

Education is **a problem which concerns us**. If we are not educated in the faith what kind of education can we offer others? We will confine ourselves to what others do. It is praiseworthy but not enough. I suggest you read again **No 32-39** in *Deus caritas est*, where the Holy Father emphasises the fundamental qualities necessary for those working in the Church's charitable organisations.

I could not finish without sincerely thanking you for the work you do. Thanks to this work, the Church today can connect with many people who are in need. Today **you are the hands and feet of Christ** - hands and feet which reach inaccessible places in order to access and thus save human being. I hope that your Assembly will generate new energy levels to drive you forward in the essential work you do.

EDUCATION – A PATHWAY TO BUILD TOGETHER

*Laurence de la Brosse,
International President*

Your Lordship,
Dear friends,

Here we are at the very heart of the work of this Assembly:

Education: a pathway to build together

Today we would like to take another step forward in our mission which has been bequeathed to us by our founder St Vincent de Paul “material and spiritual support for the poor”

This move forward is the **way to integrate** the educational dimension **into everything we do** as a means of combating poverty – especially poverty among women.

I said at our opening session: “Education is ongoing, it is a lifelong experience” and here we are in agreement with UNESCO which recognises three definitions:

- Formal education: received in schools and universities.
- Non-formal education: for adults through training programmes.
- Informal education: passing on of values through family and environment.

And for us Christians,

To educate is to enable the person to grow in every dimension: physical, intellectual, spiritual and in relationships. We can talk about personal development: St Vincent in his XVII century language said “support spiritually and corporally”.

Education has therefore a very broad sense, it deals with man in his entirety. This goes way beyond the transmission of knowledge: it promotes the person’s abilities and responsibilities (volunteers and beneficiaries, rich and poor) in order to build a more equitable society. This is what is meant by our Association’s logo.

Let us start with a few striking statistics:

In 2008 there were **69 million children who received no schooling**. These figures have decreased since 1999. On average, the difference in figures for boys and girls is decreasing. It is in the region of 56% at the moment and this is thanks to the efforts from various countries to reach development goals set for the millennium. However, in some cultures there is still a very significant gap between male and female education levels.

Father Celestino reminded us during the opening session that the training of impoverished young females, which was totally forbidden in their time, was **a priority for St Vincent de Paul and St Louise**.

St Vincent had included this in the Rules of the first Brotherhoods of Charity, and St Louise set up a school near Paris for poor young females whose parents could not send them to school.

In recent times Irena Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, **recognised the link** between education and world security. She said: *“Lack of education nourishes the vicious circle of war. Children who are deprived of schooling are condemned to poverty which is the most effective recruiting agent and advocate of violence”*.

We all know that to guarantee primary education for children is a positive deterrent to poverty and violence. AIC reports show that a large proportion of our projects is aimed at children through study, bursaries, academic resources and school canteens – a hungry child cannot study successfully. Improving a child’s health is an important factor in combating absenteeism.

Other statistics:

World population is 6.7 billion. 11% of these are illiterate, of which 64% are women – that is 500 million illiterate women.

Illiterate – a definition: Somebody who cannot read or write because she has not been educated or has been poorly educated.

Being unable to read means, for example:

- unable to read the clock and therefore always being early or late,
- being unable to understand information on food or other packaging,
- being unable to understand children’s schoolwork (homework, class journal),
- being unable to process personal or other mail.

There are also consequences for personal behaviour and relationships in society where the majority are labelled “educated.” It is difficult to develop minimal self-esteem, to establish social relationships, to communicate with an ‘educated’ person – for example children’s teachers.

In reality we recognise the link between education and poverty and we know that education is a means to personal development, independence, improved quality of life and to finding work.

Education is a catalyst for social change.

But we also realise that those women living in very difficult circumstances do not look for a better life because they cannot imagine, in the distant future, the benefits of such a life. (This is as true for vaccinations as it is for education).

How can we put forward educational schemes, strategies for the transmission of knowledge and global training in our projects?

Firstly, we are going to try to define how we, as volunteers, receive continuous training and how this will enable us to evolve *in line with our first Operational Guideline: “Every volunteer is capable of changing her way of thinking and acting”*.

Secondly, we will see how our projects and our actions accommodate the idea of global education and what additional steps we can take along this road *in line with our second Operational Guideline: “Enhance the responses to poverty among women”*.

PART 1: Accounts of AIC training

Since this Assembly started we have been in a position to assess the opportunity our AIC volunteers have to receive continuous training.

Yesterday during the Presidents' meeting, we discussed all the training programmes we can follow in AIC so that our volunteer effort is truly efficient and adapted to our mission "*Do good and do it well*" in the words of St Vincent.

The accounts which follow are examples of training received within AIC - personal, technical and spiritual training.

First Account

TRAINING WITHIN AIC: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT – AIC France

Renée Artiges

In general terms, education takes place during childhood and youth. But can education continue at 40 years of age and beyond? When Laurence invited me to talk about my experiences I looked up the definition of Education and the definition of Development with which it is associated. I put both definitions together. Two words stuck in my mind: Growth and Development.

I can say that I have truly been educated by the different types of training I have received from the Movement. When our team was set up and before the introductory cooperatives were established to follow St Vincent who instructed us to "do good and do it well", we received sound training on balanced diet in challenging environments. The tactic was to train an efficient, vigorous and united team based on team members who were full of good will but with different levels of knowledge. Out of respect for beneficiary families and so that we would feel confident and competent in our ability to reinstate these families, we must continuously assess our technical and spiritual training techniques through regional sessions, national assemblies and think tanks. "You are volunteers but you carry out your work like professionals" – this should always be our basic guideline.

The education I received has made me more confident and has increased my ambition to be more effective and more faithful to St Vincent. The training for future presidents I received twice has nurtured my enthusiasm, presented me with more opportunities and acted as a springboard to higher quality relationships. I have learned to delegate with confidence, to work as a team member, to respect the fact that each volunteer is different and that in this diversity lies a great richness. In an atmosphere of friendship and well-being each volunteer has an enriching relationship with their fellow volunteers.

Finally I refer to ADVP training which is given in Paris and then passed on. ADVP means Adult Developmental Vocational Programme. It is based on personal experiences so that those involved can become aware of their capabilities and that they are constantly evolving till the end of their lives. This way forward which is proposed for volunteers and supported families enriches my faith and my life as a woman. The richness of exchanges set up in a spirit of confidence is like yeast which makes me grow, gives me added energy and nourishes my passion for my fellow humans.

Today I would like to express my deep gratitude for the training which has made me what I am. Because of what AIC has done for me I have never before felt as enriched and as fulfilled in my social life as I do today.

2nd Account

SOCIAL LEADERS DIPLOMA – AIC Mexico

Maria Cristina Franco

My being here today is a great privilege and a gift from God. As requested by AIC Mexico I am going to tell you what my training has brought to me both in my personal and social life and in my work within AIC.

My commitment to the work of St Vincent has been motivated from the start by a wish to serve God through disadvantaged people. To share the Good News with them. To learn from other volunteers how to do this work joyfully, enthusiastically and with fervour as St Vincent did.

But my fervour and my enthusiasm was not enough, more was needed to serve the poor. I needed training, I had to study so that I could do my work professionally and communicate more effectively both within and outside AIC.

It so happened that ITESM (Monterrey Institute of Superior Technological Studies, Mexico) offered Mexican and Latin American Vincentian volunteers the opportunity to do a Social Leaders' Diploma. 78 Mexican AIC volunteers did this basic diploma in 15 different towns. This was an unbelievable experience which helped us greatly to move forward in organising the Association. It furthermore gave us the courage to start using computers - emailing and using the internet to do research. We were also able to communicate more effectively with other NGOs and extend our network.

The way we interact has changed radically. Now we can communicate and be informed within minutes. This means in fact that volunteers are always in close contact even when one may be in the north of the country, in Southern California or Merida for example, while another is in the southeast of Mexico in the Yucatan. I am not talking just about the volunteers in my own country.

In the same way, thanks to technology introduced into the Association, Vincentians all over the world can communicate with each other and share their experiences whether they be in South America, Europe or Asia. Thus they can help or give advice if it is needed.

To give a recent example we have been able to follow the training of the 12 Spiritual Reflection sheets for the Jubilee Year. Every region receives the Lectio Divina on time and we can consult the Vincentian Family website as often as necessary. We can also meet active members from other branches of the Vincentian family, establish friendly links with them and work together. An infinite range of possibilities has been opened up to us.

On the personal front, my life and the lives of all my volunteer friends have changed. The Association has become stronger and more up to date and has found its place in the 21st century. It continues to progress – our objective now is that all our volunteers in Mexico become competent in technology.

I thank God who has showered His blessings on me so that I can serve Him.

I thank the Association for all the invaluable training it has given me. It has enabled me to forge ahead in the search for the Common Good - in particular for the poor who are our priority.

My thanks also to the Monterey Technological Institute - Mexican and proud of it - for giving us the expertise to improve the way we work.

3rd Account

AN APPROACH TO TRAINING – AIC Spain

Marisa Diaz Garcia

My name is Marisa, I am married. I have three daughters and six grandchildren.

I have been asked to tell you about how I started out as a volunteer. I want to say, above all, that I am not putting myself forward as an example in any way or for any person. I have my own many limitations and concerns.

I have always been involved in charitable works and belonged to various associations. I teach religious education. It was only when I became a Vincentian volunteer that I truly realised what it means to be a benefactor.

I realised that what I had done up to that point was done without any training. I must tell you that I had not done any study until I became a volunteer and started doing some training.

I go to all learning opportunities. I attended a course on liturgy, I follow all national training sessions. I have been to Assemblies and regional meetings. I have learned to use a computer which I found very useful. I read the lives of St Vincent and St Louise and the lives of Ozanam and Sister Rosalie Rendu; but what inspires me most is the life of Marguerite Naseau. You ask why? Well it is because I can identify with her. Even though I can read and write, I hardly went to school at all and this is a great handicap to doing even more. Marguerite Naseau is an example to me not to be afraid to get involved. What IS very clear to me is that training is really very, very important. There are different kinds of charitable works and this is why training is so important. It is not enough just to do, we must know why and for whom we are doing what we do – this is learned through training.

I have told you how I started on this work and I have pointed out my limitations and now I must tell you that I am here as a counsellor for the Diocese of Oviedo. I must admit that when I was asked to talk to you I said no. I was frightened by the fact that I was uneducated and unable to speak in public. Above all I thought I was not good enough to serve the Association adequately. However they insisted and so here I am as a Diocesan counsellor. I tell myself that if one is interested in training, if one wants to learn, understand, love and be charitable, the Lord and our founders will be able to enlighten us as to what should be done each time the question is asked. As I already mentioned, it is not that these fears are no longer there. I don't know why - is it the Lord's work? Is it my courage? In any case, the Diocesan counsellors are now also regional delegates.

Therefore I urge everybody, myself included, to get more training. We really do need to attend many courses. This will give us the strength to undertake projects which are a means, almost an indispensable means I think, to work for the most disadvantaged "our lords and masters" as St Vincent tells us.

4th Account

TRAINING TOWARDS A “PROFOUND AND LIVED VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY” AIC Thailand

Joan Sarasin

Since it was set up in 1992, AIC Thailand has included volunteers of different nationalities in its rank. One of the first things we learned was to understand and get on with each other. English and Thai are the languages normally used but at different levels. We also have people of different religious beliefs who help and collaborate with us. They care for the poor with us, help us financially, materially or in active participation in our work. Some of our most generous donors are Buddhists or Muslims.

BEING AN AIC MEMBER IS A VOCATION

As time moves on, Association members get more involved and are aware that when one becomes an AIC volunteer we are answering a call - the Lord is asking us to serve Him. We become aware that He, who guides us through every moment of every day, is the Captain of the ship. His presence is apparent when we allow Him to take over our day to day living. Our faith has definitely grown and we are now fully confident that the Lord will provide all our needs and He will tell us what to do.

What experience can we share with you regarding our training? We have developed our work organisation methods without any outside help - just empirically, by learning from our mistakes. When you think about it, you realise that the Lord has sent us the volunteers we need, those who have the necessary talents and knowledge to make AIC work efficiently. It is not always easy to work together but we have learned gradually to become more patient.

As far as spiritual training is concerned, an article about the faith of St Vincent de Paul sums it up very well:

St Vincent said: “Look at every life experience through the eyes of faith.” Thus in spite of very limited formal training AIC is moving forward thanks to three factors. In the first place there are the unexpected responses that the Lord brings to our needs for the poor. Then the volunteers believe that God has chosen them to get involved in the Association. Finally, AIC members are drawn together in a special friendship. A life totally consecrated to God and to His service is an account which every AIC member gives to those around him and especially to other volunteers. Our individual works are a source of collective inspiration. On top of all this we have become very attentive to the needs of others. The sharing of both our joys and our sorrows has strengthened the bonds which unite us.

AIC Thailand works in a country which is almost exclusively Buddhist, where Catholics are a tiny minority. We are perhaps the only Christians most of the population will ever come into contact with. This makes us witnesses to the faith. The close links which unite us with the Fathers of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity through the Vincentian Family, the shared projects and the visits – all these push us forward to redouble our efforts for the poor.

It can thus be said that the spiritual training in AIC Thailand is a daily opening of our hearts to the Lord’s grace through the ordinary things in life and that our humble efforts constitute one manifestation of His Providence.

These various accounts underline the importance of our own training. It is important to be aware of how we must develop personally. This is what we want to share with others.

We know that we need <u>time</u> ,	and therefore patience with regard to others;
That we need others to have <u>confidence in us</u> ,	and so to think positively about others;
That we must want <u>to learn</u> ,	and so pass on the desire to learn .

PART 2: AIC Education Projects

AIC is a mostly female Association and I would like to quote this passage written by Pope Benedict XVI when he was Cardinal Ratzinger;

He was commenting on the “Letter to Women” written by Pope John-Paul II in 1955: “*Those ordinary women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives*”.

It seems to me that this is addressed particularly to us in AIC:

- Believe in others and have confidence in their capabilities,
- Support them in their development.

We are going to listen to some volunteers’ accounts and I suggest you ask yourselves the following questions as you listen:

- *How does this account inspire me?*
- *What must we add to our existing projects to introduce this educational, global training dimension to build a better world together?*

The projects will be presented under three headings:

- **Education and relationships**: learning to live together.
- **Education and the family**: strengthening family links.
- **Education and the role of the community**: teaching us all to work together.

These experiences have succeeded in improving conditions for the poor – especially for women by:

- Applying AIC Operational Guidelines,
- Education as a fundamental means of eliminating discrimination,
- Getting targeted communities involved,
- Systemic change.

The sought-after changes in the conception of any project bring a real change in how the community operates.

Systemic Change is therefore present as a **binding force** which drives and stimulates our actions.

EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS, learning to live together

Intergenerational computing workshop - AIC France

Michèle de Précourt

I am here to talk about a good idea which starts with failure. However we are not discouraged and we will start again next year.

How can we help older people to keep in touch with their grandchildren who are often far away?

- *Young people use emails and in spite of being well-meaning they write very few letters to their grandmother.*
- *Older people still often distrust the internet and few of them use it confidently.*

We have therefore sent young secondary school pupils with a laptop to an old people's home. Their task was to help residents open a mailbox, get connected, receive and send emails and even, eventually, print photos.

The venture with the residents was a complete success. The two types of link – links between generations with the young people in the secondary school as well as internet links were successfully established.

However: the local St Vincent team did not become involved in the project (it was a federal rather than their own). They did not do enough to get the young people involved. Planning in the project was loose. With the arrival of spring and the exams the young people stopped turning up. This is an example of what St Vincent said: « people are suffering more from a lack of infrastructure to support them than from a lack of charitable persons » C XIII 423.

We are going to start again but this time we will have some younger volunteers in the team (and they will not be left on the outside), there will be training for team members who work with older people on using the internet to combat loneliness so that they become involved in the project.

We are starting again by setting up cyber cafes in old persons' homes and pensioners' clubs.

Community allotments - AIC France

Martine Legay

My team works in a town of 5000 inhabitants on the shores of the English Channel, in France. It all started four years ago.

Because he knew our team, and our work with unemployed people, a benefactor offered us an abandoned plot which became a corner of paradise in the heart of the town.

*The **idea of the team** was to organise a gardening workshop - a benefactor took responsibility for the project.*

Little by little our welcoming attitude broke down the loneliness which engulfed our beneficiaries by sticking to pre-arranged timetables and turning up on time in the morning.

***Together** they are beginning to cultivate the earth, symbol of life and of nature.*

***United**, strong links are forged between them and they realise how important it is to maintain good relationships and they say frequently: "We are better off since we have been working in the*

garden – we are boosting each other’s morale!”.

*This plot of land has become a **meeting place and a place for sharing:***

- *Little by little they can forget their financial and family situation brought about by family conflict*
- *Rediscover their **dignity** through work*
- *Get away from their isolation: getting together in a café or taking seasonal refreshments, learning to share biscuits/sandwiches. Little by little the **loneliness is overcome...***

Hoing, weeding, pulling up weeds and thistles, digging the earth, nothing is too much for them...

Spreading manure kindly brought along by a farmer,

*Sowing, weeding, planting and **harvesting the fruits of their labour,***

Getting back the taste for life, taking advantage of the light, the sunshine and the rain.

Together, watched by fascinated passers-by. The smell of fresh mint, parsley, the scent of multicoloured flowers spreads through the sea air...

***Nobody can ignore this flower-filled urban garden** which is a visual and sensual delight.*

***The Catechist children** helped to buy tools with the proceeds of a tea party and **the children from a catholic school** will discover nature’s bounty next spring and will learn to respect nature and enjoy sowing various seeds...*

*In summer **the women** come to help with harvesting the vegetables...*

Each week, harvested vegetables are:

- *Sold for a modest sum to the food distributors*
- *Or used in our workshop kitchen: they are a godsend for our cooks who learn to produce simple, seasonal economical dishes*
- *Where there is an excess, these organic vegetables are given to the elderly who walk through the garden – a walk which reminds them of the old times.*

***All team members** participate in the workshops and encourage the beneficiaries.*

***The local media** publicises our work.*

Because of this we were invited to help out at a country wedding, we made up pretty bouquets and floral arrangements from crops such as wheat, barley, oats, flax and wire screens. We would like to do this again.

EDUCATION AND FAMILY

Smiley Kids Project - AIC-UKRAINE, Bukovina

The “Smiley Kids” project is a response by an AIC team in Ukraine to the fundamental problem of alcoholism which affects many people in their region. Volunteers realised that when this is a problem in a particular family then the most affected are the weakest ones: the children who must live under the same roof as their father, mother, an older brother...

As a result of a twinning programme with a German AIC team, the Ukraine volunteers adapted a method known as “Smiley Kids” which was conceived and developed by Christa

Gattwinkel in 1996.

The aim of the “Smiley Kids” project is to:

- Support the children so that they do not feel alone and abandoned and give them the opportunity to talk about their difficulties,
- Help them to understand that they are not responsible for their parent’s alcoholism nor for the physical and verbal violence which goes with it,
- Make the children understand that alcohol-related problems are symptoms of a serious illness,
- Facilitate communication within the family,
- Reconcile the dichotomy between love for their parents and the shame at their alcoholism,
- Give the children a space where they can discuss their problems, play and partake in interesting activities.

The children of these families get together regularly, after lessons in a room in their school. Each get-together follows rules which are set down at the beginning by the participants themselves. Confidentiality is the most important rule: no information leaves this room except with the permission of the child. They can be assured that their worries and their fears stay within the group. Meeting together in a group allows people to talk, to share problems, to think about things and to console each other. There is also time for games and reflection.

In an emergency there is a mobile number which the children can call when there are violent incidents in the family.

For the younger children there is “Bine” – a doll which can play the part of a volunteer and can listen carefully to all the very young children’s problems.

At the moment there are two groups and 6 children from these groups succeeded in getting permission to continue their studies in the secondary school.

Project: “Co-therapist mothers in action” AIC-COLOMBIA, Cali

This project involves 80 women, usually family breadwinners, mothers of multiply-handicapped children. These women meet in a Centre for handicapped children run by the Daughters of Charity, where the project is based. The objective of the project is to support all these women’s needs. They are given, above all else, training which enables them to become their children’s co-therapists. This is achieved through a teaching process – learning the theory and practice of the characteristics of particular handicaps (symptoms, impairments, etc...) and therapeutic ways of treating their children. This training is carried out with the direct participation of the mother who is herself in therapy. Supervision and instruction is in the hands of the interdisciplinary team (a physiotherapist, a professional therapist, a speech therapist and a psychologist.) The 15 AIC volunteers permanently support this training and other training in this centre.

The objective of this project is to **initiate a systemic change** between the handicapped children and their mothers. Their disadvantage is not regarded simply as a lack of personal and economic assets. **The project takes into account everything with which these mothers, who live in a society which is not yet ready to accept differences, are confronted.**

This type of training which allows the mothers to become co-therapists of their handicapped children is **innovative**. It aims to promote a **cultural change** in how society behaves towards

handicapped children and their rehabilitation. (*Ref.: Training Booklet, October 2010*).

EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Tsiriy Project - AIC MADAGASCAR

Rose de Lima Ramanankavana

A DREAM, A PROJECT, A REALITY

Four years ago, faced with the poverty and the ignorance which was prevalent in the villages, our AIC Team dreamt of a great project to eliminate illiteracy and promote training where **the beneficiaries themselves would become the training instructors**. The project was initiated in 2010!!!

The context:

The Diocese of Farafangana is one of the most isolated in Madagascar. The school infrastructure is inadequate and the standard of living of the parents is not conducive to learning for the children who often go out to work from an early age.

Even though the government has begun to get involved in implementing the Millennium Development Goals – whose aim is to guarantee universal education – it has not yet reached the sparsely-populated and isolated region of the southeast. Here funds have not yet become available and even when teachers arrive there they soon leave and go to the towns.

In 2009 the national crisis made the situation worse and put a stop to everything that was being done. Children's rights are not respected and because of poverty, society is not shocked by child labour and the lack of schooling is not seen as a problem by society.

In addition to an absence of educational infrastructure in some villages there are the economic difficulties experienced by disadvantaged families. The children are often looked after by their grandparents who cannot, under any circumstances, send them to school. They send them out to look for little jobs which allow them to make a contribution to household expenses.

In these circumstances, Caritas and AIC look for ways to improve the situation of these families through literacy and training, for both mothers and children.

The Project

In order to confront this intolerable situation we: a team made up of AIC, Diocesan Caritas, Society of the Daughters of Charity, St Vincent de Paul Conference and Marian Youth set up Project Tsiry – which means “seed”.

- This is a project aimed at the elimination of illiteracy of uneducated children, young isolated women and illiterate adults. The project is being conducted in the southeast region of Madagascar and **the aim** is that the target population will be able to give a basic education to their children, educate them on matters of hygiene, sickness prevention and agricultural activities.
- The elimination of illiteracy, education and training are catalysts for development and a solution to poverty.
- The project will see the **involvement of the whole community**, which will be respon-

sible for the success of the activities by collaborating together in planning, technical and spiritual support and the evaluation of procedures.

Initiation of Tsiry Project

In December 2009 the Vincentian Family “Systemic Change Prize” enabled us to plan and run 10 elimination of illiteracy and basic training programmes for 700 beneficiaries in villages of the SOUTHEAST over a period of 2 years.

Beginning in March 2010:

- **Stage 1:** Recruitment of monitors from the target village communities, and of 3 instructors who would train the monitors and one inspector.
- **Stage 2:** A 10 day training course for these young people. Training is given by a body which specialises in child and adult literacy elimination.
- **Stage 3:** Arrival on site and initiation of programme.

During the first six months there were: 7 locations for children and 11 for motivated and enthusiastic adults. Their reports demonstrate the determination of these beneficiaries to escape from their vulnerable and precarious situation.

In September 2010 began **Stage 4:** Second training session for monitors, instructors and the inspector,

- Meetings and discussions
- Evaluation of the first six months
- Extra training to move forward

Concern: the children get on well and are happy to come to class but they are so malnourished and in such a precarious state that their move onwards to normal schools will be delayed. **Solution:** Canteens are set up thanks to AIC and the Italian Vincentian Family.

Concern: The adults are less enthusiastic because they are faced with dreadful economic problems (the effect of cyclones, drought, political instability resulting in huge inflation). **Solution:** Thanks to UNESCO standard community development projects are established based on the needs and proposals of the beneficiaries themselves.

This is why the second training session for monitors focussed on the holistic development of the person as a free citizen living in a democracy with rights and responsibilities, who is able to manage their life (with adequate educational aids), someone monitored in small-scale economic activities (micro-credit, agriculture, basket-work etc).

Elements of Systemic Change

The Tsiry Project aims at Systemic Change because it has the objective of training people from the local community, especially women, so they are able to educate their own children and combat illiteracy among women. They equally aim to make the community aware of the importance of education as a tool for development.

The disadvantaged communities, especially the parents, become responsible for education where the government cannot guarantee it. In addition the Tsiry Project is a response to

the poverty suffered by many communities and this project can be used as a model elsewhere (multiplier effect).

Results

- Young unemployed persons have been able to find work as monitors, instructors or inspectors and have benefited from adequate training which will be useful to them in the future.
- Happy children work more effectively. A regular midday meal every day makes them more energetic and more interested in their studies.
- Parents get back their dignity and self-confidence and support each other more efficiently.

Several beneficiaries have become spiritually liberated and participate actively in the liturgy in their own parishes.

In the southern region, the local very religious communities intend to build a school in the future so that the project can continue.

Some parents have become aware of the value of education and have decided to send their children back to state schools after a few months in literacy classes. This has made more places available to other children.

In conclusion, we would like to say that nothing comes easily and fighting poverty in a country like Madagascar is a very difficult task – so many obstacles stand in the way, the people are already surviving in the face of many difficulties and sustained development

seems like a utopian dream. However the fact that a start has been made is one more step towards the future.

EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF ERADICATING POVERTY

Elena Lasida, Economist and Theologian

Elena Lasida is an economist and theologian. She is a doctor of economic and social science and she teaches at the Catholic University in Paris. The following is a summary of her contribution.

You have asked me to speak about education as a means of eradicating poverty. I am not a member of your organisation, but here are three characteristics in keeping with who you are:

1. You are first and foremost an organisation of women and I am a woman. Our bodies function to welcome new life. This gives us a particular sensitivity towards anything, which bears new life. This is a different way of looking at life and the world.
2. You are a Christian organisation and I am a Christian. This is another special way of looking at the future. Our faith invites us to see the future as full of promise not threat.
3. You are an international organisation. I belong to the North and South as I come from Uruguay. I am of Italian origin and I live in France. This is yet another particular way of looking at the world because I belong to different cultures and I understand and respect the multiculturalism of your association. Belonging to several cultures is enriching. Borders are a way of recognising differences but can also be used as a means of communication when they are crossed. The word frontier is negative when it divides but positive when it is a question of communicating by crossing over.

Here are two other characteristics linked to the theme of “Education and Poverty” as regards who I am:

- I am a teacher of Social Economics. My profession is education. This has given me a particular attitude towards human beings because education aims to help others to start out in life.
- My profession leads me to confront poverty from an economic point of view. To see it not as a mathematical model but to study limits and inequalities. Social Economics is a way of looking at poverty not by what is lacking but by stressing the potential, which exists in the people who live in a situation of poverty.

Starting from here we are going to speak about education. My talk will be in three sections but linked together:

- The importance of systemic change
- An illustration from the sphere of social and supportive economics
- The launch of three initiatives to which we are invited.

I- The Importance of Systemic Change

Systemic change is very important when speaking about education because it refers to a fundamental change in all aspects of human life: material, spiritual, professional, physical, mental and religious, and it teaches us to respond to all these needs without separating them.

Systemic also means that it is necessary to bring together all the members of a society, everyone concerned, and that the attitude and the manner in which this change is conceived and brought about are more important than the final result. Any changes however small can have

repercussions far beyond what was originally planned.

With reference to education here are three consequences:

- It is suggested that we **think differently about the relationship between the educator and the one who is being educated**. Education is not a one-way process (someone passing on his or her knowledge to someone else). We must think of education in terms of mutual exchange. We must also see what the learner can give to the teacher. This is a big challenge.
- We are invited to think of the act of educating not in terms of “filling a lack of knowledge” but rather in terms of “**identifying and developing each person’s unique capabilities**”. It is not a question of passing on a skill but rather of identifying and helping to develop already existing capabilities.
- We are invited to **think of evaluation in a different way**: systemic change implies that we think of the process of evaluation not with the aim of testing predetermined results, but in order to see if what we have communicated has been properly learnt, if we have learnt something new together. It is not the result but the process of learning which matters, the way in which the learning took place.

These three suggestions are radical changes when applied to education, but **this change is more fundamental when speaking of poverty!**

- **It changes the relationship between the teacher and the student**, volunteer and recipient. We must think of this relationship in terms of mutual giving and never forget that the one who is taught **also has something to give**.
- This infers a **radical change in the way we think about poverty**. I should not see what is lacking in a person but what skills he or she has; that are suitable for development. It is the way in which we form society together which is called into question with regard to poverty and not only the distribution of benefits. It will doubtless be necessary to redistribute wealth but the problem of poverty is concerned, above all, with a much more fundamental question, that of the plan for society. From now on a poor person will not only be seen as someone lacking and in need of help but as an active participant in society, who must be able to take part in an overall plan with his or her own unique abilities. This approach to poverty asks us to have a different concept of justice. It leads us to talk of “**contributive**” rather than “distributive” **justice**, in which a poor person is seen as someone, who has something to contribute to the common good. It is a question of creating the right conditions for each human being to feel that he or she has something to give. Two different concepts of humanity are implicit in each of these ideas of justice: in the first a human person is defined by needs to be satisfied, in the second by his or her creative capacity. Each human being **must both be and feel he is a co-creator**.
- **This changes the way of considering how to evaluate** the struggle against poverty. In the word evaluation is the word value. Evaluation means **attributing value**: To see that which is new, that which emerges unexpectedly and that which gives to this person a new value.

II – In the Area of Social and Interdependent Economics

The concepts of education and poverty, which we have seen, require us to adopt a **new language** and suggest that we:

- Move from a mere “relationship” to a “**co-relationship**”. If the relationship is mutual it involves “**acting together**” with the other person. **This makes the struggle against**

poverty more effective.

- Another word to change is “**need**”. We should turn the notion of need upside down and in so doing arrive at the point of saying to the person in need “**I need you to do something together with me**”. In order to motivate people to stand on their own two feet again we must say, “I need you”.
- In the word “**evaluation**” we must change the concept of **uncertainty**, which is implied. Usually we want to check that the objective has been achieved. We want to get rid of all the uncertainty. But there if is no uncertainty, there is nothing new which can appear. We must leave room for uncertainty, which means accepting that the “new” can emerge from the unforeseeable. Change is enormous!

This approach to the theme “Education and Poverty” is a good illustration from **Social and Interdependent Economics** where mutuality is not thought of as a transfer (of resources or skills), which aims merely to fulfil a lack, but rather as an appeal to each individual, and particularly to those who are often considered to be the weakest in our society, to take part in a common plan.

It requires a response to situations of poverty by means of practices, which create interdependence, a two-way process between the helper and the helped; practices in which the one who gives gets involved in doing “**a project together**”. It involves projects of micro-credit, micro-businesses, mutual cooperatives and fair trade.....These are experiences brought about by small agents, who carry little weight in the system as a whole but who are already showing today that thinking about interdependence in the very heart of the economy is not utopia but a very real possibility.

III – Three Shifts of Emphasis to be made

1. In terms of “relationships” we must **move from “independence” to “interdependence”**. We must aim for and create a relationship of give and take in which he and I both have something to give by remaining closely linked. This idea is strongly linked to the biblical idea of “**COVENANT**”, with the connotation of reciprocity, the capacity to take risks together and shared responsibility. It is certainly about co-creation, as between God and the Human Being.
2. As regards “needs” we must **move on from accessing material goods to the creation of them**, which means making each person feel that he or she has something to give by becoming a “creator” with her or her own abilities. It is linked to the biblical word “**PROMISE**”: a promise is not a result to be obtained, it is something which puts things into action, a motivation to keep going ever further!
3. In terms of evaluation we must **move on from quantity to quality**. We must move on to qualitative evaluation, which refers to the relationships we have been able to create and the new things which have come out of them. It is linked to the biblical word “**CREATION**”. In the beginning was chaos, God created new relationships between what was confused. This is the order of the quality of the relationship.

These are three changes associated with three biblical concepts, which further Systemic Change in education.

« THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN »

*Francesca Petriliggieri,
Head of Women's Action for Caritas-Spain*

Today we are going to speak specifically about women and we are going to show the huge possibilities for development and growth, which education implies for each and every one of them. In fact, the educational opportunities, which either mark with success or are lacking in a woman or a girl throughout her life will have a clear and direct influence on her journey through life and their impact will be a determining influence on her personal development.

We will also realise that the educational opportunities of girls and women are not solely dependent on their own choice but that a series of factors can either prevent or make difficult their access to education. We will also see that certain agents play a fundamental role and that their action is decisive. Finally, we will examine the role of the community in defending a social right such as education.

Thus, we will understand the need to act on a global plane, which is not led only by women (although they are obviously very influential), but where we will endeavour to involve more key agents. The principal agent of our action will always be **the community**.

Our last point will therefore show the need to mobilise the whole community, men and women, to set in motion the process of true transformation of our environment. For little by little we are becoming aware of the fact that equality, as much in the area of education as in other spheres, does not only concern women fighting with and on behalf of women. No, this concerns everyone, boys and girls, fathers and mothers, men and women.

Our work among people in difficult circumstances has proved to us that education and social exclusion are closely linked. What is more, the lack of education dramatically reduces people's opportunities in life. In fact, when a woman is in a situation which is difficult and on the fringes of society, she finds it more difficult to take up offers of training whether formal or informal and she has a greater risk of handing on these difficulties to her children, boys as well as girls.

It is for this reason that important agreements have been made during the last fifteen years, and that numerous initiatives have been taken. Two of these are of particular importance:

- The Millennium Development Goals
- The World Forum of Education for All

These initiatives show clearly that educational opportunities do not only have an impact on the lives of women themselves but equally on those of the whole family and consequently on the whole community.

Research in homes shows that one of the most important factors influencing the survival of children is the level of education reached by their mothers. For example, in Kenya the risk of dying before the age of five for children of mothers who have not completed their primary school education, is twice as high as that of children born to mothers, who have attained secondary or higher education.

It seems to me that given these facts it is no exaggeration to say that education can save lives.

1. A few facts...

The strength of educational systems in the world (the number of schools, teachers and pupils) has greatly increased. However, this increase has not been constant and it is even possible that it is actually slowing down because of the present crisis. Our experience of former crises shows us in fact that when there is a financial and economic crisis, the tendency is to reduce public expenditure.

As a consequence at the present time there are a considerable number of women in the world, who cannot read or write, and an equally large number of women, who have interrupted their studies. These limitations in education are reflected in social and professional opportunities. In this area it is essential that adult education is offered as much by public as private organisations.

We can say in conclusion that we still notice striking inequalities and that the disparity between the sexes is deeply rooted and that despite clear advances, there is still much to be done.

2. The breaks...

The greatest obstacles and **social and cultural barriers**, which put a stop to or interrupt the educational process of girls arise at adolescence, particularly when they reach the age of puberty. **In many countries education for boys is considered of more value than for girls.**

At this age girls are more exposed to danger, physical as much as emotional. In fact, they are sometimes considered to be women and have to confront **the possibility of suffering sexual harassment and even abuse.** This leads a father to take his daughter out of school. It is also how a girl may become a mother too soon, which causes an abrupt interruption of her education. In many countries a pregnant teenager must abandon her studies. This premature break will bring with it a drastic reduction in her life opportunities in several areas.

The community and society pay a high price for this interruption of basic studies, a cessation which prevents one from obtaining a quality education. We should all feel responsible for this.

In the world many communities commonly practise **early marriage.** This practice is a huge obstacle to the progress of education. Changing these local practices requires time and education. What is more the law is often insufficient and does not allow for the eradication of this pattern.

Poverty is still one of the major obstacles preventing girls from having access to education. The economic circumstances of a person, whether a girl or a woman, and those of her family are often what determines her access to schooling and whether she will complete her studies successfully.

Because of the poor conditions in which these households find themselves, families make boys and girls work, very often in agriculture or domestic work. This accounts to a large extent for the increasing numbers who drop out of school, higher still among girls who are moreover taken out of school by their families to **take up duties in the home** or to care for their younger brothers and sisters.

Parents and family are in general the principal employers. As a result of which managing to influence their situation and attitudes constitutes a sizeable challenge for education. There can be no doubt that working children are a direct result of poverty.

We know that poverty is to be found on different levels and that certain factors have a particular effect on conditions of poverty for girls:

- **Location, meaning whether one lives in a rural area or on the outer fringes**
- **Belonging to a minority race or group**
- **Living in an area of armed conflict**
- **Having a handicap**

True equality in these areas would mean that every boy and girl would have the same chance to go to school, would be able to benefit from the same length of schooling, would acquire the same knowledge and qualifications and that later on they would have access to the same jobs with an equal level of income.

3. Action...

A brief survey of the situation has shown us that as regards the education of girls and women on a global level, certain factors have considerable influence over the educational opportunities of this group of the population.

The factors which have the greatest influence on the educational chances of girls are above all:

- **Homes suffering from poverty**
- **Risks which come from being surrounded by violence and sexual abuse leading to early pregnancy**
- **The demands of society, which require one to assume traditional roles and the cultural practice of early marriage**
- **The requirement to take up domestic duties or care for others and other types of work as a direct consequence of poverty.**

It seems clear that in order to encourage the education of women and girls, we must act equally on all aspects directing our action towards the agents, who play a fundamental role in continuing to erect social and cultural barriers in situations of poverty, and who can create an obstacle to women and girls just at the time when they could benefit from their right to education.

The Christian community must *« promote itself as a community which proclaims, exposes, and lives the experience of involvement with its brothers and the Christian sharing of material goods »*.

It is for this reason that we are asked to **involve members of the community in our actions and to do our utmost** for them to feel involved, so that by their participation they can be as responsible and active as possible.

We must pay particular attention to establishing a process of interrelations and mutual collaboration with the local community. Through our actions we will uncover conditions of injustice, oppression, suffering and exploitation endured by the poorest people. By uncovering these conditions we search to involve the whole community in creating the plan of God's Love.

The community must defend and promote educational opportunities for girls and women. In order to do this the entire community must involve itself in defending this fundamental right, while being aware of the fact that these educational opportunities will bear fruit, which will benefit the whole community.

The Global Campaign for Education is a good example. It is being launched this year with the slogan “**Education is not just a fairy story, it’s a right for girls and women**”. There will be millions of us across the world mobilising ourselves to explain to our political leaders the difficulties encountered by millions of girls and women in the world, when trying to access quality education. We will also be asking them not to forget to keep to the commitment in which they agreed to release the necessary means for Education for All to become a reality by 2015.

*
* *

2nd April 2011

WORKING GROUPS: “TOWARDS OUR OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES”

OUR COMMON THEME

Alicia Duhne

Yesterday we explored thoroughly what education means in the fullest sense. We started with the spiritual aspect with Mgr Dal Toso, then Laurence shared with us some good reflections and we heard testimonies of successful training, whether undergone by ourselves or dealing with educational projects for more vulnerable people.

*In the afternoon we were fascinated as Elena Lasida and Francesca Petriliggieri shared with us a different vision of charity. This led us to ask ourselves a basic question: **Which kind of life do we wish to lead?** In order to build a more just world, can we speak of contributive justice?*

This morning we had our Mass in the Basilica of Saint Laurence at Escorial. Then we visited the Monastery. This was a wonderful opportunity to be in a place so rich in Spanish history and also to share together with participants at the Assembly.

This afternoon we are going to pave the way for the next two years.

In which direction do we wish to work?

What will be our Operational Guidelines?

Pascale will show us how we are going to work this afternoon.

THE WORKSHOPS

Pascale Lepeu

1. What is to be done?

The theme of the Assembly: A Pathway to build the society of tomorrow.

With AIC we are already on this path.

A pathway to change the conditions of the poorest.

A pathway to prevent poverty, especially among women.

A pathway which will allow awareness and the involvement of society as a whole.

2. To give you a chance to speak and exchange views amongst yourselves about:

- a. What you have heard
- b. What struck you particularly
- c. What you want to report back to your teams

3. An exchange of ideas on how to:

- a. Take part in the creation of future Operational Guidelines
- b. Get down to work in your teams

You have a role of passing on. You are here in Madrid on a mission as delegates sent by your groups in your countries. You must report back to them the essence of what has been said as well as the ideas and materials to get activities moving where you are. So for you as AIC volunteers, your aim during these workshops is to find concrete ideas with which you are going to go off and get things moving in your groups and your countries.

4. How do we exchange?

- 1st question : What have I heard?
- 2nd question : What shall I do about it?

5. For each question:

a. Personal reflection in silence

This time for personal reflection is important because it allows you to take into account your experience on the ground

b. Sharing in sub-groups

Each person must have a chance to speak

c. Reporting back the responses of the sub-groups

Together you will choose a word or a phrase, which will be common to you all and which will be the answer to the question asked. One of you will write it down on the sheet, which the organisers will give out

d. Return to the workshop without discussion

The person who has done the writing or someone else from the sub-group will read out this answer to the whole workshop

e. Return to the Plenary Session tomorrow

All the written responses will be taken into account and will become the object of a report back to the Plenary Session tomorrow

6. We need you...Alone we can go faster, together we can go further

You have no doubt noticed that the logo of this Assembly is a puzzle, which shows three people, two women and one man. Let us say that these workshops are an important part of this puzzle.

3rd April 2011

STATUTORY ASSEMBLY

The Report of the Statutory Assembly is sent to the Presidents.

OUR COMMON THEME

During these last few days deep reflection has allowed us to become aware of the fact that education should be a two-way process and that everyone is responsible for this. This education will be more complete if we consider it in its entirety.

The participants have invited us to have a different vision of education and of poverty, which urges us to ask several important questions: what must we do in order to build a world that is more just and fair, which includes all members of society?

Then we started off the work in groups to map out the pathway that we hope to follow during the next two years. Your contributions as to how to draw up the next Operational Guidelines are very interesting.

Now we are going to attend the Eucharist organised by the Portuguese-speaking volunteers. Then we will have our Statutory Assembly during the course of which we will elect the Executive Board, who will help the National Associations to put into practice the new Operational Guidelines.

This afternoon Pascale, who is in charge of the workshops is going to give us a summary of the work achieved in the different working groups from yesterday. Then Laurence will give us a written account of the Operational Guidelines in which we will note the future that we want for AIC.

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

AIC 2011-2013, PLANNING TOGETHER:

Education: a two-way process

- A To identify and value skills and potential
- A To encourage interdependence
- A To promote co-creativity

Supported by AIC Training

- A spiritual, ethical and Vincentian
- A in techniques, particularly in communication and visibility

CONCLUSIONS

Laurence de la Brosse

Dear Friends in AIC,

First of all a big thank you for the confidence you have renewed in me today.

Be assured that I will put all my strength and all my heart at into serving AIC during this new mandate: I will work with confidence and conviction.

With confidence in you, the members of AIC and especially the members of the EB, who have been elected today, and with whom I am delighted to collaborate. Trust in the Holy Spirit, who shows us the way and accompanies us along it. And with conviction: we in AIC are a strength, which we have spoken a lot about these last few days and which we have felt within ourselves. From where we are we can develop a new way of life based on interrelationships. Let us know how to tell other people about it.

I would like to thank very warmly the two members, who are coming to the end of their term of office, Marla Barros, who has been my deputy for the past two years and Betty Pabito, who was in charge of coordination for Asia. Thanks to these two for their commitment, their faith in AIC and their friendship. A new pathway is opening up for them in their collaboration with AIC. We have spoken about it together and I thank them whole-heartedly for their spirit of service.

This leads me to speak about those who haven't been elected, both of whom are absent for reasons beyond their control, but their candidature has clearly demonstrated their willingness to serve and I thank them very warmly. We are going to see together how to continue our collaboration.

Throughout these days of intense work, new paths have opened up for us, for the organisation of our work in our national associations and in our international network and for the actions we take.

When we return to our associations we shall be full of new ideas to share.

Let us take up again the theme of our Assembly 2011:

« Education, a pathway to build together ».

Education

During this Assembly, we have gained a better understanding that to educate a person is to bring out what is best and unique in them.

For this reason we are asked to think positively. This has been said in different ways – seeing in the other person which skills can be developed, trusting, “having a heart which sees with the eyes of God”.

The evening celebrations seem to me to be a special moment where each person can give the best of herself. We all need a party to celebrate together. Thanks to AIC Spain for Thursday evening's party and in particular for the time shared with the choir of the young people of Bilbao. We can imagine the amount of work necessary to put on such a show, but what joy and pride shone forth from the members of this orchestra!

A Pathway

We have spoken of new steps to take, of journeys, doors to open; so many images, which invite us to let new things appear and to welcome them.

Where do we want to go along this path? The word dream has been repeated several times.

In particular, in AIC Ukraine's project "Smiley Kids", we asked each child to write down in an exercise book the dream he has and when the dream comes true, to write another one.

Let us also, as AIC volunteers write down our dream. Let us be ambitious for our actions!

To Build

Systemic change urges us to think differently about the relationship between all members of society and to think of them as agents.

This leads us to move from struggling against poverty to building together and making possible the participation of each person in the common project.

For this we must perhaps learn **another language**, adopt different words because words are powerful; they form our attitudes. And we will use the words valuation, potential, capability, and interdependence, which will give us a new way of acting.

I am convinced that our AIC associations have a prophetic role to play in civil society. They must bear witness to the fact that new things are possible.

But we know only too well that this testimony and love for our brothers living in poverty can only come from the Holy Trinity, which is the source of love. Thanks to Father Manuel for reminding us, and thanks also to Father Celestino, who has reinforced the need to take time for training and to meditate on the Gospel with the eyes of the poor; thanks to Father Elie, who this morning in his homily brought together the path travelled during this Assembly.

Let us be patient. We need time for each of us to move on.

Together

Elena Lasida spoke to us of **contributive justice**. It is a systemic way of thinking about building a more just society; where each person has a place.

Up to now we have made some good plans for the struggle against poverty. Now is the moment to go forward in action together!

*Before I conclude, I would like to **thank you very warmly, each and every one, for your participation:***

- First, AIC Spain, Carmen and Mary and all those who welcomed us and who have been preparing this Assembly for so many months.
- The members of the International Secretariat, who have done a considerable amount of work.
- The teams who prepared this Assembly and who were able to experience what it is to plan together!
- All those who took part through their eyewitness accounts, the presentation of their projects, their questions, the preparation of the liturgy, the workshops, and the party evenings.
- And our friends, the translators, without whom we would not be able to work and whom I now ask to join us.

You said in the workshops, **AIC is a strength!**

So, let us use it with conviction and may the Holy Spirit go with us.

Keep up the good work!

International Association of Charities

An international network of over 200,000 volunteers, mostly women, acting locally in 52 countries in the fight against poverty.

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