This booklet, the first in a series of three, was written by Father Eli Chavez, AIC International’s new Spiritual Advisor, to guide us in our spiritual development between the 2011 and 2013 International Assemblies.

We thank him wholeheartedly for his work.
PRESENTATION

AIC held its Assembly in 2011. Following the Operational Guidelines that were drawn up on this occasion for the next two years, AIC proposes to put education at the heart of all its projects. The aim of these reflections is to help you to integrate and put into action the commitments made in the OG. These booklets constitute a pastoral tool designed to stimulate reflection, and as much as possible group reflection, so that volunteers can deepen, take on and see through this commitment together.

The reflections that we propose to you here follow a very precise objective: it’s a question of deepening the commitment to education made by AIC, with a view to training both the poor and the volunteers themselves at the same time. What matters in these studies is not the accumulation of intellectual knowledge, but that we grow in our practice of charity, helping us to be more aware, committed and active Christians as we serve the poor through charity that transforms lives.

Try to be creative. Working from the outlines being proposed to you, try to make use of participative group dynamics, use your canticles or new texts, invite people to speak on the proposed themes, etc. Through creativity, meetings become convivial and enriching.

I hope you can all study well and work in a fruitful manner on our mission, which is to “To make God known to the poor; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it is for the poor” (Coste XII, p.80).
AIC’s Proposal for Action over the next two years:

280 AIC volunteers came from all over the world to meet in El Escorial, Madrid, from 30th March to 3rd April 2011. Inspired by the theme of the Assembly, “Education as a means of eradicating poverty”, the delegates came to see beyond the normal definition of education, the one with which we are familiar. For them, education must be a process that allows people to grow and achieve their complete potential, through reciprocal exchanges between the educator and the person being educated, so that, enriched as humans by the experience, they create something new.

At the end of the Assembly, the AIC members, guided by Vincentian spirituality, formulated the Operational Guidelines for the next two years:

**Education: A two-way process:**

1. To identify and value skills and potential.
2. To encourage interdependence.
3. To promote co-creativity.

**Supported by AIC Training:**

1. Spiritual, ethical and Vincentian.
2. In techniques, particularly in communication and visibility.
To consider:

- **The Acts of the AIC Assembly 2011** (see Training Booklet no.17) present a series of themes, initiatives and proposals that help us to understand that education is a vast and complex reality. Equally, they show us the urgent need to work on education in the world today and the challenges that this involves.

1st Meeting:

GOD EDUCATES HIS PEOPLE: THE PEDAGOGY OF GOD

1. **Opening**: Solomon’s Prayer for Wisdom (Wisdom 9, 1-4&9-11).


Etymologically, the word “education” comes from the Latin verbs “edere”, which means “to feed” and “educare”, which means “to make leave”, “to push outside”, “to extract”. So education is an action or a collection of actions in which the objective is to communicate and to bring something out. It is hence a vast process which allows for the transmission of knowledge, values, customs, ways of behaving and acting; at the same time it is a process of developing potential and possibilities. It’s a process of partnerships, awareness and cultural, behavioural and moral creation.

Education is a reality of capital importance for people. It is linked to every aspect of life – personal, social, political, economic, etc., and in particular for our accomplishments and problems in our personal life. It concerns the development of every aspect of our personality, given that we exist, act and live with other human beings and the whole of Creation. Education can be gained in a **formal manner** (in schools, institutions or universities, with well established programmes and content) and in a **non-formal manner** (in different situations and various points in life, when we participate in the life of society, live together or act in a group, in the first place in the family. This kind of education is acquired throughout the whole of life).
Education develops in the process of searching for truth, where those giving the education just as much as those receiving it welcome a relationship of mutual assistance, interaction and exchange of knowledge. People are educated when they feel in harmony, by an action that communicates respect, by deepening past values and discovering new ones and by openness towards the future. The educational action must come to fruition freely and must liberate the human being in his or her entirety.

Questions for Reflection:

- Practically, in reality, in everyday life, how do people, society and governments understand education and put it into practice?

- In your own reality, on a local level, what are the practices and ways of understanding education which seem to you incomplete, erroneous or unclear?

3. **Compare Reality with the Christian Faith**: The Pedagogy of God, A Guiding Light for our Understanding and Practice of Education.

Bible Reading: In this reading, the author, who is personified as King Solomon, shows the importance of wisdom: it is the companion of all those who, in one way or another, have had a responsibility in the construction of society and the history of Humanity. True wisdom has its origin in God, it is the project of God, who is present in all the universe.

- **Bible Reading**: Wisdom 8, 2-17

- **Moment of Reflection**: (Moments of silence, meditation: What is this true wisdom which emanates from God? How can we educate ourselves and help to educate others in order to obtain true wisdom in life?)
Some Elements of God’s Pedagogy: The Bible, taken as a whole, presents God’s project, which is a proposition for a personal and social way of life that is destined to achieve happiness and holiness. In this project God reveals His infinite wisdom and communicates it by offering it to all men and women in the form of a proposal for living well.

a) **Creation** – In the **Creation**, God demonstrates the scale of his love, by giving goodness and life. God created man in His image. He created man and woman, who are different from one another but equal in dignity. The human being is the supreme expression of divine action.

Opposing the sin that defaces His Creation, **God continues to work and create, by educating Humanity** in order to preserve, develop and restore the work that He has created, in accordance with His nature and purpose.

**The Educational Actions of God:**

- **...Come from concrete reality**: God educates by collaborating with human beings. These people collaborate in total freedom, they contribute and become co-creators. At the very heart of events, **God calls and stimulates each person, as well as the community.**

- **...Are progressive**: Our God the Creator is still communicating His wisdom in a progressive manner, **step by step**. He educates and guides His People, so that they go forth along paths that are right and good in His eyes.

- **...Require a conversion**, a change of lifestyle: It’s a question of breaking away from the alienating sin of the past. As People on the right path, in a community of believers that is constantly growing, God educates us one by one.
It is true that each person is valued and educated as an individual; however, the objective of the education isn’t just individual development and perfection, but the growth and maturation of the entire group. In God’s educational actions, the individual and the community are two poles in permanent tension.

b) Alliance – Faced with humanity that had fallen through sin, God called Abraham and came to an **Alliance** with him: “I will be your God, and you and your descendants will be my People”. This Alliance is founded upon God’s love, given freely. Every story in the Bible is a story of God’s actions. Faithful to the alliance, God speaks to the hearts of the People through his story, educating them about a new way of life.

Faithful to this Alliance, when the People were slaves in Egypt:

- **God sees, listens and knows** the poverty of the People and comes down to free them (Exodus 3:7). He is God of Justice. The call to freedom and justice is an irrevocable condition in God’s plan for humanity.

- **God liberates** the People from their captivity in Egypt and He reveals that **the alliance involves an exodus**, an itinerary of breaking free from the house of slavery in order to reach the house of liberty and justice. In his Alliance, God enters the life of the People, He walks with them, He awakens the dignity which had been oppressed and denied them, He educates them to bring them towards a new way of life, with love and justice.

- **God performs his educational actions by means of an itinerary**. This involves leaving the land of oppression, then growing and developing progressively: God’s actions do not remove human commitment, but put it to work in all senses and in all its dimensions; He
The Pedagogy of God

points us to a way of seeing, listening, feeling compassion and acting in freedom and towards freedom. In order to live this life of freedom, God gives the Law, the Commandments, as tools necessary for the construction of a new story, a new and dignified life.

- God wants to rely on the people, on the poor. In the Alliance, the poor become companions of God and the subjects of a joint action. God helps the poor to discover their own power so that they can develop, freeing themselves from all forms of exclusion, vulnerability and poverty. God teaches that the union, organisation and action of the poor in favour of life and justice are necessary in order to fulfil His project. He teaches that we need others, and especially the poor, to learn and to build a fair and dignified life together, in a reciprocal relationship.

c) The Promise – In the Creation that has continued throughout history and in the Alliance, God promised the Promised Land, which “flows with milk and honey”. He promised a new world of peace, justice and freedom. God’s Promise isn’t just an objective to achieve or a result to obtain; it’s a pathway that we must make. The Promise pushes the People to walk, to collaborate in order to awaken and involve others and to walk with them.

- God walks with the People towards the Promised Land. He teaches a new way of life, in freedom and justice. For the exodus being liberated, the pathway is full of contradictions, frustrations and failures: they wanted to return to the land of slavery, they feared freedom, the price to be paid in order to successfully achieve freedom scared them. Faced with the weaknesses and unfaithfulness of the People, God
revealed himself as **demanding in the objective to be attained, but equally compassionate, patient, merciful, benevolent, just and loyal.** God is there to correct, but even more so to offer a heart rich in mercy and forgiveness.

- **God educates the People through events:** Divine pedagogy adapts itself to the reality of the historical conditions in which the People were living. He educates in life, based on life and for life in all its dimensions. It is a pedagogy of love and freedom.

- **God teaches how to create new relationships, new practices and new attitudes,** so that the novelty of his love grows among the people. God’s project demands that we search and create new behaviours and practices so that human, personal and social reality is embodied and transformed. In God’s project, the People are forever being called to build a new way of life, to live together in a fraternal, free and just society. It is vital that we accept **challenges and uncertainty,** from these spring new ideas. At the end of God’s pedagogical project there is the dream of the Kingdom, where justice, truth and freedom meet to give rise to new values and new practices, which will little by little make God’s project a reality.

- **God encourages the People** so that they don’t lose their way through a lack of experience or poor knowledge of the divine project. In particular, He sends prophets and speaks through them. As partners of God-the-Educator, they denounce erring and mistakes, they point towards God’s project and the path that must be followed and they perform transformational actions. The prophets raise the hope of the People, they don’t let them be discouraged and prevent them
from being seduced by false idols and behaviour that goes against God’s project. The prophets cultivate the utopia of the Promise; they make sure that the People have a faithful attitude to the alliance, that it is an attitude of hope in life, commitment to an ideal of justice and freedom and most of all, faithfulness and filial confidence in God. Once gained, freedom will remain an irrevocable condition for the chosen People and for all of humanity.

4. **Act:** Education, A Pathway to Build Together, as partners of God-the-Educator.

The three Biblical themes – Creation, Alliance and Promise, all interlinked, help us to understand how, in the Old Testament, God acted and educated his People. They inspire in us new practices and ways of educating, appropriate to our actions in the family, in the Church, in serving the poor, in society, in life as a whole. As people who live our faith, we are called to be partners of God-the-Educator.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Based on the way in which God educates His People, what pedagogical attitudes or educational practices should we put to work in our actions – whether personal, in the family, in society or in our work with the poor, in order to be good partners of God-the-Educator?

- What clarifications or elements can we draw from knowing how God educates His People to better understand and put in place AIC’s Operational Guidelines on education?

5. **Conclusion:** Pray – Solomon’s Prayer for Wisdom once again.
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AIC aisbl

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Editor in Chief:  
Natalie Monteza  
Tel.: 32 (0) 10 45 63 53  
Email: info@aic-international.org
www.aic-international.org

Suscription for one year  
10 Euros  
Payable to the account of your national AIC association

Collaborators for this edition:

Original Text  
Father Eli Chavez

Translation  
Catherine Avery

Design & Layout  
Tayde de Callataý
Jesus, Teacher of Teachers

The reflections put forward by Father Eli Chavez, International Spiritual Advisor for AIC, have a very clear objective: to deepen AIC’s commitment regarding education, with a view to the training provided to both the poor and the volunteers. In the first booklet we saw how God educates His people; now in this second booklet, we are going to follow Jesus, our Teacher of Teachers.
INTRODUCTION:
Education: AIC’s Propositions and Commitment

AIC 2011-2013
Education, A Pathway to Build Together

The theme of the 2011 Assembly in Madrid, “Education as a means of fighting against poverty”, invited delegates to look beyond the usual definition of education with which we are familiar.

Very often, when we talk about education, people think first of all about schools, lessons, teachers and school systems. They see education as the acquisition and accumulation of practical and theoretical knowledge designed principally for carrying out a profession. In reality, education is a much wider process which continues throughout the whole of life, within the family, in society in general, in associations and social movements, in politics, at work, in churches, in educational establishments and through social participation and means of social communication...

The Vatican Council II, in the declaration GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS on Christian education of 28th October 1965 tells us:

“The family, which has the primary duty of imparting education needs help of the whole community. In addition, therefore, to the rights of parents and others to whom the parents entrust a share in the work of education, certain rights and duties belong indeed to civil society, whose role is to direct what is required for the common temporal good...”
“Finally, in a special way, the duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognised as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life. The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human”.

**Question for reflection:**

- What is the mission and the responsibility of Christians nowadays in the field of education?
GOD EDUCATES HIS PEOPLE II: JESUS, TEACHER OF TEACHERS

Opening: Psalm 111

A look at reality: EDUCATION TO DO WHAT?

The purposes of education and life are linked. Education is linked to all aspects of life, it can help someone to accomplish their endeavours and realise their dreams:

- Being more human, cultivating your own capacities, being aware, having a critical mind, acting, developing your feelings and your abilities to be fulfilled in social relationships, overcoming your personal difficulties, having a career, being an active member of society, working with others, creating and respecting culture, building solidarity, improving living conditions...

- Exercising your citizenship, knowing your own rights and responsibilities and being able to enjoy them, respecting the rights of others, living in a responsible manner, having a civil conscience, helping to build a fair and humane society, cultivating values and the ideals of fraternity, justice, freedom and solidarity, having a relationship with God and practising a religion, knowing and living in harmony with other religions and cultures, achieving true wisdom in life...
Question for reflection:
➢ “Education never ends, it continues throughout the whole of life, and it is essential that the person develops and achieves their personal and social dreams of freedom, peace, justice and happiness”. Comment on this affirmation and give some examples.

Confronting reality with the Christian faith: JESUS, TEACHER OF TEACHERS

In Jesus, Son of God made into man, guiding path, truth and life, God definitively fulfilled His alliance: He demonstrated the richness of His creation and He fulfilled His promise, by unveiling His Kingdom of life in its fullness, the new Heaven and the new earth (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Moment of reflection: Think of an event or something that Jesus said which incorporates a teaching about education, and share your thoughts with the group.

Some elements of Jesus’s educational practices:

In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus presented His mission: anointed and sent by the Holy Spirit, He came “to proclaim the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19). He was sent by God the Father, and His religious mission was that “you might have life—life in all its fullness” (John 10:10). He proclaimed that for this the priority is life: “But seek His Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well” (Luke 12:31).
Jesus lived by and proclaimed God’s project in a particularly **original** way. He appeared in the guise of a poor person, He lived like a poor person, the poor occupied a privileged place in his teachings, and He helped them, as much in their sufferings as with their needs. It is as a poor person and defender of the poor that Jesus presented and lived according to the **proposition for a new life**, desired by God since the Creation: Love is the measure of everything.

Jesus announced this proposition through words and actions; He lived by what He proclaimed, and He proclaimed what He lived by. This proposition, which is embodied in the history of His people and His time, follows a **pedagogical itinerary**. Jesus educates us to guide us towards subscribing to His proposition; He wants to guide us towards transforming our lives, seeing life differently, living it through love. Here are some elements of his pedagogical methods:

- **Jesus establishes liberating practices**: Jesus’s time is marked by socioeconomic poverty and by Roman domination, but most of all by religious domination. The rigorousness with which the religious authorities applied the Law was the principle cause of exclusion and oppression of the poor. Jesus welcomed the poor, He healed their illnesses, He opened their eyes and hearts so that they saw life and their rights, and He integrated them into society.

- **Jesus teaches about respecting a person’s dignity**: Jesus critically examined traditions and religious practices that went against human dignity and were sources of discrimination and oppression. “The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath”. In other words, in order to work out whether any given law or human practice is valid, it is sufficient to see if the dignity of
the human being is respected. No activity or life project is legitimate and genuine if it doesn’t respect the true nature of the human being and his or her purpose.

- **Jesus develops a practice of inclusion:** As the children of God, we are all called to live through love in the new life. Jesus rejected and denounced all discriminatory practices, along with those that marginalise, reduce to slavery or repress or end life. Through Jesus, God called the whole world to live as a community, as a true people that love had made fraternal.

- **Jesus counts on the collaboration of the poor, whom He respected, valuing their wisdom and knowledge:** Jesus acted especially in Galilee, on the periphery of Israel where many poor people lived. He lived with the poor and chose His Apostles from among them...Better still, He recognised the wisdom of the poor. Jesus called into question the knowledge of the powerful and of intelligent people, but He valued the wisdom that comes from the painful life of the humblest.

- **Jesus links His message to real life, to the culture of the people:** Jesus started from reality, He was very practical, He spoke clearly about what seemed obscure. He used the typical narrative method found in popular culture. Through parables, He used a style that taught wisdom and generated questions. He led people to reflect and go deeper into the meaning of events; He left His audience to draw their own conclusions. As the parable was practical, it helped to memorise the message; it was perfectly suited to a culture in which knowledge was mainly passed on by word of mouth.

- **Jesus uses a pedagogy that reaches the heart and transforms life:** In His life and teachings, Jesus revealed that He was fully human. By His way of acting and His
Jesus, Teacher of Teachers

teachings, we perceive patience, compassion, sensitivity, mercifulness, trust, selflessness, solidarity, faith, hope, forgiveness, indulgence, tenderness, etc. His words and behaviour awaken human hearts, imprinting on them new values and behaviours; inviting us to a new way of living, communally and in solidarity; transforming the lives of those who choose to abandon wrongdoing and selfishness and open themselves up with enthusiasm to love for God and their neighbour.

- **Jesus educates through His presence, through the quality of His loving actions while living with the people:** Jesus’s presence among His disciples and the people, the fact He lived alongside them, constituted an educational process with the aim of announcing the message of Good News and preparing the disciples for their mission. Through dialogue, Jesus aroused questions in the heart of the community and the disciples; He allowed them in this way to bring to the surface what was hidden in the deepest parts of their being. In this process, He created a true community and the originality of his attitude allowed the disciples to see and live in a new way.

- **Jesus speaks with authority:** Jesus didn’t make use of his divine condition; He cast it off and made Himself equal to us in everything, except sin. He proposed His message humbly, without imposing it. He always respected the freedom of those who listened to Him and those who followed Him. However, His words and acts acquired credibility and authority because of the quality of His message and His life of serving. The values in His proposition acquired force and authority not because He was a power that came from the exterior, only through His generous, genuine and complete service offered to mankind and to God.
- **Jesus denounces false teachers**: Jesus, the supreme prophet, denounced ways of life which prevented people, and especially the poor, from leading a dignified life; these ways of life are social, economic, political and in particular religious. His words are clear and forcefully denounce those who “speak and don’t act, hypocrites, tombs that have been whitewashed” (Luke 11:37-54). The teachers and those who exercise authority over the people must lead an exemplary life and be willing to serve. They must be like Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served.

- **Jesus reveals the educational value of the Cross**: Death on the Cross is the historical price that Jesus paid for the revolutionary manner in which He saw life; He accepted this death, staying firm in His fidelity to God’s plan, and He overcame it in the Resurrection. It is thus that He taught us that in order to educate in solidarity, with the objective of the transformation of society and the deep personal and communal fulfilment of God’s children, we must make renunciations and cultivate generosity. He taught that very often in life, we must bear His cross and His suffering, necessary stages in the accomplishment of a greater good. In this world marked by evil, injustice and sin, no change is possible if it isn’t accompanied by total dedication, a huge amount of effort and even suffering.

- **Jesus teaches on the transcendent dimension to life**: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”. Jesus taught that the answer to the desire for happiness shared by everyone can be found in God. Every human life has a transcendent dimension. Jesus taught us how to put ourselves in a relationship with God through prayer and contemplation. He taught us to
cultivate a genuine spirituality, vital for living by the true values in life, treating the world’s troubles and bringing out what is good in every human being.

- **Jesus educates towards a path of fecundity in love:** Jesus, God made into man, also had the experience of growing in God’s love; He also received an education, in Nazareth, “Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and in favour”; when He conquered temptations, He chose God with determination. The supreme gift of His life on the cross and His victory over death and sin are the crowning achievement of His love and fidelity to God. This is why He is the path, the truth and the life. His life and His teachings were not just about giving perfect solutions to life’s problems; He gave us as well a programme for life to embrace, a project to live by, a perspective on the way that life should be approached and understood, a pathway to follow...

**Acting:** EDUCATION, A PATHWAY TO BUILD TOGETHER. AS PARTNERS OF GOD THE EDUCATOR, WE FOLLOW IN JESUS’S FOOTSTEPS...

In His life, His ministry and His teachings, Jesus is a parable: the parable of the Father overflowing with compassion for the poor; the parable of the liberating love of God. Parables are always paradoxical; they seek to shock, causing listeners to think and change their perception of God, life, education, religion, the way in which they should act...Jesus calls us to make sense of parables by His example as educator among the poor. As for the shock caused, it will change the quality of both our lives and our educational actions, especially those which we organise today with the poor...
A suggestion:

a) Carry out an investigation among the people and organisations that are responsible for education in your town or district: Describe the state of the educational establishments. What are the main problems and needs regarding education? What are the existing possibilities for voluntary collaboration and action and how could AIC volunteers participate in the education programme?

b) Bring the result of the investigation to the next training meeting. Use this occasion to present and study it.

**Conclusion:** Canticle
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Editor in Chief:  
Natalie Monteza  
Tel.: 32 (0) 10 45 63 53  
Email: info@aic-international.org  
www.aic-international.org  

Subscription for one year  
10 Euros  
Payable to the account of your national AIC association  

Collaborators for this edition:  
Original Text  
Father Eli Chavez, CM  
Translation and Formatting  
Catherine Avery
VINCENTIAN EDUCATION:

Educate in collaboration with poor people and with mercy

1. Theme: VINCENTIAN EDUCATION: SAINT VINCENT AND SAINT LOUISE

* Opening: Prayer of Saint Vincent

Lord, send your Church good workers, / but they should be really good ones, / send good workers, / men such as they should be, / to work hard in your vineyard; / workers, Lord, truly detached from themselves, / from their own ease and their worldly goods. / They can be small in number, / provided they are good. / Lord, grant your Church this grace.

A. THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY OF ST VINCENT AND ST LOUISE:

It is a fact that St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac were not specialists in teaching. They were not theorists about education. (...) However, it would not be going too far to talk about St Vincent de Paul or St Louise de Marillac and their close relationship with education and teaching. On one condition, however: you have to go beyond purely academic or technical limits, and approach education in the broadest sense, universal, forming and fashioning the individual person and society. In that way, we can see St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac as the greatest educators of all time.¹

¹Talk by Fr. P. Celestino Fernández, « St Vincent and Education », during the AIC International Assembly at El Escorial, 30 March 2011. www.aic-international.org
The educational work of St Vincent and St Louise is within the wider sphere of overall service and attention towards poor people:

- **St Vincent de Paul** knew how to read the « signs of the times », and realised that ignorance, a lack of education and culture were at the root of poverty and marginalisation. So, St Vincent took action as the great originator, advisor and organiser of a great plan to evangelise poor people, in which education had a role to play. Within the sphere of the Church he organised, suggested and implemented a number of educational initiatives. These brought about real reform for the clergy and Bishops, as well as a wider evangelisation of poor people and especially country folk. In the field of educating poor people, he worked hard to create small schools. He motivated, prepared and led individuals and groups to create and run these schools, aimed at the most marginalised poor people.

- **St Louise de Marillac** under the spiritual direction of Saint Vincent, played a significant role as an educator and catechist, showing that she was a woman who was dynamic, a creator, an organiser, a teacher and trainer of new educators. In 1625 she began to come into contact with poor people and to visit the Confraternities of Charity. She gathered together members of the Confraternities, reorganised them, taught their members and gathered together young people in order to educate them. Thanks to the active participation of the Daughters of Charity and the support of the Confraternities, Louise directed, organised and supported the running of the small schools, mainly in the countryside. She worked tirelessly to train the Daughters of Charity because, in their social work, they were almost always involved in a small school.
The Small Vincentian Schools, situated in poor places, were free and intended for poor children. Their aims were the following: religious education about the truths essential for redemption, learning to read and write, as well as professional training. In the letters, writings, talks and rules of St Vincent, we can see some educational indications which enable us to see the spirit of St Vincent and St Louise:

- « The poor are our lords and masters ». They are our school, an irreplaceable place for learning about life and work. With them we can learn how to respond to calls for charity and justice. It is in the fight of the poor for their survival that we can find creative ways to solve these problems, to find God and live our faith, to find solutions and become hopeful of seeing better days dawning.

- Education begins with the mission of Christ: to educate poor people in the love of God. It is important to pass on the truths of faith. Education must make poor people aware of Christian values and practices. The work of education is to be found in continuing to serve Christ, and requires Christian feelings and behaviour. Education is a way of evangelizing people so that poor people are enabled to emerge from ignorance; it encourages their dignity and improves their living conditions. This requires attention, kindness and gentleness towards people.

B. ACTION: FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF ST VINCENT AND ST LOUISE

From the time of St Vincent and St Louise right up till now, education has changed greatly and is still developing. We need to reinterpret the educational testimony of St Vincent and St Louise by adapting it to the needs of current reality
and to developments in teaching. In this reinterpretation, we can see some challenges with regard to current Vincentian education:

- If education is seen as a work of charity, it is essential to move towards an education seen as an individual right.

- The right to education for everyone can and must be imbued with the spirit of Christian charity, with love, compassion and self sacrifice.

- Vincentian education of poor people requires an education which poor people can choose. A warm welcome, fraternal relationships, seeing the poor person as a subject not an object, liberating educational practice - these constitute the basic characteristics of the raison d’être of Vincentian education.

- St Vincent and St Louise started from the concrete reality of the lives of poor people, and they encourage us today to find an education symbolised by the life and culture of poor people.

- The poor being our masters, Vincentian education must develop with their collaboration, through a two way process which consists in giving and receiving, through an exchange of knowledge, through mutuality and solidarity.

- St Vincent and St Louise set up collective, creative and participative work. That is what Vincentian education must be.

- St Vincent and St Louise, using ideas and resources from their era, gave of their best in educating the poor. In this
current age, this means seeking an education of human and instructive quality.

- To continue the aims of the Small Schools, Vincentian education must be complete, and take into account the religious dimension and the culture of faith.

Questions for reflection:

1. From the testimony of St Vincent and St Louise, what attitudes and commitments do we need to adopt in our work in education?

2. How can we educate together, in collaboration with our sisters whom we serve?

* Final Prayer: (adapting the text of Saint Vincent, XI/3):

« God loves the poor, / but you know, my sisters, / that God loves those who love the poor. / Our Association tries to do its utmost, with affection, to serve poor people, / who are beloved by God; / and thus we have cause to hope that, through loving them, / God will love us. / Let us go forth then, my sisters, / and let us apply ourselves with new love to serve the poor, / and let us even seek out the poorest and most abandoned people; / let us recognise before God that they are our lords and masters, / and that we are unworthy to give them our small services ».

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2 Text of the Campaign for Fraternity (Brazil), CNBB, 1998.
2. Theme: **TO EDUCATE TOGETHER, IN A SPIRIT OF COMPASSION**

* **Opening**: I believe in Education

- I believe in education because it makes us human, / it seeks for new things, it generates conflict, / it prepares us for citizenship. / I believe in education because I believe in the human being, / protagonist in their own story, / capable of transforming and building relationships in life.

- I believe in education which, being liberating, / is a way to transform, /is a way to build a new society. / I believe in an education which promotes the person, / transforms them and makes them sociable, / which gives them a critical and democratic spirit.

- I believe in an education which is a process of liberation, /leading human beings to know themselves and to know other people. / I believe in education because I believe in the educational charism of faith for all. / I believe also in being a lifelong learner.

- So / I believe in education as a permanent process / which accompanies human beings throughout their life. / Amen.

**A. SEE THE REALITY: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION**

In the world of today, characterized by great advances and changes of every kind, the phenomenon of social exclusion is very marked. The latter marginalises millions of people, and prevents them from living a dignified life and from making progress. In the broad field of education, we can identify different characteristics present in marginalised people:

- the people who cannot read or write and who have passed
the age of being at school; children and teenagers who do not go to school;
• disadvantaged people who were not able to complete their schooling; most of them young, and more particularly poor people, without access to higher education; immigrants and workers who cannot be integrated into educational structures; women who are discriminated against and oppressed, who do not enjoy conditions which favour education;
• unemployed people, not qualified to satisfy the new requirements and changes in the world of work;
• « the new modern illiterate people » who cannot use current technological resources;
• people, especially the young, even those still at school, because they do not see any meaning in their lives and think it is not good. So they burn the candle at both ends, taking drugs and resorting to violence and criminal activity;
• the people who, without a fully formed conscience, are manipulated by the diktats of fashion, methods of communication, prevailing ideology, most people in general, the poor, people who are exploited and manipulated, who do not know their rights as citizens.

In addition, the relationship between excluded people and education can be much more important, more particularly if one takes into account the various human, social, geographical and cultural realities.

➢ Questions for reflection:

1. What are the main characteristics of people marginalised from education from the point of view of their local, regional and national reality?
2. What are the main causes and consequences of exclusion from education?

**B. CONFRONT THE REALITY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH:**

The Good Samaritan (the merciful father) represents first of all God himself, who feels compassion and reacts when faced with the suffering of others. As for Jesus, he represents all those who are seeking to live in compassionate solidarity.


Mercy is the key phrase in the good news of Jesus. Mercy is exactly that: feeling compassion, particularly for all marginalised people. Mercy means sending waves of compassion which make us feel the suffering of others and make us sensitive and attentive to the cry of distress from our neighbour in need. Mercy is a Christian way of life; it involves SEEING the needs of the person who is suffering; it involves FEELING COMPASSION, feeling the pain and needs of others; it involves ACTING, helping the person who is suffering to support themselves, to eradicate the causes of their marginalisation so that we all have a life, and not just any life – a worthy, fulfilled life.

Mercy is the revelation of the characteristics and the heart of the Father, in the person of Jesus, who identifies with the poor and the suffering, acting under the influence of the Spirit. It is the love which becomes effective; it is charity in concrete action. It makes us united with them, placing us in the shoes of our neighbour who is suffering, sharing their preoccupations and their needs. Mercy is the spirit of love which has as its origin and its final objective the Trinity. *It is the core, the heart of the good news of Jesus.*
C. ACTION: TO EDUCATE TOGETHER, IN A SPIRIT OF COMPASSION

According to the tradition of the Church, the works of mercy are concrete material works: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to give a roof to the homeless, to visit the sick, and prisoners and to bury the dead. In harmony with the Scriptures, the spiritual works of mercy are the following: to teach, to counsel, to console, to forgive sins, to patiently put up with the weaknesses of others and to pray to God for the dead and the living. Those are the actions which promote the creation of a life in complete fraternity.

«A compassionate gaze does not concentrate its attention only on the wounded person, but also on the saviour, symbolising the iniquitous structures which create and maintain suffering and social exclusion. In the same spirit, wounds are treated and their causes condemned, having as their aim the eradication of evil and the restoration of life».3

Attitudes to give priority to, when working to educate excluded people, in a spirit of mercy:

- **Be a physical and supporting presence for marginalised people:** welcome them and treat them well. Give them assistance and immediate relief, promote emergency measures, without dependency or paternalism.

- **Through faith, strengthen the subjectivity and dignity of excluded people:** Self esteem, dignity, subjectivity and the resilience of marginalised people. Develop a respectful relationship between two people; protect and defend people in need, without possessiveness or paternalism.

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• In serving excluded people, maintain a prophetic zeal: illuminate – inform, clarify their situation with gentleness, without fatalism; keep on negotiating with politicians, have a sense of citizenship and fight for it – think in a global way but act locally.

• Awaken and cultivate hope: in the reality of poor people filled with suffering, highlight the potential of marginalised people, kindle hope, show them positive aspects, value their knowledge, be patient, inspire them and direct them without pessimism or moralising.

• Be a sign of life and solidarity: With poor and excluded people, try new experiences, strengthen support links, encourage mutual help, and forms of cooperation and organisation, gather strength, set up links with groups or people involved in the fight against poverty.

In a spirit of mercy, an education involving mutual learning develops. The master and servant, the Good Samaritan and the wounded person, the educator and the educated, they all need each other to promote life and to improve as human beings. With St Vincent and St Louise, we see that they needed each other and that they began to help each other mutually. It is not by chance that, throughout their life and work, humility was the basic virtue.

Humility, the virtue of Jesus Christ, implies admitting that all good comes from God. Humility presupposes:

• distancing oneself constantly from too great a self esteem, arrogance, dominance and self sufficiency;

• expressing oneself, emerging from one’s own closed world, no longer thinking about one’s own interests, and discovering other needs, other ways of thinking and tackling life;

• becoming dependent on God and cultivating inter-dependence between people.
No-one is self sufficient; we develop and learn in communion;

- getting rid of one’s own truths and seeking the authentic truth which liberates and which God reveals in His Word, in His Church and in the real sufferings of poor people;

- considering a poor person and other collaborators as people who have qualities and the potential to develop. Supportive and compassionate collaboration helps us to blossom in charity;

- seeing, analyzing and improving life starting from the reality and points of interest of the weakest and the excluded. How? By small, simple gestures, living in all simplicity and without the pretentions of fashion and overconsumption, freeing ourselves from the discriminatory practices and attitudes of prevailing ideology, while no longer remaining passive and accommodating, and committing ourselves to be involved.

A new attitude of mutuality, interdependence and being open to collaboration with one’s neighbour requires a fraternal relationship, without discrimination or power interests. In the humble exchange of gifts, blossoming in charity, as well as the building of a real union against exclusion and in favour of a just and fraternal life are possible.

Questions for reflection:

1. How can we see education as a work of mercy, and what are the attitudes and behaviour that evangelical mercy requires of an educator?
2. How can we, in a spirit of mercy, educate together, in collaboration with our sisters whom we serve?

International Association of Charities
AIC aisbl

An essentially feminine association, operating on a global level with 200,000 volunteers in 52 countries.

Founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in 1617 to fight against all forms of poverty and injustice and to give women an active and recognised social role, in a spirit of solidarity.

Editor in Chief:
Natalie Monteza
Tel.: 32 (0) 10 45 63 53
Email: info@aic-international.org
www.aic-international.org

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Collaborators for this edition:

Original Text
Father Eli Chaves dos Santos, CM.

Translation
Marlene Burt

Design & Layout
Diana León