



## Reflection I: January 2017

# *“Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: The AIC Volunteer's Commitment”*

Preparation for the AIC Assembly of Delegates: March 2017

**“400 years of walking with Saint Vincent,  
towards the future in our Common Home”**

### I - INTRODUCTION:

As we, the volunteers of the International Association of Charities (formerly known as the Confraternities of Charity), draw near to the four hundredth anniversary of our foundation by Saint Vincent de Paul, we realize that it is very important to return to our origins in order to engage in a profound reflection on our participation in this incredible Association which struggles against every form of poverty and every painful form of exclusion... realities that afflict countless numbers of our brothers and sisters who find themselves in very vulnerable situations.

During the year 2016 we studied and discussed the First Rule of the Association, which was written by Saint Vincent in 1617. There we discovered valuable suggestions of our Founder... suggestions with regard to serving Jesus Christ in the person of those who are poor and abandoned. We also became aware of the fact that today there are many new forms of poverty which demand our attention, for example, immigration, drugs/alcohol, domestic violence, the ever-increasing number of elderly people and children who are abandoned, etc.

## II - DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME:

### IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMITMENT OF THE AIC

Saint Vincent initiated AIC in Châtillon... how and where did you initiate your commitment with the Vincentian mission?

We invite you to begin this reflection by recalling your first steps in AIC and to do this by responding (in your group) to the following questions:

- How did you become a member of AIC?
- What was your first encounter with people living in poverty?
- What do you remember about your first home visits?
- What tasks were entrusted to you?

We should have no doubt that it was Jesus Christ who invited each one of us to become a member of this Association. Possibly this invitation was extended to us through another person who asked us to collaborate in working together to create a better life for God's chosen people, those who are most poor and needy. We became more and more captivated by service, especially as we experienced that we were able to instill hope in the infirm and suffering and as we were able to assure such individuals that they were not journeying through life alone.

It is also most probable that we began to participate in various formation sessions in which we came to a deeper understanding of the Vincentian charism and of the person of Saint Vincent who entrusted ordinary women with extraordinary work. In those sessions we learned to value the various works, which from the beginning of our Association, have been carried out in an organized manner. As we became more aware of all these matters, gradually, with the grace of God and conscious of our responsibility, we put aside our fear and we whole-heartedly committed ourselves as **AIC volunteers**.

At this time it is important that we reflect on the importance of our commitment and understand that we are privileged to have been chosen by God, chosen from all eternity to be AIC volunteers, chosen to serve God in the person of those men and women who are poor.

***"It was not you who chose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain"*** (John 15:16).

**What a great mission has been entrusted to us! What a wonderful opportunity the Lord has given us as AIC volunteers... namely, to come to a deeper knowledge of God and to proclaim God's love to our brothers and sisters!!!**

***"It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not also love God"*** (CCD:XII:215).

We have a God who loves us, and we should be living testimonies to this. But at the same time, we can and should, through our Vincentian work, improve diets, restore health, raise self-esteem, make people

smile, offer a friendly hand, support people in realizing their own worth, train them and help them discover their strengths, create opportunities, be the voice of the voiceless. **In a word, we need to collaborate with the Lord towards the construction of a fairer and more equal world.**

### **MAY OUR WORKS BE LIKE MONUMENTS TO GOD!**

We must always remember that **we have made a commitment directly with God** and at the end of the day, it's Him that we are serving and Him to whom we must be accountable, independently of the obligations found in the Rule, like those of acting in complete transparency and giving reports of our action.

In most countries, new volunteers participate in a ceremony in which they commit before God to serving Him in the person of our brothers and sisters who live in situations of poverty. We would like to suggest the prayer below, which we encourage you to renew regularly.

### **III - FINAL PRAYER:**

Lord, Jesus Christ, from the time of our baptism we have belonged to you and since then we have professed our faith countless times. Today, in the presence of the whole Church we come before you and we consecrate ourselves to you. We commit ourselves to avoid sin and to deepen our relationship with you and with our brothers and sisters. With your grace, we commit ourselves to imitate your unconditional love for all people, especially as we serve those men and women who are most poor and abandoned. May we follow the example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and walk along the paths of the gospel. At the same time, may we provide for the spiritual and material welfare of those who are poor... those persons in whom you reveal yourself, you who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

**Translated:** Charles T. Plock, CM



## Reflection 2: February 2017

### *“The Meaning of Pilgrimage”*

Preparation for the AIC Assembly of Delegates (March 2017):

**“400 years of walking with Saint Vincent  
towards the future in our Common Home”**

#### **I – Introduction:**

This year, 2017, presents AIC members with an opportunity to make a pilgrimage to France and/or to some part of their own country. Let us now offer some definitions of the word ***pilgrimage***:

- A journey to a shrine or some sacred place that has important religious significance;
- A journey that is undertaken by a believer or by a group of believers to a place of devotion or a place that is viewed as sacred and holy;
- A visit to a chapel or a place that preserves some sacred relics;
- To undertake a journey towards...
- To walk towards a goal.

A pilgrimage can be undertaken as a way to profess one’s faith or as a way to atone for some sin or to express one’s gratitude for some favor that has been granted. Pilgrimages are also profound expressions and characteristics of popular piety and are well-received by the faithful.

#### **II – Development of the theme: The meaning of pilgrimage:**

As AIC volunteers, you know that from 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> we will hold our Assembly of Delegates in Chatillon-sur-Chalaronne. The AIC Executive Board has proposed giving our Assembly a sense of pilgrimage ... especially since our gathering takes on many of the characteristics that enable it to be viewed as such.

At the present time, Chatillon continues to be a small town; nevertheless, for us as AIC volunteers, this town has great significance since it is the place of **our birth**. The parish church of Saint Andrew has been preserved (with some changes) and it was there that our Founder, on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1617, proclaimed his moving and eloquent homily that occasioned the establishment of the Confraternities.

Near the parish church is the house (also with some changes) where Saint Vincent lived, which today is a residence for the Daughters of Charity. The original stairs and door have been preserved; what was once Vincent's bed is now an altar in a chapel where one will find the First Rule that was written by our Founder.

We want to let you know that for the past three years, all the inhabitants of Chatillon, including civil and religious leaders, have been working with much enthusiasm in order to prepare for the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our establishment and the birth of our charism. They have organized an extensive programme of activities that began in January 2017 and concludes in December 2017 and that includes the participation of the whole Vincentian Family... our Assembly in 2017 is part of that programme. These activities include concerts, expositions, pilgrimages, spiritual retreats, conferences, solemn celebrations of the Eucharist, a musical comedy, a light and sound show, etc.

AIC has promulgated a Jubilee Year that began on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016 and will conclude on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017... during this time there will be various celebrations, one of which is our Assembly (see our web page: [www.aic-international.org](http://www.aic-international.org)).

**We invite all groups of volunteers to plan activities in your own countries, thus uniting yourselves with this worldwide celebration.**

Groups might consider making a pilgrimage (as a group) to the different centres where your work as Vincentians is being carried out, knowing of course that Christ is present in each person with whom we share our lives... and as such our brothers and sisters become our shrine. We would suggest that your pilgrimage begins with the celebration of the Eucharist and concludes with the recitation of the prayer below.

We know that you are very creative and that you will have some wonderful activities. **We would appreciate it if you would share your experiences with us on the above mentioned web page.**

### **III – Final Prayer:**

*Merciful God, we thank you for having chosen us to be part of this Association that was established four hundred years ago by Vincent de Paul. We thank you being able to serve your Son, Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor ... and being able to serve him in the person of our brothers and sisters who are poor. Grant us the grace that we need in order to continue this marvellous work of collaborating in the building up of a more just and equitable world. Help us to communicate your unfathomable love to our brothers and sisters who live in vulnerable situations and also help us to communicate enthusiasm and hope to those same individuals so that they might take an active part in their development. Teach us to be docile to your will and give us the strength that we need in order to be authentic volunteers who work together for the transformation of society. Bring us men and women who are willing to join us as volunteers and who are*

convinced of Jesus's words: **"whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me"** (Matthew 25:40). We pray in the name of Jesus, your Son, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, today and forever. **Amen.**

**Translated:** Charles T. Plock, CM