



AIC International aisbl
Against Poverty, Acting Together

Training Booklet 2014

Let us be enchanted by St Vincent's Project

Dear AIC volunteers,

We are on the journey towards our 400th anniversary: 2013 and 2014 are the years for the internalization of the project and spirit of Saint Vincent. Last year, we published two training booklets. This year, monthly reflections have been sent out by email to volunteers (with PowerPoint presentations in Spanish and English). These reflections have been brought together in this booklet under the title "Let us be enchanted by St Vincent's project".

In order to serve, in order to be capable of giving more to our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, each of us must strengthen ourselves internally through Love. This Love comes from our Vincentian Charism: following the example of St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac, let us walk in the footsteps of Christ!

We also invite each of you to really give yourselves to AIC, so that it lives on, so that the 400th anniversary that we are going to celebrate in 2017 is just the first and will be followed by many other great anniversaries. We should always keep in mind what the Father Eli said: **"The Future of AIC: being Enchanted with Christ in the poor and transforming life into an enchanting experience. The future of AIC depends on its capacity to live by the Vincentian mysticism that enchants and makes each of us enchanting"**.

When we have internalized this message, we will see that the future is enriching and full of promise. From then on, the brothers and sisters whom we serve will find in us defenders of life and human dignity. As for AIC, it will be active and dynamic, renewed, retrained and most importantly of all, it will be rooted in the Vincentian charism which sees Christ in every person living in poverty.

Dear AIC volunteers, let us celebrate from now onwards, with joy, hope and enthusiasm, the first 400 years of dedication and love towards our lords and masters.

"If you give yourself entirely to God, he will also give himself to you and will shower upon you his graces and choicest blessings" St Vincent de Paul (CCD:VII:310)



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REFLECTION FOR JANUARY:

History of the Confraternities of Charity

Text: Selina Suárez Fermín --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

Let us deepen our knowledge with regard to our origin in order to strengthen our sense of belonging to AIC.

Let us reflect on the history of the Confraternities of Charity so that we might become more aware of our origins and at the same time might also recognize how the International Association of Charities came into existence. We have to be aware of this information so that we might recognize the heritage that our founder, Saint Vincent de Paul, has given to us. Only in this way can we love who we are and know what we want to continue to be. In a short period of time, we will celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of living out this vital charism, four hundred years during which time it became rooted in the hearts of many people and helped many men and women who were marginalized and immersed in misery. Thus our theme, let us act together in our struggle against poverty, becomes ever more real and necessary.

Development of the theme:

On August 1st, 1617 Vincent de Paul took possession of his new parish. One Sunday, when the new pastor was about to celebrate Mass, he was informed about a family in the parish that was ill, in fact no member of the family was healthy enough to care for the other members. Vincent was touched by this information and preached a moving sermon. In the evening, when he went to visit this family, he found a long procession of women who were traveling along the same road in order to bring relief to the family. Vincent said: "God gave me this thought: Couldn't these good ladies be brought together and encouraged to give themselves to God to serve the sick poor" (CCD:IX:166).

- ***The first act of service: The home visit***

"I suggested that all these good persons animated by charity to go there might each take a day to make soup, not for those sick persons only, but also for others who might come afterward, and that **is the first place where the Confraternity of Charity was established**" (CCD:IX:193). That occurred on August 20th, 1617. Three days later, on August 23rd, Vincent organized the first team of women who would care for the infirm in their homes. At that time, he drafted the first regulations for the Association and those regulations provided a framework for all future regulations. The objective of the Confraternity was clearly defined: "**to assist the poor in their spiritual and material needs**" (CCD:XIIIb:8) and the reason for this is stated: "**charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God**" (CCD:XIIIb:8). The method behind all of this was also clarified: there is no lack of charitable people who are willing to assist the poor but there is a **lack of organized assistance**. Thus the priorities were established: **reach out to those persons who are most poor and most marginalized**.

The first **Confraternity of Charity** was established and then was officially recognized by the Archbishop of Lyon on November 24th, 1617 and erected on December 8th, the feast of the Virgin.

Some months later, a series of missions were preached on the lands of the de Gondi family. About seven or eight thousand people lived on that estate and in each place where the mission was preached a Confraternity was established.

- ***Responder to all the needs that we find: Specific services***

In September 1618, Vincent was preaching in Joigny and visited a small hospital. He found there many infirm people who had been abandoned and he oriented the Confraternity in Joigny toward this new specific need. In 1619, through the

intervention of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, Vincent was appointed chaplain to the galley slaves. He discovered the shocking conditions in which these individuals lived and immediately established a new Charity to respond to the needs of these individuals.

Vincent's ministry, his various relationships and his observations led him to the discovery of other catastrophic situations: the misery of street children and the elderly and adults without work, the poverty of orphans and abandoned children and widows, the situation of those who suffered devastation as a result of war. Vincent adapted the structures of the Confraternities in order to respond to these various needs and very soon all of France became aware of this new Association.

- ***The need to organize, inspire and coordinate the Charities***

A few years later Vincent found a woman who would become his most valued collaborator: **Louise de Marillac**. In 1629, he entrusted to her the task of inspiring and coordinating the Confraternities. For months Louise would travel to the various places where she would visit and encourage the members and resolve conflicts that had arisen in the various groups, but most importantly, she would remind the members about primary purpose. Louise was the first coordinator of the "Charities" and throughout her life she was attentive to their activity and the development of their ministry. We could say that Louise was the first person to undertake the role that today we would refer to as the **national or international president**.

- ***The Charities become international***

In 1634, the first Charity was established in Italy and in 1651 the Charity was established in Poland. On September 27th, 1660 Vincent died and a page in his life came to an end, but it was only the first page in a large book that has still not been concluded. Today the movement established of Châtillon has been extended to every continent. Under the name "International Association of Charities" thousands of women have come together and in more recent years, men have become active members in this association. All of these individuals, faithful to our Founder, have committed themselves to work together in the struggle against misery and poverty. They are convinced that "service on behalf of the poor ought to be preferred above all other things" (Louise de Marillac, E95, p.803 (Spanish Edition only)). Through the light of faith they attempt to discover Christ in the poor, Christ who calls them and mobilizes them.

Personal and Community Reflection:

Let us reflect on the following phrases:

- "Charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God" (CCD:XIIIb:8);
- "The people who have sometimes suffered a great deal, now suffer from a lack of organized assistance rather than from a lack of charitable persons" (CCED:XIIIb:8);
- The future of AIC means that we allow ourselves to be enchanted by the reality of Christ in the poor and thus change our whole life into an enchanting experience.

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ Let us take time to reread and review our Regulations and then as we conclude this reading;
- ❖ Let us make an analysis-review-examination of our conscience.

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR FEBRUARY:

With Christ before us, Our Vocation is to follow Christ

Text: Alicia Duhne --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

Vincent's teachings were Christ centered. Let us remember these words, which reveal this characteristic of his teaching: *When there is a question of doing some good work, say to the Son of God, "Lord, if you were in my place, how would you act on this occasion?"* (CCD:XI:314).

In this reflection we want to consider our Vincentian vocation, which is focused on the following of Jesus Christ. Let us together place ourselves in the Lord's presence.

Development of the Theme:

- ***Our Christian and Vincentian vocation***

Our Christian vocation leads us to follow Jesus Christ. Our Vincentian vocation reaffirms that fact and also places us in the presence of those persons who are most poor.

Faith, hope and charity are to be our pillars of support.

Through **faith** we realize that we are children of God and also understand that all men and women share the same dignity and have the same right to live the fullness of life (and here we are not only talking about some future life, but referring to our present life here on earth).

Our awareness of the fact that we live in a world where there is inequality with regard to opportunities presents us with a great challenge. We believe that it is this challenge that motivates those of us who have accepted the invitation to travel along the path that has been marked out by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. It is also this same reality that fills us with the **hope** that we will be able to change the unjust situations in which we find ourselves.

The path that we must travel is obvious; indeed, it is the path of **charity** that will bring us closer to people (just as it brought Jesus closer to the people of his time). Jesus did not just preach; he was also concerned about "the well-being of the sheep". Pope Francis has stated: *Jesus was a man of streets ... in the gospels we rarely find Jesus preaching in places of worship. Jesus liked to travel from town to town and village to village in order to meet people.* Let us accept this invitation to go out to the highways and the byways in order to encounter those persons who live in situations of poverty... and then it is there that we can speak with them about God.

Our vocation has a twofold dimension since at the same time that we encounter Christ we undoubtedly encounter the poor... and when we encounter the poor we encounter Jesus Christ. Those persons who have studied the life of Vincent de Paul tell us that it was not Jesus who led him to the poor but rather that it was the poor who led him to Jesus.

We are invited to make every effort to become more and more aware of Jesus's doctrine since this will help us to strengthen our faith and will also enable us to discover new ways in which we can live as Christians. Indeed, **we must put aside our concepts of religious individualism** since such concepts will lead us nowhere.

- ***Let us make this charity come alive in our groups***

It would be good for us to reflect on how we practice this charity in our groups. At times it can appear to be easy to love those persons who are not so closely related to us and we can forget that Christ is also present in those brothers and sisters who are near to us and who often do not think or act in the same way that we do... and yet Jesus calls us to serve and collaborate with these individuals. Let us strengthen the bonds of communion among us so that when people see us they can say: Ah! They are certainly AIC volunteers!

- ***Promotion of the human person***

Finally, I would like to highlight the fact that love should **lead us to engage in the promotion of all people**, so that in union with our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, **we can build a more just world where there are greater opportunities to live well and to live with happiness, where there are greater opportunities to rejoice in the kingdom of God.**

Personal and Community Reflection:

Let us meditate on the ways in which we can put into practice the following words of Saint Vincent:

- *The two great virtues of Jesus Christ are reverence toward his Father and charity toward humankind (CCD:VI:413);*
- *We must strip ourselves of the old Adam in order to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ (CCD:XI:85).*

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ What motivates me to be an AIC volunteer?
- ❖ Has my initial motivation changed? If so, how?
- ❖ Has your experience in AIC changed your relationship with Christ? If so, how?

Prayer:

Jesus, you who walk with those who are poor, we place ourselves in your presence so that you might accompany us as we live out this Vincentian vocation that you have given to us and that we have accepted. Show us the path that will enable us to encounter you in our brothers and sisters who need our assistance. Help us to strip ourselves of everything that is foreign to our vocation (our selfishness, our comfort, our attachments)... everything that can prevent us from being good Vincentians. Help us to be your true witnesses so that many people might come to know you and so that we might also build up a better and more just world. We pray in the name of Jesus who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR MARCH:

Vincentian Charism: An Encounter with Christ in those living in Poverty

Text: Selina Suarez Fermín --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

Vincent preached and ministered on behalf of those living in poverty and he was convinced that the Lord was present in those poor men and women whom he was called to serve. Thus Vincent ministered on behalf of those men and women in order to reveal his love for the Lord, his love for the abandoned and suffering Christ who was present in the men and women who were suffering in the world. Vincent also said that among those living in poverty one finds true religion and that Christ is present in each one of those persons. Let us reflect on our actions as we encounter Jesus Christ.

Development of the Theme:

- ***Seeing Christ in those living in poverty***

Vincent de Paul “discovered” the poor and their misery and in his writing we can see the realism and the seriousness of Vincent’s gaze. Vincent saw those living in poverty as they were and he committed himself to serve them. Thus he walked in their midst. Only after he “found” and “saw” them did he experience himself being questioned by Jesus Christ. **In those living in poverty, Vincent discovered a poor and humiliated Jesus Christ.** As a result of this encounter with them, Vincent deepened his understanding of “the mystery of the poor”. Vincent realized that those persons who are poor and despised by the world are in fact the representatives of Jesus Christ:

“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. **But turn the medal**, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that he scarcely had a human face in his Passion, and passed for a madman in the mind of the Gentiles and a stumbling block in the mind of the Jews. With all that. He describes himself as the Evangelizer of the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. O God! How beautiful it is to see poor people if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them! If, however, we look on them according to the sentiments of the flesh and a worldly spirit, they will seem contemptible” (CCD:XI:26).

Vincent came to the conclusion that in serving those living in poverty one serves Jesus Christ. He also realized that living in their midst one will encounter God.

As Vincent was “gazing” on the poor of his time he interpreted the parable of the Final Judgment (Matthew 25) and came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ, poor and humiliated, is represented by those living in poverty and therefore to serve them is to serve Jesus. Leaving a spiritual retreat and even leaving Mass in order to serve them is “leaving God for God”.

“Remember that **when you leave meditation and Holy Mass to serve poor persons**, you lose nothing, because to serve those who are poor is to go to God, and you should see God in them” (CCD:IX:5).

- ***Evangelizing those living in poverty***

The type of evangelization that missionaries should engage in implies an imitation of Jesus who did not limit himself to teaching people but was also charitable toward these same people: “We can say that coming to evangelize the poor does not simply mean to teach them the mysteries necessary for their salvation, but also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to **make the Gospel effective**” (CCD:XII:75). **This then means that we are willing to act in accordance with our model, Jesus Christ, and it also means that we are willing to commit ourselves to provide for the spiritual and the material needs of those who are living in poverty.** In order to eliminate every doubt from his listeners, Vincent, near the end of his life, stated: “So then, if there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others...to do that is **to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that is the most perfect way; it is also what Our Lord did**” (CCD:XII:77-78). Evangelization means that we attend to all these needs and to the many others that have appeared in our own time.

As Vincent nurtured his spiritual life with the Word of God he was strengthened to reach out to those living in poverty, to assist them, to visit the infirm and to organize the Confraternities of Charity that in turn would provide for the material and spiritual needs of those who were suffering.

Personal and Community Reflection:

Let us reflect on the following words of Saint Vincent: “Turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people”.

The evangelist Saint John tells us: “We too, then, ought to give our lives for others!” (1 John 3:16).

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ Make some type of a collage to represent how you, as a group, see the presence of Jesus Christ in those persons whom you serve (the elderly, infirm and children).
- ❖ How can we work together as a team in order to change and transform the reality of those who are poor? What should the contribution and the role of women be in this process of changing the reality of our sisters and brothers who are living in poverty?

Prayer:

Gracious God, today we present to you the cries of so many poor and marginalized and vulnerable brothers and sisters. In them we see your suffering face. In them we discover your will. You are truly present in them and therefore we ask that through our faith and our commitment, we might also be able to recognize your presence in these brothers and sisters. We ask that we might recognize the fact that you are still hungry and thirsty and naked and abandoned and alone and infirm. Lord Jesus, may we have that clarity that enables us to discover you, the generosity to serve you and the courage never to pass you by when we find you lying on the roadsides in the places where we live. We pray in the name of the Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Suggested Hymn: *When I Needed a Neighbor* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrJ190Hk1w>)

REFLECTION FOR APRIL:

Saint Vincent's Spirit and Project Inspire our Journey

Text: María Eugenia Magallanes Negrete --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

AIC (known at that time as the "Charities"), was born out of the spiritual experience of St. Vincent de Paul, who found in his contact with the poor the image of Christ disfigured and also discovered in Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor, **the real model and the great invisible framework to which all our actions will have to conform**. With eyes fixed on Jesus, Saint Vincent found the spirit that would guide his life, as well as the actions of his followers. This is the gift that the Holy Spirit, through Saint Vincent, gave to the Church and especially to us, the Vincentians. This is the origin of the AIC, the nature, spirit, light and strength of its mission.

Another characteristic of Saint Vincent's project is the concept of the poor as persons who have rights and dignity and as a result we owe them justice, not pity.

- ❖ "There is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice" (CCD:II:68).
- ❖ "May God grant you the grace of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy" (CCD:VII:115).

According to Vincent de Paul the manner in which we love or do not love **those living in poverty is a sign of our love for God or a sign of our betrayal of God**.

Development of the Theme:

Here we present a practical application of the project and method that our Founders have passed on to us.

- ***The need for organization and training***

Saint Vincent, often with the assistance of Louise de Marillac, wrote Rules for the Confraternities of Charity and these Rules were adapted to the distinct reality of the specific place. Father André Dodin wrote about the Rule of the first Confraternity in Châtillon and called it a masterpiece of **tenderness** and **organization**¹. In the Rule that he wrote, Vincent noted that "the people [of that town] have sometimes suffered a great deal, more through **a lack of organized assistance** than from the lack of charitable persons" (CCD:XIIIb:8). If Vincent and Louise saw the importance of acting in accord with a **Rule**, then today it is indispensable that our activity be in accord with a **plan**.

The more unstructured the lives of those whom we serve implies that our intervention should be all the more structured methodologically. Today **professional competency** is absolutely necessary in order to respond to and become involved in:

- ❖ An **on-going study** of the situations of poverty;
- ❖ The development of a **critical awareness** of the causes of poverty;
- ❖ The development of a plan with **measurable outcomes**;
- ❖ Appropriate and adequate intervention that involves **planning in terms of methods**, management and evaluation.

- ***Clarity in our analysis of the reality***

Today poverty is not something that is inevitable. For the first time in the history of humankind **there are sufficient resources** so that **no one should be wanting with regard to basic needs**. **Poverty, marginalization, and exclusion** are

¹ Dodin, CM, André, *Vincent de Paul and Charity* [Translated by Jean Marie Smith and Dennis Saunders], New City Press, New York, 1993, p. 25.
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realities that are the **fruit** of what John Paul II referred to as structures of sin (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #36) ... **they are realities that are manifestations of our unequal and unjust distribution of goods**. God does not want this situation to exist and Vincent de Paul cried out against this situation as it existed and as he experienced it during his lifetime. Today, as in the past, there is no such thing as political neutrality. **Silence when confronted with these realities** is to become an accomplice in this injustice and means that we are willing to tolerate and to allow the injustice to continue ... it is a passive manner of **cooperating with injustice**.

Before developing a plan it is very important to analyze the reality. Also as we analyze the present reality it is equally important to **know how to frame specific situations** so that **possible solutions can be discovered** and implemented within the community itself.

- ***To be clear about the model of society that we desire and to understand its consequences***

In order for our denunciation to be **prophetic and morally valid**, it should be accompanied by a **testimony** of our life ... thus we must maintain an on-going **tension** between **denunciation and proclamation**.

As a result of our lifestyle we ought to be able to state:

- ❖ That it is possible for **“being” to replace “having”** as a basic value in our society;
- ❖ That we **need much less in order to satisfy** our fundamental human needs;
- ❖ That the **quality of our relationships** fills us with a happiness that is far greater than that which we obtain from our material possessions.

- ***To firmly believe in people***

This supposes the development of basic attitudes:

- ❖ **Consideration for all people**, without exception ... we are all **subjects with rights and responsibilities**;
- ❖ To trust in the **ability of all people to better themselves and move forward**.

These attitudes imply a **perspective of faith**: “turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that **the Son of God**, who willed to be poor, **is represented to us by these poor people**” (CCD:XI:26).

Our elders in the Vincentian charism taught us to view the poor in such a way that we affirm them as being our masters who by their presence evangelize us. At the same time **we affirm them** as our lords **whom we ought to love with great tenderness and whom we ought to respect at all times**.

Direct assistance on behalf of the poor should not be seen as an end in itself nor as some isolated activity but rather it should be viewed **as a means that helps** us to make the poor aware of the need to **move forward in their personal development**. We are not as such attempting to **resolve problems** but rather we want to accompany people on their journey through life. This is a **slow process** and has as its starting point **respect for the ability of men and women** to organize their own lives. A criterion to use as we evaluate our activity is to look at the **level of autonomy that is achieved** by the various persons with whom we work.

The best **educators** are those who enable **people to develop all of their potential** and then accompany them in that process of development.

- ***The ability to collaborate and to work together as part of a network***

The process that we have referred to is an individual process but it is also a **process that should be developed in the group and in coordination** with other services. **Our activity should not be isolated** and we should not accept a **“lone ranger” attitude** or activity that is being done without the knowledge of others. Hopefully we will always coordinate our

plans with other branches and members of the **Vincentian Family** ... with each branch contributing the richness of the gift that is specific to them.

We should remember that in Châtillon, Vincent intervened **in the midst of the environment in which the problem arose** and was able to organize **action that flowed from the initiative of the people of that community**. The same would be repeated in the other Confraternities.

- ***To recognize the poor as a gift in our life***

Even though those who are poor **appear to be persons who “receive”** because of the extreme situation in which they find themselves, nevertheless, they give us an example about the **“openness to receive”**. If during our life we never establish a relationship with people in need, we will never discover all the **various abilities that we possess**.

With **the discovery of our limitations and our prejudices we are able to grow as we then accompany others in their journey through life**. In fact, it is here that the expression concerning **the poor as our lords and masters** acquires its true significance and value.

We should never place an **excessive trust** in our resources because such an attitude will make us **forget about God's providence**. In order to evaluate our service we must understand that we follow Jesus whose life was an apparent failure; we must understand that we are the spiritual children of Vincent de Paul who was focused on accomplishing God's plan in the same manner that Jesus did, as expressed in the Gospel of Luke: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me **to bring glad tidings to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

Personal and Community Reflection:

May Mary, our Mother, who always knows how to provide for the needs of others, help us to reflect more deeply on each point in this presentation. May Mary also help us to give life to the concepts that have been explained here. Finally, may Mary help us to live our life for the glory of God and for the greater well-being of those living in poverty.

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ Describe how Saint Vincent's spirituality has inspired you in your work?
- ❖ In which points of this presentation do you find some important elements with regard to **systemic change**?
- ❖ In our **Operational Guidelines**, we use the phrase: **education is a two-way process** Where do you find this concept expressed in this presentation?

Prayer:

All powerful and eternal God, who filled the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul with charity, listen to our prayer and allow us to share in your love. In imitation of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise help us to discover and to serve you, Lord Jesus, in our poor and marginalized brothers and sisters. May we learn how to love you with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms (Cf.CCD:XI:32). Free us from hatred and make us mindful of the fact that one day we will be judged on the manner in which we have loved. Gracious God, you who desire the salvation of all people, provide us with the priests, monks, nuns and AIC volunteers that we so urgently need and may they be witnesses of your love. Virgin of the Poor and Queen of Peace, give our divided and anguished world the gifts of your love and peace. Amen.

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR MAY:

Martha and Mary: Contemplation and Action

Text: Selina Suárez Fermín --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

As Vincent took his initial steps in ministry he was accompanied by women and that reality reminds us of the many women who accompanied Jesus from the time of his initial preaching in Galilee. We remember especially Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Both of these women were very hospitable toward Jesus but they had very distinct personalities. We find that one could be characterized by her words and actions and the other by her contemplation and prayer. Let us reflect on Martha and Mary in today's world.

Development of the Theme:

AIC is an Association that is composed primarily of women and for the most part, our service is directed toward women. That reality leads us to reflect on what we can learn from these women whom we serve and whom we could refer to as biblical women, women like those that we find in both the Old and the New Testament.

Without a doubt the first woman whom we are called to follow and imitate is our heavenly mother, the Virgin Mary. The greatness of Mary, who was proclaimed as "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42), is found in her ability to reach out to others and her commitment. Mary was a humble and trusting woman, "the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).

Among these many women we also find Martha and Mary who, as we will see in this presentation, are models for our activity and service, models for our Vincentian commitment.

Martha was the elder of the sisters and did many of the household tasks; she was a very active, talkative, restless and a very obliging woman. Very attentive to detail, she prepared the meals and served at the table; she was attentive to the guests and when they were over-bearing and demanding, she herself could become flippant and even stubborn at times.

The younger sister, Mary, was at her side. She was calm, reflective and out-going. She remained seated at the feet of their friend from Galilee, attentively listening to him as he spoke.

These sisters teach us that their experiences in life are still valid at the present time. Indeed, we have to serve in the various places where we find ourselves and we have to struggle against the various forms of poverty. At the same time Martha and Mary teach us that we have to deepen our faith and that at all times and in all places we need to minister together and thus serve our Lord, Jesus Christ. Like Vincent de Paul we must be willing to ask the question: **"Lord, if you were in my place, how would you act on this occasion?"** (SVP:XI:348; ES:XI:240; CCD:XI:314). Vincent recommended that we should be ever mindful of our encounter with Christ in prayer. In fact, he emphasized prayer when he stated: **"what food is to the body, prayer is to the soul"** (SVP:IX:416; ES:IX:381; CCD:XI:327).

Vincent's plan **to provide for the spiritual and material needs of the poor** obliges us to honor the love of Our Lord, a love that we, by the manner in which we serve the poor, can reveal to those men and women living in situations of poverty. Thus we are challenged to clothe ourselves more fully in Vincentian spirituality and invited to engage in a process of on-going training and preparation so that we might better respond to the present situations of poverty.

We are to provide for the spiritual and material needs of our brothers and sisters and to encourage their participation in this process so that they become actively involved in promoting their development and the development of their community. We are challenged to empower people because then, as Vincent stated, **the poor will evangelize us** (cf. Coste XI:201) and this in turn establishes a good relationship between those who “are assisting” and those who “are being assisted”. We should remember that our plans and projects ought to be such that they transform the lives of those who are excluded from participation in society. Thus we imitate Vincent, who wanted to alleviate the miseries that he discovered in society, and at the same time we imitate Christ, who attacked the causes of poverty.

We cannot remain on the level of piety. It is not enough to go to all the meetings, to recite all our prayers and to participate in the Eucharist. Indeed, if we do not serve our brothers and sisters who live in various situations of poverty, then we are not authentic Christians and we have not learned how to love Jesus who, before becoming present in the Eucharist, served his disciples. In the Eucharist we find both the element of service and the element of prayer and those who believe that one dimension is more important than the other are actually misinterpreting the Eucharist. Both prayer and service are equally important if we are to be authentic volunteers on behalf of our association and if our activity is to be motivated by love. Indeed, we see that both prayer and service were part of Jesus' life. Love has to be shared with others and this sharing is done through service. We are exhorted to imitate Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples during the Last Supper. Three things will endure: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.

The Christian life means that we are filled with and guided by the Word of God and that we place ourselves in a position to serve our brothers and sisters. One without the other is meaningless. Nevertheless, the encounter with the Lord is fundamental. Therefore we pray that we might learn how to combine our action with prayer and thus learn how to balance the “Martha and the Mary” that is part of each one of us.

Personal and Community Reflection:

Let us meditate on the following words of our beloved founder, Vincent de Paul:

- ❖ **“How little it takes to be very holy: to do the will of God in all things”** (SVP:II:36; ES:II:34; CCD:II:47).
- ❖ **“God calls you to make your prayer, and at the same time he calls you to that poor, sick person. That is called leaving God for God”** (SVP:X:595; ES:IX:1125; CCD:X:478).

What do these words mean to us today?

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ Take a moment to reflect on how the characteristics of Martha and Mary are present in your own life. What must be changed in order to become a person who balances prayer and action?
- ❖ What initiatives can we take to improve our time of prayer and our union with Christ and with Mary? What initiatives can we take to improve our service as a group, that is, to better our service on behalf of our brothers and sisters to whom we minister?

Prayer and Hymn

REFLECTION FOR JUNE:

Attitudes and Values of Every AIC Volunteer

Text: Lottie Espinoza de Pivaral --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

Our attitudes and values as AIC Volunteers come alive when we become aware of the manner in which God made his presence felt in the life of Vincent de Paul and thus discover the fundamental aspects of his prayer experience. Those attitudes and values were the result of the practice of the virtues that he viewed as “fundamental virtues” and that now have become the foundations that enable us to insert ourselves into the midst of the human realities in which we are living and serving... and to insert ourselves with a creative and life-giving dynamic.

Development of the Theme:

We understand spirituality as a set of concepts and attitudes that characterize the spiritual life of an individual or a group of people. The spirituality of Vincent de Paul and his specific manner of following Jesus Christ had its origins in a powerful encounter with God and with Christ in the world of the poor, which in turn led him to the discovery of new values and attitudes as he lived his life in accordance with the gospel.

These attitudes and values are the principles that every AIC volunteer ought to practice in order to fulfill the will of God and the mission of Christ, evangelizer of the poor. That was the way in which Vincent de Paul lived his life.

In order to do this we need to believe in and understand the Vincentian charism in such a way that we have no hesitation in communicating this gift to all those whom we serve (through our activity we will demonstrate the charism). Those living in poverty ought to see Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul in each one of us.

Saint Vincent spoke often about the various virtues and focused his attention on those aspects that would challenge men and women to live in such a way that, as stated in the gospel: “by their fruits you will know them” (Cf. Matthew 12:23).

We are all aware of the fact that the scale of values changes. Many factors influence the hierarchy of human and Christian values and these same factors will influence our reflection on the virtues and the values that these virtues contain.

The virtues that Vincent de Paul emphasized flowed from his vision of the Son of God who became incarnated in the world and also became the evangelizer of the poor. Here then we refer to simplicity, humility, gentleness, charity, mortification and zeal for the salvation of souls. Saint Vincent invited the Ladies of Charity, as laywomen, to live by the first three virtues: **simplicity, humility and charity**. As we live our life in accord with these virtues and clothe ourselves in attitudes that are proper to the children of God, we are able to demonstrate the values that are upheld by all AIC volunteers.

Why these three virtues and not others? Vincent would say: “I have chosen these three virtues because they are most essential to the process of evangelization. What is most essential about these three virtues is that they constitute a spiritual program for our apostolic activity. These virtues not only focus on our interior life but more specifically deal with our relationship with our neighbor, with our AIC: simplicity in our activity; humility in our encounter with others and charity, which makes it easier to establish relationships with our sisters and brothers who are living in poverty”. Let us analyze each one of these virtues.

1) *Simplicity*

What is the meaning of this virtue? “God made humankind simple, but people have recourse to many calculations” (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Above all else, simplicity consists of speaking the truth so that there is a harmony between what we say and think and do. Simplicity means that we are transparent in our speech and that we speak about things as they are, that we are not duplicitous or do not have hidden agendas. Finally, it means that we act from a love for God and, thus for no other motive.

Why should we practice this virtue? Vincentian groups and associations ought to be grounded in communication and trust and unity. Those who practice what they say, speak with greater moral authority and that reality alone is sufficient reason to practice this virtue.

Saint Vincent tells us: “It’s among them, among those poor people that true religion and a living faith are preserved; they believe simply, without dissecting everything; they submit to order and are patient amid the abject poverty they have to suffer as long as it pleases God, some from the wars, others from working all day long in the great heat of the sun; poor vine dressers, who give us their labor, who expect us to pray for them while they wear themselves out to feed us” (CCD:XI:190).

Simplicity is indispensable for the volunteers who go out to encounter those living in poverty and this virtue is revealed in the manner in which we receive, listen to and speak with others. We can achieve this through the process of on-going training. Thus the great challenge for every volunteer is to be able to say with Saint Vincent: “simplicity is my gospel” (CCD:IX:476).

2) *Humility*

What is the meaning of this virtue? “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves” (Matthew 11:29). Humility means that we recognize everything that is good as coming from God... it means that we willingly empty ourselves of ourselves. Vincent tells us that Jesus and his Mother ought to be our models for the practice of humility. Indeed, humility is the origin of all the good that we can do. Humility implies an attitude of service on behalf of the Lord and on behalf of our brothers and sisters. Humility also means that we allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor, “our lords and masters” (CCD:X:215).

Why should we practice this virtue? The primary value of humility is that by the practice of this virtue we imitate our Lord who had humility as “his virtue” (CCD:XI:46).

Humility allows us to recognize ourselves as “creatures” of God who need other persons (we cannot live without others). Humility also helps us recognize our limitations and our sinfulness and thus leads us to trust in God. Humility is a way to defend ourselves from the temptation of ambition and vanity, while at the same time it provides us with inner peace and is thus seen as the foundation for perfection and the principle on which the whole spiritual life is built. Through the practice of humility we can overcome the obstacles that could lead us to act in a way that is contrary to the plan of God.

Today the fact that people lack an experience of God has created a crisis in values which has left us with a society in which we find “corruption of our nature, the fickleness of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the disorder of our will, and the lack of purity of our affections” (CCD:XII:169-170).

How can we be humble? Saint Vincent stated: "Humility, may this be our password!" (CCD:XII:169). In our activity as Vincentian volunteers we often run the risk of being domineering and feeling that we are self-sufficient and therefore we cling to our own ideas and methods and refuse to collaborate with others.

We lack humility when we allow ourselves to be guided by our prejudices which enable us to categorize persons with such great facility; when we speak lightly about the negative aspects of other volunteers; when we are lazy with regard to prayer; when we are unable to become enthusiastic about renewal and on-going training; when we refuse to share our possessions with those living in poverty (and not only our possessions but also when we refuse to share our time, our talent and our life with them). "May humility be our password!" (CCD:XII:169). In order to attain humility we ought to accept our short-comings and our faults and the correction that is given to us. Above all we ought to pray and ask God and the Blessed Virgin for the grace to be humble and "to empty ourselves of self in order to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ" (CCD:XI:311). Today Saint Vincent would speak to the volunteers and tell them: "Dear members of AIC, you must understand that you will never be able to do the work of God unless you have deep humility. Only then can you be certain that you are able to do the work of God... indeed, God uses such persons for his great work".

3) *Charity*

What is the meaning of this virtue? The essence of charity is found in Matthew 7:12 and is often known as "**The Golden Rule**": "Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

By applying the Golden Rule we would not only transform ourselves but could transform all those around us: We could put an end to misunderstandings, disagreements, selfishness, resentment, self-importance, etc.

If we truly recognize Jesus Christ as our Lord, his "**Golden Rule**" will govern our lives.

Why should we practice this virtue? Charity is an obligation; it is a divine precept which encompasses others. Everyone knows that our love for God and our neighbor includes all the laws and the prophet's teachings. Everything is contained in this love, everything is directed towards it; and it has so much force and primacy that the person who expresses it fulfils the law of God, as we all relate to this love, and it is what makes us do that which God asks of us. However this love doesn't just refer to love for God, but also charity towards our neighbor; it is so great that human understanding cannot comprehend it; we need to rise above the stars in the sky to see how high and deep it runs.

Is it true that I will do for my neighbors that which I wish them to do for me? This is a serious self-examination that we have to undertake. How many of us have this disposition within us? If we love our neighbors, can we ever speak ill of them? Can we do something that displeases them? If we have this feeling in our hearts, can we see our neighbors without showing them our love?

The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart; normally our exterior actions bear witness to what is inside of us; those that have true charity inside, will show it on the outside. As it is characteristic of fire to light and heat, it is characteristic of love to respect and please the beloved.

Hence it is important that we as volunteers promote love and solidarity: among each other and inside the Association; between ourselves and the most disadvantaged; between disadvantaged persons and among all members of civil society and the Church.

Personal and Community Reflection:

In silence reflect on these virtues and ask yourself: which of these do I find most difficult to practice? What can be done so that I find it easier to practice this virtue?

Activities and Questions:

Get into groups and in the form of an examination of your conscience, reflect on:

- ❖ What expressions of simplicity do I view as most necessary for my personal and Christian development as a member of this Association?

In the life of my group:

- ❖ How has a lack of humility prevented me from developing the gifts that God has given me?
- ❖ Are my actions consistent with my words and without hypocrisy, artifice or false pretensions?
- ❖ Do I stimulate the other volunteers by communicating my enthusiasm for serving those living in poverty?

Prayer and Hymn

REFLECTION FOR JULY:

It is not enough for me to Love God, if my Neighbor doesn't Love Him - Evangelization

Text: Lottie Espinoza de Pivaral --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction: May the Spirit of Christ Live in me

Who is my neighbor? Who is my closest neighbor? Saint Vincent spoke about spirituality and he shared with us his understanding of that reality when on December 13th, 1658 he addressed his followers and stated: "When we say that the Holy Spirit is at work in someone, it means that this Spirit, residing in that person, gives him or her the same inclinations and dispositions Jesus Christ had on earth, and they cause the person to act in the same way --- I'm not saying with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of that Divine Spirit" (CCD:XII:93). Thus we have a very simple description of spirituality, namely it is the Holy Spirit acting on our interior. Our interior is our spirit: thoughts, feelings, criteria, convictions, etc. This is also where the Holy Spirit acts. Since the Holy Spirit is the same Spirit of Christ, therefore when the Holy Spirit interacts with our spirit, it is natural that our spirit should be filled with the spirit of Jesus with his inclinations and dispositions... indeed, the ideal would be that we are able to say: "I live, no longer I, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Development of the Theme:

"It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor doesn't love him" (CCD:XII:215).

These words of Saint Vincent apply to all of us as Vincentian volunteers because he frequently said that "if we have love, we should show it by bringing people to love God and the neighbor, to love the neighbor for God and God for the neighbor" (CCD:XII:215).

- ***Evangelization is done within the Church***

From the time of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, the volunteers have always understood that their origins were rooted in the Church and therefore, as part of the Church we carry out our mission of love and service on behalf of those living in poverty. In the Church we were gifted with faith; in the Church we have developed and grown in faith; as members of the Church, God has called us to this vocation of service on behalf of those persons who are most poor and most vulnerable.

Our charitable action, our transformative efforts and our commitment to justice and charity are the best arguments and the best witness that in turn make the Church credible.

- ***Saint Vincent de Paul and the Church***

Because of Saint Vincent's love for the Church (he was very aware of the Church's faults and defects) he was convinced that the community of the faithful is called to holiness and perfection. For Vincent de Paul, this perfection "lies in charity" (CCD:VII:356) and "in doing the will of God" (CCD:V:613). This charity involves helping our neighbor to come to a knowledge of God's will and also helping our neighbor to love God.

- ***The Church of the Poor***

We cannot separate the Church from love and we know that the incredible growth in the number of poor people played a decisive role in the ecclesiological awareness of the Apostle of Charity during the seventeenth century (cf., CCD:XI:98-100). A quick reading of the gospels will convince us of the fact that the followers of Jesus were mostly poor people and Jesus himself was also poor.

Those of us who have read something about the life of Vincent de Paul have been able to understand that Vincent imitated Jesus; Vincent opted for the poor; Vincent taught the poor to love Jesus and to open themselves to an encounter with Jesus. Throughout his life Vincent taught the poor to love Jesus and he used Vincentian volunteers, volunteers like ourselves, to help him in this ministry on behalf of the poor.

The Church has a social mission: The Church not only offers men and women the message and the grace of Jesus Christ but also seeks to discover ways that will better the material life of those same people. It is here that **our mission as Vincentian volunteers shares in the mission of the Church**. The application of the gospel message to the social realities demands of us a humble spirit of charity and also demands a spirit of humility in understanding that “doing good isn’t everything; we have to do it well” (CCD:XII:148). This may mean that we have to look for more appropriate techniques and tools in order to bring the true charity of Christ to our present world, to all men and women who are not only living in poverty but who also are not loved and therefore do not know how to love. **Therefore we, as volunteers, are challenged to share with them this love so that they will learn how to love**. We have to learn how to evangelize them so that they come to know the love of God and the ways in which God loves them personally.

- ***The Church is Love: We, All the Baptized, are the Church***

We seek the conversion of everyone; we desire the conversion of everyone; we make every effort, if necessary, to bring about the conversion of everyone. There is no other way to be faithful to Christ. We are not about winning debates or making ourselves pleasing to our brothers and sisters. We are about saving souls and there is one name that is given to men and women who want to be saved: Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Are we to preach only with words? No, our works give witness to God. Jesus said: “your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16).

The letter of James exhorts us in a similar manner: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if some people say that they have faith but do not have works? Can that faith save them? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, “You have faith and I have works.” Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” (James 2:14-18).

It is for this reason that **the church has always accompanied the preaching of the gospel with charity toward those who are most in need**. We cannot have one without the other and it would be a serious mistake to put aside one of those two realities. We cannot offer sacrifice to God without providing food for those who are hungry and without giving water to those who thirst. Yet we cannot be satisfied with providing the sinner with just bread and water but we must also offer them the bread that has come down from heaven. It is outrageous to think that we would deny people either the earthly bread or the heavenly bread since we are able to offer people both of these. Who would raise their voice calling for people to respect their neighbor and yet not offer the gift of salvation to the neighbor?

Who would think that it is enough to speak about Jesus and therefore feel no need to act like the Good Samaritan who cared for the man who had been left lying half dead on the side of the road? Is not that type of care a form of love?

We conclude this theme in the same way that we began. Here, however, we cite Saint Paul: "If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast... for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Saint Vincent explained this to us when he stated: "It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor doesn't love him" (CCD:XII:215). Indeed, we can ask what does it mean for us to love God if those who share life with us on a daily basis do not find us to be true evangelizers as a result of the attitudes that we communicate? We would become like the rock that causes people to trip and fall, we would become a scandal to those whom we are called to communicate the faith and the love of Christ and the Church.

Let us be creative and innovative so that all people might be able to love and teach others to love, so that we might be able to continue to move forward as we follow Jesus Christ and follow Louise Marillac and Vincent de Paul...

"Love is inventive to infinity" (CCD:XI:131).

Personal and Community Reflection:

Who is better, those who love God but are not concerned about the neighbor or those who love the neighbor for love of God? Which of these is the purer and more disinterested form of love? (Cf. XII:214-216).

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ In our service what specific things can we do that will give life to this evangelizing love that we have learned from our Vincentian charism? (Think of something that involves systemic change).

Prayer:

*Come, Holy Spirit, and from heaven send forth your light.
Come, Father of the poor, come and give us your gifts, come and give us your light
Come, Consoler, filled with goodness, marvelous guest of the soul.
With your holy light enter into the most intimate part of the soul of your faithful followers.
Without your divine assistance there is nothing in the human person that is innocent.
Cleanse us and satisfy our thirst and heal our wounds.*

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR AUGUST:

The Words and Deeds of St Vincent de Paul

Text: María Eugenia Magallanes Negrete --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction: Jesus Christ, an Example of Authenticity

Authenticity is closely related to **honesty**. Persons who are honest can easily be recognized because they are sincere in their behavior, their words and their feelings. Jesus of Nazareth was an authentic person and that characteristic gave him great authority. People knew that he spoke the truth and that he said what he was thinking. Vincent de Paul, our founder, **in imitation of Jesus Christ**, was also an authentic person: **“Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ”** (Abelly I:103). There is no doubt that the imitation of Jesus Christ was his constant desire; according to the Bishop of Rodez, it was **“his light and mirror”** (Abelly III:88).

Development of the Theme: Being like Vincent de Paul, an evangelizer in word and deed

Vincent was a gifted man who had an amazing ability to establish relationships with a great variety of people: men and women, rich and poor, ecclesiastics and politicians, nobles and plebes, religious men and women, lay men and women. Later, he would place this gift of God at the service of those persons most in need.

Let us reflect on some phrases (**words**) of Vincent de Paul and explore the relationship of those words to his actions (**deeds**).

“To be Christian and to see our brother or sister suffering without weeping with them, without being sick with them! That is to be lacking in charity; it is being a caricature of a Christian; it is inhuman; it is to be worse than animals” (CCD:XII:222).

Let us recall the events that occurred in Châtillon: Vincent de Paul, filled with love for God, responded to one of the great needs of that era and established the first Confraternity of Charity. All the works that he accomplished (and there were many works) were inspired by his great love for Jesus Christ whom he really and truly saw in every poor person that he met during his lifetime. It was for that reason that he asked the first **volunteers**, and then the members of the **Congregation of the Mission** and the Company of the **Daughters of Charity**, to care for the poor with true love and to be aware of the fact that Jesus Christ is present in each and every one of those poor men and women.

“Do what we will, people will never believe in us if we do not show love and compassion to those whom we wish to believe in us” (CCD:I:277).

Vincent was able to obtain the confidence, respect, admiration and affection of those persons whom he knew, especially the poor who felt truly loved by him.

“It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love him” (CCD:XII:215).

Vincent experienced the urgent need to **evangelize** so that everyone who was close to him might come to a knowledge of God. In 1625 he established the Congregation of the Mission.

“How happy will those be who, at the hour of death, can say those beautiful words of Our Lord: the Lord sent me to bring the Good News to the poor. You see, brothers and sisters, that the essential aim of Our Lord was to work for poor persons” (CCD:XI:122).

Those words of Vincent could be applied today to each one of us and could be seen as an invitation to engage in the process of evangelization. Hopefully we have all read the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Here I would like to present some of the ideas that Father Celestino Fernández, CM expressed in his presentation entitled: **“Vincentian Contributions to the New Evangelization”**.

Evangelization is like a rainbow and the evangelization that is done by the members of the Vincentian Family is like a color that beautifies. We do not seek to create divisions but rather, from the perspective of our Vincentian charism, we seek to make a contribution to the process of evangelization.

In 1979 during a visit to his native Poland, Pope John Paul II coined the phrase, “the new evangelization”. Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization and for Pope Francis, the new evangelization is the fundamental focus of his papacy. Why do we call this process of evangelization “new”? We call it “new” because we are living in new times and this means that we have to evangelize anew because the world has become pagan. Gospel values have been absorbed by secular values: hedonism, consumerism, competitiveness, etc. The pulpits have disappeared and been replaced by the internet; the cathedrals have been replaced by commercial and financial centers (Wall Street). That is the reason why **we must proclaim the good news of the gospel with creativity, with new methods and strategies that are adapted to the new world in which we live**. Evangelization is not a war or a crusade, but rather it is an offer of salvation. In the process of evangelization we do not attempt to conquer but to propose and persuade. We have to go out to the **“peripheries”**, to those places where those living in poverty have been confined. We have to go out to the geographical peripheries and also to the moral and spiritual peripheries.

In the introduction we spoke about authenticity and with the following words, which are quite strong, Vincent invites us to be authentic: ***“[Be careful], do not undo by your actions the progress you have made by preaching”*** (CCD:XI:252).

By way of conclusion, let us reflect on the following words of Vincent and view those words as wise counsel:

- ❖ ***“Doing good is not everything; we have to do it well, after the example of Our Lord, of whom it is said in the Gospel that he did all things well”*** (CCD:XII:148).
- ❖ ***“The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones”*** (CCD:I:33).
- ❖ ***“We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor”*** (CCD:III:384).

Personal and Community Reflection:

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us so that we might reflect on what we have read and make a firm decision to better our service... recognizing of course that it is Jesus Christ whom we are serving.

Activities and Questions:

Individual Response:

- ❖ Like Vincent, do I see Jesus Christ in those living in poverty?

Group Response:

- ❖ Do those living in poverty guide our service and plans?
- ❖ In our service as members of AIC what can we do in order to participate in the new evangelization?

Prayer:

Lord, Jesus Christ, may your presence fill us with your grace and may your image inspire our hearts so that we might walk in the light of your life. May we think as you thought, act as you acted, speak as you spoke, dream as you dreamed and love as you loved.

May we live as you lived: unconcerned about ourselves and concerned for others, self-sacrificing in order to encourage and to provide hope to others and selfless in order to heighten our sensitivity to others.

May we live as you lived: compassionate and merciful; patient, humble and gentle; sincere and truthful. May your chosen ones, the poor, be our chosen ones and may your objectives be our objectives. May those who see us see you and may we be a reflection of your life and your love. Amen.

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR SEPTEMBER:

The Words and Deeds of St Louise de Marillac

Text: *María Eugenia Magallanes Negrete* --- Translation: *Father Charlie Plock, CM*

Introduction: Saint Louise, a leader who teaches us with her example

In 1625 Vincent de Paul responded positively to the request of Madame Le Gras, Louise de Marillac, to become her spiritual director. At that time he could not have imagined the place that she would occupy in his life. He counseled this woman who had suffered greatly and involved her in his service on behalf of the poor. Like Vincent de Paul and in imitation of Jesus Christ, Louise was an authentic woman... a good organizer and a woman gifted with a facility in relating to others.

Louise was an important person for the members of the various Confraternities... she was their first Visitor. From her very first contact with the Confraternities (1629) she discovered the importance of attentive listening, thus putting aside her own concerns. This attitude allowed the members to speak openly about their problems. Those women knew that Louise respected everything that they said. They felt as though they were understood and therefore they trusted her. At no time did they feel they were being judged, even though at different times Louise would point out a better way for them to carry out their ministry: **“The Ladies of Charity have recognized the needs of the poor... and God has given them the grace to provide for them in a charitable and magnificent manner... The means that these charitable women utilize in order to distribute the various provisions is their assemblies that are directed by faithful and charitable persons who recognize the true needs of the poor and provide for these people in a prudent manner, tending to their material as well as their spiritual needs”**.

We, as AIC volunteers, ought to feel privileged in being called by the Lord to this vocation: **“You should be very grateful for the graces God has given you by placing you in a position to render Him such great services”** (SWLM:271 [L.228]).

Development of the Theme: The spiritual life of Saint Louise (the presence of Christ in the Incarnation and in the Eucharist)

Louise de Marillac loved to contemplate the mystery of the **Blessed Trinity** and how these persons would communicate their love to humanity. She wrote: **“As soon as human nature had sinned, the Creator, who wanted to repair this fault by a great act of love, ordered, in the Council of His Divinity, that one of the three Persons should become man. By so doing, He gave proof of deep, true humility”** (SWLM:700 [A.7]).

She reflected on the reasons that might have led God to send the Son to earth. One simple phrase can be viewed as a summary of her thoughts about the reasons for the Incarnation: **“God never showed greater love for his creatures than when he resolved to become man”** (SWLM:700 [A.7]).

The Incarnation of the Son of God is real: the Word became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. With great devotion Louise contemplated God calling Mary, the simple woman from Nazareth, the mother of God and contemplated the reality **“of the dignity for which God had destined her as the Mother of His Son”** (SWLM:735 [M.35b]).

Through her own experience Louise knew the joy of giving life to a child, giving to another that which is most intimate: one's own blood. She described that joy when she wrote: **“Now is the time for the fulfillment of your promise. Blessed may you be forever, O my God, for the choice you made of the Holy Virgin... You used the blood**

of the Blessed Virgin to form the body of your dear Son” (SWLM:801 [A13b]). All of Mary’s glory is derived from her divine maternity. Louise proclaimed that Mary was **“the masterpiece of God’s omnipotence in a nature that is purely human”** (SWLM:831 [A.31b]). To honor Mary for the choice that God made is to honor God. God so loved men and women that God wanted to be in their midst, wanted to receive his humanness from Mary.

In addition to the theme of the Incarnation, Louise also wrote about the Eucharist: **“The Son of God was not satisfied with taking a human body and dwelling in the midst of humankind. He desired an inseparable union of divine nature with human nature. He accomplished this after the Incarnation by the admirable institution of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar in which the fullness of the divinity dwells continually in the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity”** (SWLM:784: [A.14]).

The incarnation is not limited to Jesus’s lifetime. When Jesus knew that his hour was approaching, he found the means to prolong his presence so that he would always remain with us. Louise was in awe as she contemplated the extraordinary mystery of the Eucharist.

Personal and Community Reflection:

We pray that the Lord might fill us with his Holy Spirit in order that we might reflect upon the words that we have read. May this Spirit of the Lord help us to understand that which Louise saw so clearly, namely, **“the poor demand more than alms and medicine and clothing or some form of more or less permanent assistance! They demand the absolute surrendering of our life”** (Father Celestino Fernández, CM).

Activities and Questions:

Individual Response:

- ❖ Did you learn something new about Louise de Marillac?
- ❖ How did you feel as you read this reflection: surprise, admiration, questions, something else?

Group Response:

- ❖ What teachings do you consider to be important for training the members of our Association?
- ❖ What means can we utilize in order to confront new challenges?

Prayer: Generosity

*Lord, teach us to be generous;
To give without counting the cost;
To return good for evil;
To serve without expecting some reward;
To draw closer to those whom we find repulsive;
To do good to those who cannot reciprocate;
To love generously;
To work without being concerned about rest;
To be solely concerned about giving;
To give our whole self;
To give to those who need us,
Hoping to receive only You, Lord, as our reward.
Amen.*

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR OCTOBER:

Different Ministries but the Same Mission: The Vincentian Family

Text: María Eugenia Magallanes Negrete --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction: The Vincentian Family, a powerful force with a long history

The Vincentian Family was founded by Vincent de Paul who discovered his charism of service and evangelization on behalf of those living in poverty and very quickly shared that charism with other people. Thus, the first branches of this fruitful tree came into existence: **the Confraternities of Charity** (1617), **the Congregation of the Mission** (1625) and **the Company of the Daughters of Charity** (1633).

Two centuries later two new branches of the tree came into existence: **the Vincentian Marian Youth Association** (the event that led to the creation of this Association was the appearances of the Blessed Virgin to Saint Catherine Laboure in Paris, France [1830]) and **the Saint Vincent de Paul Society** (founded by Frederic Ozanam in Paris [1833]).

In 1909 the **Miraculous Medal Association** (this Association also came into existence as a result of the apparitions of the Virgin to Saint Catherine) and in 1997 the newest branch, **the Vincentian Lay Missionaries**, was born as a result of the desire of the members of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association to engage in the work of missions *ad gentes* for an extended period of time.

These are “the official” seven branches of the International Vincentian Family (FAMVIN); throughout the world, however, there are more than two hundred fifty groups and movements that are inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul and/or by his spirituality. What unites all of these groups is a common mission of love and service on behalf of those who experience distinct forms of poverty and exclusion.

Development of the Theme: The Vincentian charism is shared by more than 250 groups, or in other words, more than 2,000,000 people

- ***The charism is shared***

Beginning in 1995, Father Robert Maloney, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, encouraged all the associations that are inspired by Saint Vincent to live to the fullest their spirituality and their ministry and the present Superior General, Father Gregory Gay, has continued that work. This new impulse seeks to create bonds of unity and collaboration on the level of training as well as on the level of service on behalf of those living in poverty.

Since that time the Superior General of the Congregation has gathered together the International Presidents of the seven branches of the Vincentian Family and has also invited the leaders of other international groups that share the Vincentian charism to participate in the meetings. These groups have included the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity, the Brothers of Charity, the Brothers and Sisters of Mercy, the Religious of Saint Vincent, the Vincentian Companions, the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, among others.

- ***FAMVIN is concerned about the training of its members***

Saint Vincent said that we continue the mission of Jesus Christ who came to evangelize the poor. This is also our mission... in fact we have no other mission except that of evangelizing those living in poverty. The task of evangelization is derived from our Baptism. As Vincentians we have to be evangelizers.

The fundamental theme of the pontificate of Pope Francis is that of **the new evangelization**. It is referred to as “new evangelization” because we live in new times. Indeed, the world has turned a page in its history and is in need of being evangelized once again. In accordance with this line of thinking the 2014 meeting of the Vincentian Family had as its motto: **The Vincentian Contributions to the New Evangelization**.

The International Vincentian Family is involved in an important training program which is geared toward providing better service to those living in poverty. This program is composed of five modules which are: [1] the Vincentian as **visionary**; [2] the Vincentian as **contemplative**; [3] the Vincentian as **collaborator**; [4] the Vincentian as **catalyst**; [5] the Vincentian as **servant**. In May 2013 this program was delivered for the first time and in June 2014 the second session was held.

- ***Programs that assist those living in poverty***

The branches of the Vincentian Family are engaged in projects that assist people trapped in “new forms of poverty” such as, people living with AIDS, drug addiction, refugees and migrants. As members of the Vincentian Family we are called not only to provide these people with food and clothing and medicine but even more importantly we are called to struggle with those who are living in poverty for justice and peace and education and the holistic development of all people. Some years ago the Vincentian Family began the “systemic change” initiative which, in imitation of Saint Vincent de Paul, is directed toward the causes of poverty. Thus we saw the creation of some important projects that transformed in a radical manner the life of those who were living in the midst of situations of poverty (for example, in Madagascar, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Haiti).

- ***Representation in International Organizations***

Several branches of the Vincentian Family, including our beloved AIC, have representation as a non-governmental organization at the Conferences of Catholic Organizations, the European Council, the Pontifical Council COR UNUM, the United Nations (and their various bodies, such as, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.).

Many of the projects of the different branches of the Vincentian Family are directed toward fulfilling the **Millennium Development Goals**, which are: [1] to eradicate poverty and hunger, [2] to achieve universal primary education, [3] to promote gender equality and to empower women, [4] to reduce child mortality, [5] to improve maternal health, [6] to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, [7] to ensure environmental sustainability, [8] to form global partnerships for development.

- ***The Vincentian Family is invited to build a more equal and just world***

As Vincentians we are invited to work for social justice. When we see someone on our streets begging for food, it is because there is no justice and therefore we must act. Social justice means that people have enough to eat, are free, are able to live dignified lives, have access to employment and education and are able to develop themselves as people. To work for justice is something concrete... it is action and not just theory. We have to be engaged in an ongoing struggle against poverty and inequality and we must also attempt to make our dream of equality a reality. Even though we may not be able to achieve the goal in its totality, we must continue to work together to change those structures that imprison so many men and women; we must continue to struggle together so that those who are living in situations of poverty will be treated with dignity and respect.

- ***The members of the Vincentian Family are called to be “revolutionaries” like Christ***

Revolutionaries never use violence; they are people of integrity, that is, they do what they say. They persevere in the action and/or activity that they are involved in... they commit themselves to the accomplishment of a mission. Christ was a revolutionary because he wanted to transform the world and wanted to change people's hearts. Christ was a revolutionary because he loved people so much that he gave his life so that others might have the fullness of life. It is most probable that we will not be able to completely change the world, but we can change the reality in which some people live if we can convince them with our example and our testimony.

Personal and Community Reflection:

Let us reflect on the following words of Frederic Ozanam, words that refer to the struggle for justice:

“Charity is not enough. To heal the wounds but not stop the blows that cause those wounds... charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the beaten traveler who has been attacked. The role of justice is to avoid the attacks”.

“The aim of the Society is based on two virtues: justice and charity. Nevertheless justice supposes great love because much love is needed in order to respect the rights of men and women”.

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ In your city or neighborhood, are there other branches of the Vincentian Family? Do you meet together as a family? How frequently do you interact with one another?
- ❖ As AIC volunteers are you involved with any Vincentian Family projects?
- ❖ In your center, are you involved in some project that is aimed at achieving one or more of the Millennium Development Goals? Describe that project.

Prayer of the Vincentian Family:

Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor, give us eyes and a heart directed toward the poor; help us to recognize you in them; in their thirst, their hunger, their loneliness and their misfortune.

Enkindle within our Vincentian Family, unity, simplicity, humility and the fire of love that burned in St Vincent de Paul

Strengthen us, so that, faithful to the practice of these virtues, we may contemplate you, and serve you, in the person of the poor and may one day be united with you and them in your kingdom. Amen.

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR NOVEMBER:***Fraternal Communities in every AIC Group***

Text: Selina Suárez Fermín --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction: Let us act and be like true sisters in Christ

It is very important to highlight the importance of the fraternity, respect and trust that ought to exist in every AIC group or center. There is no doubt that we, as individual members of AIC, are different, that we think and act distinctly. Yes, we are different, but we must also be clear about the fact that we are bound together as Vincentian Volunteers. As such, we ought to do many things together and this implies collaboration, solidarity, love and accompanying one another. Indeed, it is precisely those qualities that will enable us to fulfill our commitment toward our brothers and sisters in need and will enable us to do this in an affective and effective manner. We have to live and act as brothers and sisters to one another... we have to be authentic fraternal communities.

Development of the Theme: May respect, solidarity and warmth thrive in AIC groups

Vincent de Paul, as well as Louise de Marillac, always acted with respect and love toward their brothers and sisters... not only those brothers and sisters who were suffering and/or in vulnerable situations, but also those brothers and sisters with whom they shared their life on a daily basis. Many letters that were written by these two saints and addressed to the Missionaries or the Daughters of Charity encouraged them to be concerned not only about their ministry (which had been entrusted to them) and their interior dispositions, their encounter with the Lord and their following of Jesus Christ, but also to be concerned about their health, their financial situation, their travels and the various missions on which they were sent. Vincent often repeated the words: *take care brother; take care sister; take care of yourself*. Vincent and Louise exhorted their followers to rest and take care of their health. They respected the opinions and insights and decisions of their companions in community and were very aware of the pluralism that existed in those communities. Following the example of Vincent and Louise and also imitating the members of the early Christian community who were known as being of one heart and one mind, we must come to appreciate the fact that our differences are a treasure that should lead us to an unconditional commitment to our group and to the brothers and sisters whom we are called to serve.

There are many values that we have to make real in our life so that as a group we never lose sight of that which makes us who we are. We have to search for the common good of the group so that this in turn becomes the cornerstone of the service of our Association whose fundamental value ought to be solidarity. We ought to become ever more aware of the needs of others and promote unity among ourselves as well between ourselves and others. Indeed, that unity is transcendental because every individual has an irreplaceable value and, therefore, we are bound together with one another. We must always be mindful of our origins: we are a fraternal community and we promote a culture of love.

Personal and Community Reflection:

We have to cultivate other values, such as respect and tolerance, and we have to do this on a daily basis. We must not allow intolerance to become a reality in our midst, that is, we can never close the door on or reject those persons who think or act or live or believe in a way that is different from ourselves. We can affirm the fact that just as respect is the basis for life together as a society, so also intolerance, if it becomes rooted in our midst, will make our life together impossible.

Activities and Questions:

- ❖ Is there some dynamic that will help us to get to know one another on a deeper level?
- ❖ Do we treat our companions with respect?
- ❖ Do we believe that pluralism can be enriching?
- ❖ Do we accept others as they are?
- ❖ Discuss your answers to the questions above in groups.

Prayer:

*Jesus Christ, our Lord and Brother, place a lock on the door to our heart
so that we think no evil of anyone,
so that we do not prejudge or wish harm to others,
so that we do not suppose or interpret evil in the intentions of our brothers and sisters.
Lord Jesus Christ, you are the unifying element of our life together.
Place a seal of silence on our lips so that the path of murmuring and discord is closed off;
so that the words that are entrusted to us in confidence and all the irregularities that we observe... may we guard all
of these things zealously!
May we always be aware of the fact that the primary
and most concrete way to love is to remain silent!
Place in our hearts those seeds of kindness
and give us a spirit of civility
so that we reverence one another in the same way that we reverence you, our Lord!
At the same time, give us the wisdom to combine that gift of civility
with a trust in our brothers and sisters.
Lord Jesus, give us the grace of mutual respect.
Amen!! So be it!!*

Hymn

REFLECTION FOR DECEMBER:

The Dreams of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent *What are your dreams?*

Text: Sister Carolina Flores and Alicia Duhne --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock, CM

Introduction:

We can all dream and in fact we all ought to have dreams. We could spend all the days of our life doing those things that are immediately in front of us or we could become enthusiastic and energetic about making our dreams a reality.

Following the example of our Founders, perhaps we can gain some insight into how to work so that what seems impossible becomes possible.

Development of the Theme:

- ***Saint Vincent's Dreams***

Vincent's earthly journey continued for eighty years. His first steps involved searching, restlessness and uncertainty. Thirty-six years would pass before he acquired the certainty that molded and characterized the rest of his life.

Vincent had three primary dreams: 1) evangelization through charity; 2) reforming the life of priests; 3) serving the poor, the beloved of Jesus Christ, with love. Those dreams were envisioned and made real during Vincent's lifetime.

As a young man Vincent dreamt of obtaining an income that would enable him to support his family. His family was poor and as a child, Vincent knew what it meant to go without. He thought that as a priest he would be able to contribute to the support of his family. He had not yet envisioned his own mission. We can read the beautiful accounts of how the Lord called him through the dying man whom he ministered to in Gannes (1617) and through the abandoned infirm family in Châtillon. The Lord provided Vincent with a great dream. Indeed, it was through his encounter with the poor that Vincent began to envision a more encompassing mission, namely, to contribute to the building up of a world that would be more intimately related to God and, as a result, a world in which material goods would be more equally distributed. In 1617 Vincent realized that the lack of evangelization and organization was the cause of the chaos that surrounded him. Thus, he began to look for solutions.

Vincent discovered the poor and this led to a radical change in his life. He began to understand the meaning of Jesus' words when he said: "whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). **Vincent's dream was expanded: he wanted to serve Jesus Christ by serving those men and women who were poor.**

Vincent was not satisfied with providing people with alms, but rather he always attempted to give to each person that which was needed so that tomorrow they could provide for themselves. **Vincent's dream was not focused on evangelization alone, but rather he joined together with the poor in their search for a path that would enable them to put their situation of poverty behind them.** Thus, in 1617 he established the Ladies of Charity (now known on the international level as AIC and in other places where they minister they are known as *Voluntarias Vicentinas, Equipes Saint Vincent, Ladies of Charity*). The members of the Association provide for various groups of poor people who have different needs because of the situation in which they find themselves.

Vincent also became aware of the needs of many priests and he decided to share his dreams with some priests and this ultimately led to the formation of group of Missionaries who “go from town to town, passing from village to village, preaching sermons and exhortations to the people. They teach everyone, catechizing them both publicly and privately, about the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation, of which most of the people are completely ignorant. They prepare them for general confession... and establish the Confraternity of Charity where it is necessary for the corporal and spiritual relief of the sick poor” (CCD:I:49). In 1625 these priests became members of the newly established Congregation of the Mission.

Providentially, as Vincent journeyed through life, he met Louise de Marillac and in 1629 he asked her to coordinate the Confraternities of Charity which were becoming more and more numerous throughout France. Louise was the first coordinator of the Confraternities.

Vincent and Louise shared their concerns with one another: the Ladies, because of their family and social obligations, were often unable to provide direct assistance to their brothers and sisters living in situations of poverty and so they sent their servants. As a result of that situation Vincent and Louise began to envision the establishment of another group that would become known as the Daughters of Charity. This dream became a reality as a result of the efforts of Louise de Marillac and thus, “the Ladies” and “the Daughters” complimented one another in their vocation and service and ultimately, prolonged the insight of their common founder.

When Vincent and Louise discovered the poor members of their society and country, they were tempted to ignore the poor who lived and died in other parts of the world. During the first thirty-one years of his apostolic ministry, Vincent only envisioned serving the poor in France. But as Vincent continued to look at the reality that surrounded him, his horizons were expanded and he began to send Missionaries to other countries: Italy (1642), Tunis (1645), the British Isles (1646), Madagascar (1648) and Poland (1651). Vincent dreamt of extending his work throughout the world... indeed, **Vincent initiated that work during his own lifetime** and we, the member of the Vincentian Family, continue that ministry today.

- ***Saint Louise de Marillac's Dreams***

Louise's life was directed by one dream: **to be faithful to the will of God**. Her letters and her writings enable us to discover her journey in pursuit of that great dream which was concretized in daily enthusiastic commitments.

Louise's writings place an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Her Pentecost experience of 1623 gave a direction to her life and became part of the spiritual heritage that she passed on to the Company. At the beginning of their relationship Vincent wrote: “The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He will reign in you if your heart is at peace” (CCD:I:111) and on another occasion: “The Spirit of Our Lord will be your rule and your tact” (CCD:I:118). Louise offered her whole life to the Spirit.

Louise dreamed of **being a servant on behalf of the poor**. Her contributions to the Church of her era were so important, so noteworthy and so organized that Pope John XXIII declared her to be the Patroness of all Social Workers. In the conferences that Vincent gave after Louise's death, the first Daughters spoke eloquently about Louise and her service on behalf of the poor: “she spoke very gently to the poor” (CCD:X:583); “she always showed a cheerful, contented countenance” (CCD:X:584).

Soon after meeting Vincent, Louise began to dream about collaborating in the organization of the Confraternities. In early 1629, Louise made a decision that changed her life and changed her into another woman: she decided to commit her life to serving the poor. She became responsible for visiting the Confraternities, observing their ministry, encouraging the members and then, writing a report on each visit. Louise reorganized and provided a new dynamism to many Confraternities. She sent many reports to Vincent and redacted and reformulated many of the Rules for the Confraternities.

Louise was passionate about teaching... when Louise visited the Confraternities, one of her primary concerns was to reinforce the need for education, especially among the girls and the young women since “if they remain steeped in ignorance, it is to be feared that this same ignorance will be harmful to them and render them incapable of cooperating with the grace of God for their salvation” (SWLM:50 [L.41]). Louise was insistent on the fact that the instruction that was to be imparted should be simple and practical and above all she wanted the girls to learn how to read and write.

Louise was a woman of detail and this characteristic was manifested in her deep realistic love. **Her dream with regard to organization** was also revealed in her redaction of the Rules which were always formulated from the perspective of her life experiences and therefore, those rules were viewed as essential for the functioning of those groups and for the future of the works that were undertaken.

Louise dreamt about the Daughters of Charity... she became the focal point for those who wanted to join and to be formed in order to serve the Charities. The young women received personal, religious and technical training that enabled them to engage in a competent material and spiritual service on behalf of the poor. The establishment of the Company was due in great part to the insight of Louise and from 1633 onward she carefully guided this institution that she so loved.

Louise dreamt of establishing relationships with all people... each of whom had a unique dignity. Louise's warmth, rooted in trust and respect, enabled her to enter into the life of many individuals as she provided for their well-being.

Personal and Community Reflection:

Vincent and Louise, like us, had dreams... our challenge is to respond to the dreams that God has for us. How can we make our dreams a reality?

Activities and Questions:

At this stage of our development:

- ❖ What are our dreams as a group?
- ❖ What are our dreams with regard to AIC's mission?
- ❖ Do you, as a member of AIC, have some other personal dreams with regard to your ministry?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we have many concerns and we also have many dreams that we want to make real so that we can live in a world that is guided by love and justice. Enlighten us as you enlightened Vincent and Louise and help us to see the path that you have marked out for us. May our life be meaningful so that at the end of our years we can say with calmness: we have done what you requested and we have contributed in some way to making your dream (which is also our dream) a reality! Amen.

The Spiritual Testament of St Louise:

My dear Sisters, I continue to ask God for His blessings for you and pray that He will grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation in order to serve Him in the manner He asks of you.

Take good care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great union and cordiality, loving one another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord.

Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother.

Hymn

Personal notes:

Personal notes:

AIC International

**An international network of over 150,000 volunteers, mostly women,
acting locally in 53 countries in the fight against poverty.**

~*~*~

This booklet contains all the spiritual reflections that were sent out to you every month by e-mail in 2014. The reflections can be downloaded from the AIC website: www.aic-international.org

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