

With Saint Vincent



*We build together
to bring hope to life*

The AIC Charter

2023 Edition

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Introduction

AIC, Association Internationale des Charités, (International Association of Charities) is an **INGO**.

It is an **international network** bringing together groups of Christian volunteers inspired by the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, its founder.

The aim of this network, mainly made up of women, is to combat different forms of poverty at local level and to involve public authorities in the fight against poverty.

AIC groups have a two-fold legal identity:

- A civil identity as NGOs recognised in their own country.
- A canonical identity subject to canon law. Every local AIC group is, under canon law, an “association of the faithful”. This means its constitution is officially “approved” by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

AIC International itself is constituted as a “legal entity”, according to Belgian law:

The Constitution (1985) determines the way AIC works. It can be consulted on our website.

The By-Laws (1985) determine the principles and ethics of collaboration, and the rights and duties of members.

The **Canonical Statutes** (2007) confirm our organisation as a faithful movement of lay people.

Saint Vincent and his successors received from the Holy See, by Apostolic Privilege (C 312 § 2), the power to establish parish-based or inter-parish Confraternities of Charity. Later on, local groups were organised into national and international associations (AIC) with different names according to the countries.

AIC belongs to the Vincentian Family, formed of all the associations founded by Saint Vincent de Paul himself, or those inspired by his work. The Vincentian Family has over 2 million members around the world.

Chapter I

AIC's Identity

- **Our Origins**
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Our Origins

<p>On 20th August 1617 in Châtillon-les-Dombes (France), Vincent de Paul, the parish priest, appealed for help for a family in need. The priest quickly realised that the overflowing generosity that resulted from his call had to be organised, to make it effective, and so he founded the first “Confraternity of Charity” (or “Charity”).</p> <p>On 8 December 1617, the bishop of Lyons, Msgr Denis Simon de Marquemont, handed to Monsieur Vincent the decree recognizing the new Association of Charity and its rule.</p> <p>“Monsieur Vincent’s” choice: Evangelisation of the poor, and action on behalf of the deprived: this was the two-fold, dominating purpose of the life of Monsieur Vincent. Charity for him was the vocation to serve the most humble of people, the abandoned, those afflicted by physical and spiritual misery.</p> <p>To love means to feel responsible. Thus he took every initiative he could to alleviate the miseries of the people he met.</p> <p>The Charities spread, and in 1629 Saint Vincent asked Louise de Marillac to coordinate them and visit the groups. Saint Vincent realised the difficulties the ladies of Charity would meet, given the rigours of life in service of ever-increasing numbers of poor people.</p> <p>In order to provide support, he joined a new company of women with Louise de Marillac, living a new Rule, outside the cloister, in the service of the poor: the Daughters of Charity. These were formed as a “Company” in 1633, led by Louise de Marillac. So “the ladies and the daughters” complemented each other in their vocation and their service, following the inspiration of their joint Founder.</p> <p>After Vatican II, the international organisation was strengthened by the creation of an international association in Belgium.</p>	<p>Founded in 1617 as a way of making overflowing generosity effective</p> <p>Dual aim: evangelise and be responsible in the face of other people’s poverty.</p> <p>The lay Ladies work side by side...</p> <p>...with the Daughters of Charity</p> <p>1971: Creation of AIC</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. AIC International is present in 56 countries and has existed for more than 400 years; what does the fact you belong to this association bring you, how does this motivate you in your voluntary work?**
- 2. Particular circumstances inspired Saint Vincent in the creation of the first Charities, what forms of poverty invite us to pursue the mission that he has entrusted to us today?**
- 3. How do we propose to change the unfair circumstances experienced by those living in poverty today?**

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The Motivations for our Action

A Commitment as Citizens:

A commitment to the poor

Poverty affects the person's fundamental right to take part in his or her own destiny: *"Insecurity is the lack of one or more of the foundational needs allowing people and families to take on their basic responsibilities and enjoy their fundamental rights."*

Source: UN, Economic and Social Committee, 2006.

70% of poor people are women.

A Christian Commitment:

Like all the baptised, a commitment to following Christ

"Whatever you do to the least among you, you do it to me." The Church lives by its **preferential love for the poor**. The Church is the place where all who suffer: the poor, the destitute, the unhappy, the sick, prisoners, the hungry, must find rest. Its mission is to tell all those people: "Come to me..." (Mt 11: 28).

Poverty is not just material poverty. Benedict XVI speaks of "marginalisation, affective, moral and spiritual poverty", of those "whose interior lives are disorientated" (Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace*, 1st January 2009).

A Commitment to Following St Vincent:

1. Serving the Poor as Christ did

Christ is a master, a teaching, he is the example; the Son leads us to the Father. Christ first and foremost bridges relationships, he links us to the Father and invites us to let ourselves be transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Saint Vincent was marked by the spirituality of Pierre de Bérulle. For him, **Christians are those who experience a relationship with Christ, and so who allow Christ to inhabit them and act upon them.**

Poverty: an injustice

Making visible a lack of fraternity

Following Christ: the Church, a place of welcome for the marginalised.

"The programme of the Christian is 'a heart that sees.'" DCE (No. 31)

St Vincent would say: "What would Christ do if he were in my place?"

<p>There are 3 dimensions to this: <u>Faith</u>: Confidence in one person, Christ <u>Prayer</u>: An intimate relationship with Christ which determines action <u>Action</u>: Active life</p> <p>2. <u>Serving Christ through the Poor</u></p> <p>A person living in poverty allows us to discover the first sufferer, Jesus Christ, "The poor are our masters, they are our kings".</p> <p>The pyramid is reversed, the rich and powerful in this world are those called to serve.</p> <p>This allows us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ready to listen to others both when working in a team and in our own actions. • Recognise our own vulnerability and our limits to be able to understand those of others. • Live in an austere Vincentian way, showing that this lifestyle is possible. <p><u>A commitment which gives women a place in society:</u></p> <p>The work of AIC members with 20,000 women in positions of responsibility shows that across all cultures, women can take on responsibilities in the world. This is a testimony to what John Paul II called "the genius of women". (Letter to Women, No 10, 1995)</p> <p>It is not a matter of claiming that men and women are independent and self-sufficient. That would risk enclosing them in a utopian or even aggressive self-realisation. Nothing would be further from Christian faith. "An essentially female movement" is a way of explaining the service we give: Given the marginalisation of women through poverty and violence, a first response from women themselves may be easier to accept.</p> <p><u>A commitment which gives women a place in the Church:</u></p> <p>The Church is faithful to the Gospel, and does not see women as following in the apostolic succession. They have another role, as demonstrated by women such as Mother Theresa, Louise de Marillac, Elizabeth Seton and Hildegard de Bingen, as well as so many other unknown women working in the shadows. St Vincent said to the first Ladies of Charity: "For around 800 years women have had no public role in the Church, and..."</p>	<p>For St Vincent, serving the poor was the fruit of an intensely spiritual life</p> <p>Accompany the poorest people spiritually and materially</p> <p>Be ready to listen</p> <p>In an essentially female movement</p> <p><i>"You are the mothers of the poor"</i> St Vincent de Paul</p> <p><i>...see how Providence itself is now speaking to some of you."</i></p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. How does being aware of the existence of so much social injustice around you motivate you in your work as a volunteer?**
- 2. Given the teachings of Christ and Saint Vincent de Paul, how do you try to be consistent in your personal life?**
- 3. What practical actions could you carry out, alone or in a group, to fulfil your commitment to accord a place to women in society?**

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The Profile of our Volunteers

<p>Whatever the status of the volunteer: full member, associate member or collaborator, volunteering at AIC has its requirements and demands for a commitment to be made.</p> <p><u>Committed volunteers:</u> Commitment is freely given, it takes account of each person's motivations, capabilities and availability in terms of health and time. This means that the continuity and efficiency of the action taken can be ensured.</p> <p><u>Generous volunteers:</u> Volunteering is unpaid, and does not seek any affective or moral gratification (freely given help does not prevent the repayment of personal expenses incurred in voluntary action).</p> <p><u>Responsible volunteers:</u> Responsibility is an obligation to do what one has promised to do. It leads directly to trust in the members of our group, the people being supported and partner organisations.</p> <p><u>Competent volunteers:</u> AIC volunteers accept on-going training adapted to their action. Amateurism is all the more dangerous as the work is carried out with vulnerable people. Individual or particular actions, or even emotional involvement, can only partially reduce the problems.</p> <p><u>Volunteers rooted in Saint Vincent's project:</u></p> <p>AIC is the place where, in the light of the Gospel, volunteers work to change situations of poverty; they follow in the footsteps of their founder, St Vincent: <i>"support the poorest people spiritually and materially"</i>.</p>	<p>A commitment</p> <p>to continuity and efficiency</p> <p>selfless</p> <p>responsible</p> <p>well trained</p> <p>based on Vincentian spirituality</p>
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Working as a Team

<p>Meaning and Method</p> <p><i>The group unites its strengths around a common project; the key moment is the team meeting.</i></p> <p>Saint Vincent united the goodwill of many in order to help one family living in poverty. He knew that one person alone wouldn't be enough.</p> <p><u>Working as a team:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multiplies strengths: everyone contributes their time, energy and personal qualities. – Guarantees that the action will continue in the long term. <p><u>To work as a team, members require:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respect: Every point of view is legitimate and completes the others – Coordination: Everyone has a clearly defined role – Communication: In confidence – Commitment: From everyone, according to what has been planned. <p><u>Group meetings are:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The moment when communication is privileged: A place for everyone to stay informed and have their say. Solutions are found to difficulties encountered by the team and future activities are organised. – A place for revitalisation and progress: Together we situate our actions in St Vincent's spirituality. In this way we enter into a process of continuous conversion – conversion through little things – it is a question of being open to changing our attitudes. 	<p>The group, a community of faith, communion, work, sharing and friendship.</p> <p><i>“They will be united among themselves like sisters that our Lord has linked through his love”. St Vincent de Paul</i></p> <p><i>“What would Christ do if he were in my place?”</i></p>
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The Organization of the AIC Network

<p>Local groups: Over 5100 local AIC groups have their own juridical status governed by statutes, led by a president and a board of management.</p> <p>These local groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Work in a limited geographical area: a district, town, city or parish;</i>▪ <i>Respond to calls from those in situations of distress in their surrounding area, with appropriate actions.</i> <p>National associations: 56 national AIC associations, bring together the local AIC groups in their countries. They elect a national president and board of management. Each association is responsible within its country for coordination between groups, the training of its members, fundraising and advocacy.</p> <p>The international association: AIC International brings together the 56 national associations. National presidents elect the international president and the members of the Executive Board.</p> <p>AIC International:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Leads the national AIC associations and coordinates their reflection and their action.</i>▪ <i>Represents its members within international agencies and takes part in the common action to fight poverty and injustices in order to move forward.</i>▪ <i>Promotes exchanges between local and/or national associations to promote solidarity at the global level.</i>	<p>Local</p> <p>National</p> <p>Global</p> <p>List of member countries at: www.aic-international.org</p> <p>Work on the ground gives AIC its authority</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

1. As an AIC volunteer, which of the 5 qualities mentioned here would it be most important for you to develop? What practical measures could you take in order to do this?
2. After having analyzed all the points concerning working as a team carefully with your group, are you convinced of the advantages of working in this way? Could you give concrete examples for each of the points covered in the context of your Vincentian work?
3. In your opinion, what are the advantages for your local group of belonging to a national and international association?

Chapter II

AIC's Mission

- **AIC's Vision and Mission**
- **The Foundations of AIC's Mission**
 - **The Gospel**
 - **St Vincent's values**
 - The Social Doctrine of the Church
- AIC's Journey

AIC's Vision and Mission

<p>Vision</p> <p>AIC intends to be a Christian transformative force in society, to give priority to involvement with women around the world, through projects and actions that include the participation of the beneficiaries.</p> <p>AIC carries out local activities, collaborates on a local and global level, participates in networks and involves itself in public political programmes or in civil society.</p> <p>Mission</p> <p>Following the example of Saint Vincent de Paul and the teachings of the Church:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To fight against all forms of poverty and exclusion, through transformative initiatives and projects;• To work with our brothers and sisters living in situations of poverty, encouraging the discovery of everyone's individual strengths, supporting education and promoting a decent life;• To denounce injustice and put pressure on civil society structures and decision-makers to fight the causes of poverty.	
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The Foundations of AIC's Mission

<p>AIC's identity is based on three sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Gospel• St Vincent's values• The Church's social teaching <p>The Gospel</p> <p>We want to keep the message of Christ alive today: follow him, until we meet him and remain with him. Like secular NGOs, we live in solidarity in a globalized society, but for us in AIC this solidarity is based on love of our neighbour, received from Christ, and always goes the extra mile, beyond what our merely human strength could achieve.</p> <p>When teaching the first volunteers, St Vincent based his teaching on Christ, asking them: <i>"What would Christ do if he were in my place?"</i>. Today, this means:</p> <p>Follow Christ (Mt 25:4): <i>"As often as you did not do it for one of these little ones, you did not do it for me"</i>. Christ identified himself by preference with the poor.</p> <p>Meet Christ (Jn 3:16): <i>"He laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another"</i>.</p> <p>Remain with Christ (Jn 15:10): <i>"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love"</i>.</p> <p>St Vincent's Values</p> <p>St Vincent promoted several values by which he encouraged the women in first groups that he founded to live. As AIC volunteers, we are also invited to live with:</p> <p>Simplicity (Ecclesiastes 7:29): <i>"See this alone I have found: that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes."</i></p> <p>St Vincent tells us: <i>"For my part, I can state that a true and practical faith, and a real religious spirit is commonly found among the simple and the poor... everyone is attracted by simple people, speaking with sincerity"</i> (SV:XI:462).</p> <p>Humility (Mt 11:29): <i>"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls"</i>.</p>	<p><u>1st Source:</u></p> <p>follow</p> <p>meet</p> <p>remain with Christ</p> <p><u>2nd Source:</u></p> <p>Virtues that belong to evangelisation:</p> <p>Simplicity: Sincerity when we act</p> <p>Humility in your encounters with others.</p>
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<p>St Vincent tells us: <i>“If we are told “Who goes there? Humility! Let that be our watchword.” (Coste XII, 203). “Leave God to find God. The poor evangelise us by their presence alone”, and they are our lords and masters (SV:IXA:120) whom we ought to love with tenderness and deep respect. “It seems that the poor man only receives, because he is in distress. And yet, he gives us his ability to receive.”</i></p> <p>Charity (Mt 7:12): St Vincent tells us: <i>“When charity dwells in a soul, it takes full possession of all its powers: it gives it no rest, it’s a fire that is constantly active” (SV:XI:132) “Charity cannot remain idle, it must push us to procure salvation and consolation for others” (SV:XII:265).</i></p> <p>This has an interpersonal dimension, which is respect for the other, a community and political dimension - in that human beings are fulfilled through belonging to a human organisation - and a religious dimension - universal love, without measure (Mt 5:43), selfless (Lk 14:12-14) and truly willing to serve (Mt 20:25-28).</p>	<p>“The poor person gives us his ability to receive”</p> <p>Charity: Loving our neighbour as ourselves</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

1. **How do you live AIC’s mission in your group? Do you have the impression that you aren’t putting certain aspects into practice? If so, which ones?**
2. **How do you bring the desire to look for Christ to life in your service with others (or in your Vincentian mission) to *follow* him, until *meeting* him and *remaining* with him?**
3. **Give some concrete examples of the way in which you each live by the Vincentian values (simplicity, humility and charity) in your group and on a personal level.**

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The Foundations of AIC's Mission

<p>The Social Doctrine of the Church</p> <p>Saint Vincent truly loved the Church, while still recognizing her faults and failings. He always thought that the community of believers was called to holiness and to perfection in the Christian life. For him, this perfection lay in charity and <i>“practical holiness, always and in everything doing the will of God”</i>. (Coste XII, p. 150, n. 199).</p> <p>What we now call the Church's Social Doctrine has been in the course of development since the 19th century. The encyclical Octogesima Adveniens (written for the 80th anniversary of the first social encyclical <i>Rerum Novarum</i> by Pope Leo) tells us: <i>“It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words... and, in dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters and all women and men of goodwill, to determine the options and commitments to be made in order to bring about the transformations that seem urgent and necessary”</i> (Oct. Adv. 3-4).</p> <p>The Church's Social Doctrine proclaims the truth of the love of Christ that is always new. The Encyclical <i>Deus Caritas</i> (God is love) expresses for today the essential elements of Christian charity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Immediate need (Good Samaritan) met by professional competence and heartfelt concern;</i> • <i>Independent of parties and ideologies;</i> • <i>Charity cannot be used at the service of what is now called proselytism. Love is free”</i> (DC 31). <p>For Benedict XVI, justice and charity belong to two different spheres, which are nonetheless related:</p>	<p><u>3rd Source:</u></p> <p>Saint Vincent loved the Church</p> <p>The Church's Social Doctrine: bringing the message of Christ up to date</p> <p>Experience on the ground feeds the reflection of the Church</p> <p>Justice and Charity - 2 paths to achieve this:</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice is the primary task of the State: the building of a just order of society and of the State, through which each person receives their due, is a fundamental duty, which each generation has to confront in its turn. Charity does not take the place of justice. • Organised charitable activity is true humanism, which recognises the image of God in human beings and wants to bring them to lead a life in conformity with this dignity (DC 30b). Love is needed beyond justice and is irreplaceable (DC 28b). <p>Underlying justice and charity are two basic principles: unconditional respect for human life and the dignity of every human person. From these arise the other proposals for a more just society.</p> <p>Five principles are named among those in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, Ch4) needed to organise a society that is at the service of the person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The common good: <i>“The common good means the set of social conditions that allow social groups and their individual members thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment”</i> (GS 26 § 1; cf. GS 74 § 1). ▪ The universal destination of goods: In the end everything belongs to God. We are only temporary stewards. ▪ Subsidiarity: The Church considers that decisions must as far as possible be taken by the people who will feel their possible consequences. This principle, also called the “principle of help”, which states that it is an error that goes against morality and charity to let something be done at too high a level when it can be done at a lower level as by doing so, we will deprive the lower level of everything it can do. ▪ Participation: As a consequence of the previous principle, each person must be able to take part in making decisions that concern him or her. This is not a vague or simply democratic idea. It is a principle that is deeply rooted in the definition of the human being personally loved by God. ▪ Solidarity: This is a consequence of the four previous pillars. Human beings are called to be at one with each other, so that they can help those who are less skilful, less knowledgeable or have fewer resources. Everyone is at the service of everyone else, but especially of the poorest people. By being with the poorest, as Christ was, we become a Christian society. 	<p>The action of the State responsible for justice</p> <p>Organised charitable work</p> <p><u>The essentials:</u> Each human being is personally loved by God</p> <p>All are equal in dignity</p> <p><u>The five principles:</u></p> <p>The common good</p> <p>The universal destination of goods</p> <p>Subsidiarity</p> <p>Participation</p> <p>Solidarity</p> <p>The preferential option for the poor</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. How does the Church's Social Doctrine affect our commitment as AIC volunteers?**
- 2. What elements of Christian charity were expressed by Benedict XVI? How do these definitions help you in your AIC work?**
- 3. Reflect on the five principles of the Church's Social Doctrine and note your comments.**

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AIC's Journey

<p><i>AIC's social and pastoral action is guided by the Church's social teaching and the philosophy of Saint Vincent.</i></p> <p>Participation (1976): AIC commits to the participation of everyone in solving their own problems, and in the life of their community.</p> <p>1981: Publication of AIC's Basic Document.</p> <p>Solidarity (1985): Solidarity forms an explicit part of AIC's reflection. Solidarity means shared responsibility, fraternity and participation among volunteers and with those living in poverty.</p> <p>Self-help (1990): First Operational Guidelines: self-help, solidarity, training and communication. This concept of self-help came from Latin American volunteers who drew on their experience and their conviction that those living in poverty have the right to take part in their own progress.</p> <p>Force of transformation (1998): "Be a force of transformation in the association, in the face of poverty and in society". The transformative force is selected as a driver for personal action with those living in poverty in society.</p> <p>Co-responsibility (2002): Social co-responsibility for Peace: Our specific way of working for peace is to fight poverty and injustices, which are always sources of conflicts. The concept of Empowerment is developed to reduce poverty and instigate sustainable development. It is the recognition of the capacity and right of those who are empowered to take responsibility for creating their own future. It is for us as volunteers to support them, help them develop their potential and work with them so they find their own solutions.</p>	<p>From assistance to participation and self-help</p> <p>co-responsibility and empowerment</p>
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<p>Systemic Change (2007): This method, suggested by the Vincentian Family, invites us to see each person, not as an isolated individual, but as an individual surrounded by all their family, social, professional relationships. This involves changing viewpoint, defining with the person concerned the goal, the “dream” that they wish to achieve, and then, along with them, seeing which relationship, which link they can change. At that moment, the whole of the “system” in which the person lives will change.</p> <p>At each of these stages, AIC has made a firm commitment in favour of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving the situation of women: Since 1980 AIC has been doing significant work to denounce injustice against women, to defend their rights and to fight against all the forms of violence of which they are victims. In 2001 in Fortaleza (Brazil), AIC created and distributed a “Manifesto against violence towards women”. ▪ Reducing the poverty of women in different cultures (2007): Our actions and projects are rooted in the various cultures that form the international profile of AIC and it seems vital to understand how the cultural values and traditions of a society influence the role of women and men, and create or aggravate the poverty of women. We are convinced that each woman has the capacity to impel her own culture to grow, and to find in it the resources to construct her life project. How? Above all, by developing places for women to speak, by education for a better balance of roles among men and women, by training in human rights, especially those of women and by working in a network on projects to improve women’s circumstances. ▪ Education as a tool to prevent and tackle poverty (since 2011): Saint Vincent said that education is one of the most valuable tools to achieve “<i>dignity for the poor</i>”. The person living in poverty is a social player in their own right. If they are given the opportunity to develop their own abilities, they can take the place and role that belong to every human person. <p>The educational project does not consist of a vertical, passive transmission of knowledge. It is as much about learning from the other as allowing the other to learn. “<i>The teacher learns while teaching, the learner teaches while learning.</i>” (Paulo Freire).</p> <p>We need each other to build a more just society together. This is why education must be present and a driving force in any charitable action by AIC, to promote the establishment of a fair and interdependent society.</p>	<p>Systemic change, a new way of looking to understand situations of poverty</p> <p>Using the present as a lever for the future</p> <p>Raising awareness and preventing injustice against women</p> <p>Women and poverty in diverse cultures</p> <p>Making women aware of their dignity and their rights</p> <p><i>“The more women are educated and their rights are recognised, the less their children are hungry”</i> O. de Schutter, UN</p> <p>A two-way exchange</p> <p><i>“Have a heart that sees with the eyes of God”, Pope Benedict XVI</i></p> <p>Contributive justice</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integral ecology and sustainable development: since 2017, AIC has been committed to actions that respond to the cries of people living in poverty and the cries of the earth, following the call of Pope Francis in his encyclical 'Laudato SI'. AIC volunteers also respond to the call made by the UN through its Sustainable Development Goals. ▪ Moving forward together and opening up to change: In 2023, AIC volunteers committed to opening up new paths together to overcome crisis situations and prepare for the future, with creativity, trust and hope. <p>AIC is on the road, on a never-ending journey...</p> <p>Following Saint Vincent, let us be fascinated, captivated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the love of Christ towards the poorest; • By his way of putting the “little ones” in the centre: <i>“What do you want me to do for you?”</i> <p>Only the strength born of conviction that God is love, communion and justice can build “another possible world” of peace, solidarity, justice and freedom.</p>	<p>Caring for the Common Home for future generations</p> <p>Moving forward together</p> <p>Opening ourselves up to change</p> <p>Preparing for the future</p> <p>The enchantment of the love of God for the little ones.</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

1. **How is AIC committed to the empowerment of women?**
2. **What role does education play in preventing poverty?**
3. **What can AIC do to promote “integral ecology”?**
4. **How can we open ourselves to the breath of the Spirit who “makes all things new”?**

Chapter III

AIC Today

- **AIC's Grassroots Actions**
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- Code of Ethics

AIC's Grassroots Actions

<p>Over 12,000 actions or projects to tackle poverty are currently being carried out by volunteers from across the AIC network. The main objective is to support people living in poverty to help them obtain more independence and dignity.</p> <p>Our strengths and priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locally-based volunteers who set up the projects and work in teams. • Special attention to poverty among women and children. They are the most affected by poverty and represent 70% of our beneficiaries. • Offering people holistic support. • Building social links to get people out of isolation. • Priority to education, an essential tool in the fight against poverty, especially that of women. For adults, this could be literacy projects, professional training aiming for reintegration into the job market through income generating activities, or educational workshops. For children, there are often daycare centres, preschool centres, refresher courses, school bursaries and homework clubs. <p>The participation of beneficiaries is an essential element in the development of empowering projects. How is this done? By valuing people's strengths and their own abilities to respond to the challenges they encounter, so as to be able to dream and act together to change the situation of poverty, adopting a 'facilitator' attitude.</p> <p>Thanks to the AIC network, twinnings between AIC groups all over the world allow special relationships to be established in a culture of solidarity: financial support, exchange of experiences, two-way training and co-management of projects.</p>	<p>Aiming for independence and dignity</p> <p>Locally-based</p> <p>Women</p> <p>Human at the centre</p> <p>Rebuilding social links</p> <p>Participation of beneficiaries</p> <p>Being a 'facilitator'</p> <p>Twinnings</p>
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Advocacy

<p>As a civil society organisation, AIC takes part in global networks where the efforts of public and private bodies are combined and interact. Through its presence among these institutions, AIC is in touch with a process of international reflection and receives information that contributes to its growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the public level, AIC is an INGO (International Non-Governmental Organisation) and has representatives with European and international bodies: <p>It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special Consultative Status with <i>ECOSOC – UN Economic and Social Council</i> - Consultative Status with <i>UNESCO – United Nation’s Council for Education, the Sciences, Culture and Communication.</i> - Participative Status with the <i>Council of Europe</i> <p>AIC is a member of the Catholic NGO groups of these organisations.</p> <p>At the United Nations, AIC representatives have joined representatives of other branches of the Vincentian Family to form a coalition (VFUNNY) to strengthen the impact of their actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Universal Church, AIC is an Association of Lay Faithful which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is recognised by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life - Is a member of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development - Is a member of Crescendo – Network for human and Christian ageing - Participates in Forums of NGOs of Catholic inspiration 	<p>Giving people in need a voice at international level</p> <p>Institutional representation:</p> <p>ECOSOC UNESCO Council of Europe</p> <p>CCIC – CINGO</p> <p>Vincentian Family Coalition at the UN</p> <p>Within the Church: Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life</p> <p>Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development</p> <p>Crescendo</p> <p>Forums of NGOs of Catholic inspiration</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. Among the strengths and priorities mentioned above, which can be found in the grassroots actions of your local group?**
- 2. What do you think are the advantages of twinings between AIC groups? (You can respond based on your own experiences or reflect on the possibility of setting up a twinning with another AIC group. In this case, please don't hesitate to ask for further information from the International Secretariat).**
- 3. Why does the presence of AIC in international networks and within the Church seem so important?**
- 4. As an INGO (International Non-Governmental Organisation), AIC is part of the civil society network. How can AIC work on behalf of those in need within this network?**

Chapter III

AIC Today

- AIC's Grassroots Actions
- Advocacy
- **Training Volunteers**
- **Communication**
- Finances
- Legal Framework
- Code of Ethics

Training Volunteers

<p>Following the example of Saint Vincent, who at a very early age was concerned about education (a concern that continued throughout his life), AIC views the on-going training of each volunteer as an essential requirement in order to accompany our less fortunate brothers and sisters "<i>...it is a question of justice on behalf of those living in poverty whom we want to support</i>" (Fr. Celestino, CM, <i>Vicente de Paúl: un corazón sin medida</i>, [Vincent de Paul: a heart beyond measure] p. 242).</p>	An essential requirement
<p>AIC offers the volunteers on-going training (technical, human and spiritual). This training is done through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Documents that are sent electronically to the volunteers who are invited to reflect together as a group on the content of the documents;• Seminars on a national, continental and international level;• Visits to the national associations and the local groups by the continental coordinators, the members of the Executive Board, and those responsible for projects at the International Secretariat.	Comprehensive on-going training
<p>Every three years, on the occasion of the International Assembly, we focus on specific guidelines which are called Priority Lines of Action, which in turn guide the work of all the volunteers from across the AIC network.</p>	Common priorities
<p>AIC also offers an online Diploma which has as its objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing the volunteers with tools and knowledge in order to cement the fundamental concepts of BEING a part of AIC;	AIC Diploma

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing specific competencies in order to DO the work better, thus providing the volunteers with sufficient tools to allow them to carry out organised work and coordinate themselves effectively within their groups; • Increasing the knowledge and the ability of the volunteers with regard to the development of projects, fundraising, social communication and strategic planning; • Developing leadership and professionalism among our AIC members. 	
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Communication

<p>Communication and Visibility</p> <p>AIC highlights the importance of internal and external communication in order to develop the projects and the activities of the Association.</p> <p>Internally, communication is fundamental in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training the volunteers; • Exchanging their experiences and knowledge; • Spreading AIC's message and image. <p>In its external relations, AIC's image is constructed on the basis of the work that groups carry out with people living in poverty. This is the work that gives the association credibility.</p> <p>This credibility should allow AIC to continue its Christian and social mission and to attract new volunteers, donors and partners. Therefore, above all else, the name AIC ought to be associated with the idea of credibility.</p> <p>Moreover, the actions undertaken are presented with total transparency, as is the way that the donations are used to implement these actions.</p> <p>Concrete means to achieve visibility</p> <p>The present means such as the website and Facebook page help us to communicate with one another and to communicate to others what we are doing. These tools are utilized by AIC International as well as by many national and local groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Website:</i> www.aic-international.org ▪ <i>Facebook page:</i> www.facebook.com/AIC-International-713564958772833/ 	<p>Communication and Visibility</p> <p>Fundamental tools</p> <p>Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Credibility - Transparency <p>Website</p> <p>Facebook page</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. For what reasons does on-going training seem important to you as you go about your day-to-day Vincentian work?**
- 2. What have you taken away from the training that you have received recently from AIC International?**
- 3. List some of the activities that your group utilizes in order to enhance both its internal and external communication.**

Chapter III

AIC Today

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Finances

<p>The activities of local groups are financed by the annual dues of their members and by the donations that the groups seek from private donors or public bodies in the vicinity.</p> <p>The volunteers, AIC members, also contribute to funding the work by offering the association their time and putting their skills to its service.</p> <p>AIC International is financed by the annual dues of the member associations, as well as by donations from individuals or different bodies.</p> <p>Paying the annual dues has deep value: it is the sign of our desire to contribute, through a gesture of solidarity, to the life of the association. It is also a commitment to collective responsibility and above all it is a symbol of belonging. For this reason, paying the annual dues has a different meaning than a simple donation.</p> <p>A donation, even if it is necessary for the life of the association, can just be a sign of appreciation for the work being carried out and does not imply a personal commitment. The annual dues, on the other hand, express the decision to belong to the association and to take on the responsibility of this commitment.</p>	<p>Finance:</p> <p>A means of action</p> <p>The annual dues:</p> <p>A symbol of belonging</p> <p>and commitment</p>
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Legal Framework

<p>AIC groups have a dual legal identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A civil identity as recognised NGOs in their own country • An ecclesial identity, subject to canonical norms. AIC is, under Canon Law, an “association of the faithful”. This means that its Constitution is officially approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority. <p>AIC is constituted as a “legal person”: it is an international not-for-profit organisation.</p> <p>The Constitution (1985) and its subsequent modifications define:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objectives being pursued and the activities being implemented to achieve them; • The operation of the association and the hierarchy between the powers; • The rights and responsibilities of the members <p>(It can be consulted on our website)</p> <p>The By-Laws (1985) complete the constitution and are only imposed on members. They enact an ethic of collaboration.</p> <p>The Canonical Statutes (2007) confirm that AIC is movement of the lay faithful.</p> <p>Saint Vincent and his successors received the power to canonically erect parish or interparish Confraternities of Charity from the Holy See through Apostolic Privilege (C312 §2). Later the local groups were organised into national associations with different names according to the country and an international association (AIC).</p>	<p>Dual identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil • Ecclesial <p>Constitution</p> <p>By-Laws</p> <p>Canonical Statutes</p>
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Code of Ethics

<p>Governance according to Saint Vincent implies promoting the values of rigorousness, fairness, integrity, transparency and efficiency;</p> <p>A clear legal framework and a balance of power allow for transparency and proper management of money that is the property of those living in poverty.</p> <p>The rules that the association has given itself, its evangelical values and the vision and method of Saint Vincent direct our behaviour as partners at the service of the most disadvantaged, with respect to both them and the donors.</p>	<p>Total transparency in the management of the “property of the most disadvantaged people”</p>
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Questions to reflect on in groups:

- 1. Do you consider the payment of the annual dues to be a gesture of solidarity and a sign of belonging to AIC? Knowing what the dues are used for, do you pay them with pleasure?**
- 2. What do the members of your group think about the subject of the “legal framework”? What do you think about the fact that mandates are only for a limited duration of time?**
- 3. Why do you think it is important that AIC volunteers act in conformity with evangelical values and the teachings of Saint Vincent?**

Chapter IV

The Future of AIC

Our Dreams

A prophetic and committed AIC whose members live in solidarity with one another and with those living in poverty and in harmony with the spirit of Saint Vincent.

<p>We are about to conclude this document which identifies us as AIC volunteers who have been entrusted with a very special mission, namely, that of following Jesus Christ, serving those living in poverty (and doing this in imitation of Saint Vincent de Paul).</p> <p>Our association was founded more than four hundred years ago and we continue to journey along the path that was first marked out for us by our Founder. We must therefore ask ourselves what we want for the future of our Association so that we might continue to be signs of hope for our brothers and sisters.</p> <p>More than four hundred years ago, during the lifetime of Vincent de Paul, there were other forms of poverty, distinct from those of today (though perhaps similar). Nevertheless, it is as true today as it was yesterday that our presence continues to be most needed. Yes, all our efforts are significant in building a better world.</p> <p>Recently the Pope has asked us to focus on what he has referred to as environmental, economic and social ecology. Human migration, the way in which we use natural resources, the desire for power, pandemics... all of these are signs that the members of our society are crying out for change.</p> <p>We are very aware of the great injustices that exist in our world and therefore we stress the importance of focusing our attention on preserving AIC as a prophetic and committed organization, one whose members live in solidarity with one another and those living in poverty. It is in this way that we can engage in activities that promote a more dignified life for every human person.</p> <p>We dream... that all the volunteers will be able to discover their strengths and at the same time help their brothers and sisters do the same.</p> <p>We dream... that day by day we become more creative in our Vincentian work so that our activities promoting human development</p>	<p>The future of AIC</p> <p>A committed AIC</p> <p>Discovery of strengths</p> <p>Solidarity</p>
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<p>increase in number. May we work together as a team with the beneficiaries of our work, with the other volunteers, with God...</p> <p>We dream... that we will never lose our joy and optimism which we want to be contagious to all those who surround us. May we always see the positive aspect of different situations.</p> <p>We dream... that we will always be passionate about our Vincentian endeavors and will always have a desire to train ourselves so that we can serve others in a better manner. May we always be proud to be members of AIC.</p> <p>We dream... that as volunteers we live lives of integrity and give witness to the Christian life.</p> <p>We dream... that the teachings of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, as well the Church's Social Doctrine, might always remain those strong pillars that continually reveal to us the manner in which we can be better Vincentians.</p> <p>We dream... that each day we, as volunteers, might put aside our fears and develop a deeper spirituality; may we be mindful of the fact that it is Christ himself whom we serve and that it is Christ himself who accompanies us in the various activities that we engage in.</p> <p>We dream... that each day we might rejoice in gathering together more volunteers throughout the world... may our charism become rooted in the hearts of more and more people who in turn might also serve their brothers and sisters.</p> <p>We dream of many things! Our list is endless! We dream that we have shared dreams and that we continue to dream and to be passionate about our work.</p>	<p>Always joyful</p> <p>Willing to train ourselves</p> <p>Integrity</p> <p>Faithful to Christ and the Church</p> <p>Fearless and spiritual</p> <p>Rely on more volunteers</p>
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Questions for individual and group reflection:

- 1. What are your dreams and the dreams of your companions for your group and for AIC as a whole?**
- 2. What do you view as the more urgent forms of poverty that you and your group ought to confront?**
- 3. How might you attract more members to your group so that they share in your dreams and participate in the work that you do?**