

NEWSLETTER

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL

November/December 2015

Dr Michael Thio : Christmas message 2015

Year 2015 reaches its end, the President General International addresses a greeting message to the Vincentian community.



My Dear fellow Vincentians,

The year will be fast drawing to a close and we approach that wonderful event of Joy and Jubilation in welcoming the arrival of the infant Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. He is indeed the reason for the season.

Let us share this season of merriment not only with family and friends but also our Friends-in-Need whom we have so faithfully served and in sharing God's love and care for them to enable them to lead dignified lives.

As Vincentians, we build our lives and service around our 5 Vincentian virtues of Simplicity, Humility, Meekness, Zest and Holiness. Jesus was born to a simple family of Mary and Joseph and lived humbly as a carpenter's son. Blessed Mary was a lady full of grace and a gentle woman who loved and cared so much for her son Jesus. They lived a humble, simple but zestful lives and with God and holiness in them. Through Mary's humble acceptance to be the mother of Jesus, a Saviour was born to the world.

The world today is experiencing so much turmoils and sufferings and let us not forget the many needy and vulnerable people who are uncared for. Apart from extending to them our relief assistance, care and concern let us also pray for them that God in His infinite mercy

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and goodness will embrace them and alleviate their miseries. God is in control and He knows best what is good for them. We do our very best and God will do the rest. Let there be peace on earth.

As Vincentians in bearing witness to Christ let us bring love and good cheer to those in need especially during this Christmas season and commit ourselves faithfully to His call and endeavour to provide Hope and Peace of Jesus to those we serve. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. Blessed are the poor in heart, for they shall see God" Mt 5:7-8.

Let us also give thanks to God for the many blessings He has showered on us and our family during the year. We gather in celebrating this great feast of the birth of Jesus with Love and Joy in our hearts.

To love another person is to see the face of God. Let us see God in our Friends-in-Need and share God's love with them. "Every action for the poor is itself a prayer, if motivated by Charity, which is love inspired by grace"- St. Vincent.

On behalf of Council General International I extend my gratitude and thanks to all of you for your commitment and effort in the pursuit of our mission and vocation in the Vincentian apostolate and for caring and sharing with the needy which made the difference in their lives and give them hope and a better future. Keep up with the good work

Let us rejoice and celebrate this great feast of Christmas and join in prayer in according thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit for guiding and enlightening us in our lives and in our work in the Society. We seek the intercession of Mother Mary, St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic.

It gives me great pleasure for my wife, Rosalind, and I, in wishing all Vincentians and their families God's blessing for a Holy and Blessed Christmas and a Spirit-filled and

Peaceful New Year. With God's abundant grace, love and blessing.

Yours appreciatively in the humble service in Christ.



Dr. Michael Thio
President General



2016: Jubilee Year of Mercy



For Catholics all around the world, 2016 is going to be especially intense, after the Holy Father's announcement on 13 March of an Extraordinary Holy Year, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the closure of the Second Vatican Council, a great Jubilee of Mercy, a theme dear to the heart of Pope Francis. He hopes for "spiritual renewal of the whole Church". Preparation for this event has been entrusted to the Pontifical Council for the new evangelisation.

The Holy Year was officially announced in the publication of the Papal Bull of Indiction *Misericordiae vultus* on 11 April 2015, the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday. In this document, Pope Francis explains the reason for this "Holy Year" and its highlights, planned for Rome but also for all dioceses, who will be visited by "mercy missionaries". He invites Christians to contemplate and live this mystery of mercy, "a source of joy, serenity and peace."

On 29 November 2015, during his African tour, Pope Francis marked the first high spot of this year by opening the first of the Holy Doors at the Cathedral of Bangui, a few days before the Jubilee year begins, thus making this Central African capital, a city ravaged by war, and one of the poorest on the planet, the "spiritual capital of the world".

The Holy Year and Jubilee begins officially on 8 December, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, when the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica is opened. This

door will be closed again on 20 November 2016, solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, marking the end of the jubilee year. Between these two dates, a whole series of events is planned in Rome and in the dioceses.

SSVP invited to join the jubilee

In a letter addressed to the International President General, the Pontifical Council *Cor unum* has called on the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul to promote a day of spiritual retreat on the theme of "Christ's love compels us", for all those who contribute to the Church's charitable action, as professionals or as volunteers. Mgr. Giampietro Dal Toso – Secretary, states in the letter: "Faithful to the wishes of the Holy Father, it will be an encouragement to us to apply especially to our daily lives this dimension of compassion, by exploring more deeply the roots of our charitable action".

This day will be held during Lent 2016, and each entity (whether local, regional or national) of the Confederation is free to choose a date that suits them. *Cor Unum* will provide topics for reflection on its website after Christmas, with tools for organising this event.

Access the full text of Bull of indiction on :
www.ssvpgloabl.org (CGI's News section)

During 2016, you can find regularly updated information about the Year of Mercy on our website.



Central African Republic: a wounded country, Vincentians in danger

Violence has flared up once more in Bangui in recent weeks, targeted at Vincentian members.



We have received dramatic news from Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic. In this wounded country, violence has once more struck at civilians. The CGI learned with horror from the President of the National Council that several members of the Society have been killed: François SABEGALA, President of the Management and Finance Committee, young member Romaric, as well as their fellow member Kondonga.

In the last few days, the tragic deaths of another 2 Vincentians are reported: Véronique VINO, who was the first Secretary of the very first SSVP conference in CAR, and the first Secretary of the very first Central Council in CAR, as well as Claudine KOYABADE, a member of St Joseph's Conference in Mukassa. So 7 people have died in Bangui, and who knows how many more deaths have occurred in the rest of the country.

In addition, several members have had their homes damaged by fire, including that of the President on 30 October. Since then she has not been able to return to her former area without risking her life, and some of her neighbors have been killed trying to recover a few of their belongings.

The Central African Republic, one of the poorest countries in the world, is the setting for a civil war between Christian and Muslim militia. In March 2013, the overthrow of President François Bozizé by the Séléka rebels plunged the former French colony into its most serious crisis since independence in 1960, leading to slaughter between Muslim and Christian communities in 2013 and 2014.

The civilian population is paying a heavy price in human terms, massacre, torture, rape, destruction of property. International peace-keeping forces have succeeded in restoring calm to some extent, but inter-community tensions remain in Bangui. Camps and refuges have been set up to house displaced people fleeing violence in their own districts.

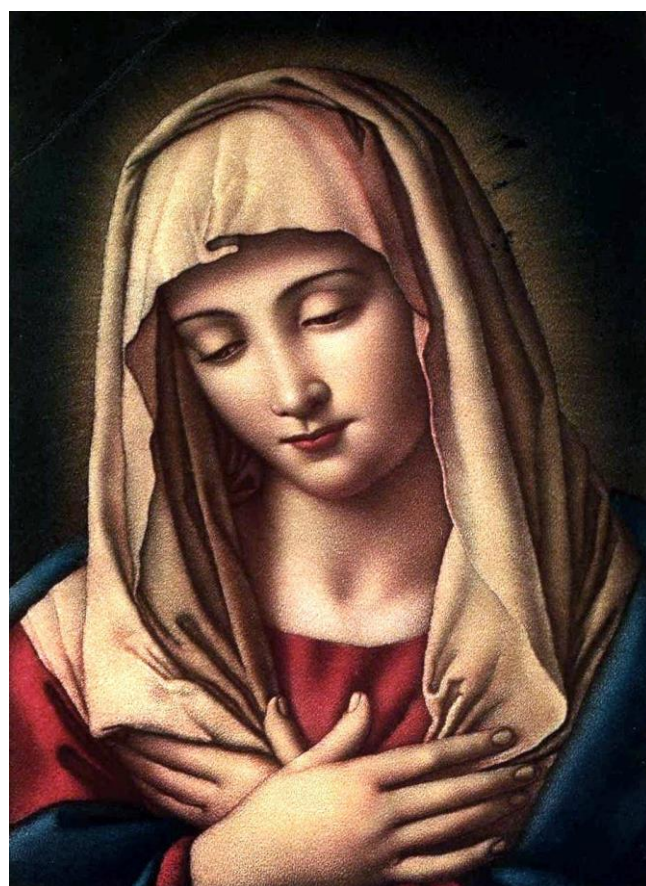
The country is destroyed, the State in shreds. Civilians are dying every day, not just because of the war, but through sickness, hunger and despair.

The NGOs present in Central African Republic have had to withdraw to quieter provinces, chased out of Bangui where their premises are burned down.

The visit by the Pope on 29 November is arousing hope of a return to calm and a commitment to dialogue for peace, despite the flare-up of violence in the last few days, with its daily toll of civilian victims in the capital.

In the face of this dreadful record, the Vincentian community is called to show solidarity with its brothers and sisters in the Central African Republic. All Vincentian members who can are invited to form a chain of prayer and support for these brothers and sisters and all those who have chosen this country as their second home, so they will soon find peace, and the values of peace, love and human dignity may carry them out of all this human madness, witnessed by the people of the country.

Our Central African brothers and sisters need to feel us at their side. May Our Lady of Peace obtain real peace for this martyred country.



Who, What, How ... Election of the International President

In June 2016, the Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul will elect its next International President General, to succeed Dr. Michael Thio, with a term of office of 6 years. Here is a brief introduction to the electoral process so that you can understand what is happening at this important time in the Society's history.

When does it start?

The electoral period opened officially in June 2015, at the Annual Meeting in São Paulo. It will conclude with the vote and the announcement of the results on 5 June 2016.

Who can vote?

One representative of each Superior, Assimilated or Associated Council. These are normally National Presidents, who exercise their voting right in their own name and on behalf of the members whom they represent (Statutes: 3.3). One country = one ballot paper.

Whom do they vote for?

The candidates are proposed by the member countries of the SSVP, individually or in groups. Nominations closed on 30 September 2015, when all names had to be submitted to the CGI. The proposed candidates were then asked if they accepted their nomination. At the beginning of December, Council General received the CVs and electoral statements of each candidate, whose names will be revealed in February 2016 by Brian O'Reilly - Vice-President General... be patient!

How do they vote?

On an individual ballot paper, placed in a ballot box on the day of the election, or else if no representative can attend the Assembly, the vote is cast by post for the first round. All the electoral documentation (candidates' statements and CVs, ballot papers) will be sent by e-mail and by post to the National Councils between February and March 2016.

Who does what?

The electoral process is supervised by a Commission formed especially for the occasion. Its members are:

- Brian O'Reilly: Vice-President General
- Julien Spiewak: Secretary General
- Liam Fitzpatrick: Treasurer General
- David Williams: Rule and Statutes Commission

Archives: 2 lost photos of Marie Ozanam



This is a delightful discovery, made recently in the archives of an American museum: 2 previously unknown photos of Marie, daughter of Frédéric and Amélie Ozanam. The story of this discovery takes us to the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC: while researching Charles Ozanam (brother of Frédéric), Ralph Middlecamp (Executive director of the United States National Council) chanced on these 2 pictures, very probably taken by Charles himself between 1850 and 1860. These photos were identified with the name of Marie Laporte, the married name of Ozanam's daughter, which may explain why they remained hidden so long.

Born in 1845, "little Marie" was the first and only child of the Ozanams. Frédéric was not only a loving husband but also an attentive and tender father. On the day his daughter was born, he wrote to his aunt: "...I am the guardian and custodian of an immortal creature. [...] I will watch over every one of her steps, I will see all the graces of her childhood emerge and when I clasp her in my arms, I will remember that in her there is a soul made for God and for eternity... » Only 8 years of age when her father was called to God, Marie was brought up by her mother, who lived at that time at 58 rue de Vaugirard in Paris.

In 1866, the young Marie married Laurent Laporte. The couple had one child, named Frédéric. Marie Ozanam died in 1912, at the age of 67, and lies beside her mother in the cemetery of Montparnasse.

*The International General Council's staff wishes you
A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year !*