

CIRCULAR LETTER AND FAREWELL SPEECH AT THE CLOSING OF THE MANDATE OF THE XIV GENERAL PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

“In nomine ecclesiae Dei”

My dear friends and members,

Absolutely everything in life has a beginning and an end; in the same way as God grants every individual the possibility to walk on Earth, in order to then join another eternal path of Life.

It is incumbent upon me today to say farewell to the beloved members that make up the Conferences before the Assembly of the International Society that you all represent here. I do this at a time when the service that you entrusted to me is about to come to an end. This has been a long period and when I look back in all conscience, I witness many aspects for personal and community reflection. Above all, I see reasons to thank God. A period that started under the motto “In nomine ecclesiae Dei” that I foresaw would give meaning to my own life, as I stated in my first speech before the worldwide Conferences when starting my first mandate as President General, on the 27th September 1999.

It is, as a child of the Church, that I accepted and assumed, on that very day, the service which will come to an end today. I never believed that I would belong to several religious associations at the same time, fearing that my scarce strength would become too dispersed. I have been lucky enough to find within the Society, within the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, all that I need for my spiritual life and dedication to service, as required by my ecclesiastic filiation as a baptized Christian.

Each time we are called to fulfill a mission, whatever that service maybe, some results are positive and others are less so. Among the objectives we have set ourselves, some have been achieved others have been blocked, whether through lack of resources or because we have not been able to follow the path laid out by the Lord.

As the Apostle of the **meek/Gentiles** writes: *“⁴Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (Paul 2nd Corinthians 3,4-6)

A true body

Nevertheless, regarding these aspirations, especially those that have become reality, there is no doubt that they would never have been possible without the collaboration of all the fellow members who have accompanied me during so many years. Indeed, the first assertion that I would like to share with you today is that Conferences can

only really exist if there is a collegial project; intimate dedication of all fellow members to the true community of faith that all Conferences must be in their essence. This is applicable to all Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul. In the same way that our foundation in 1833 was collegial, so has been our service to the Society ever since.

In the future, the historians who will be in charge of analyzing and explaining the history of this small and humble Society under my presidency may be tempted to give the President General, who is now addressing you, the credit for all that has been undertaken. This reading of events would be made perhaps for simplicity, due to a lack of information or even out of laziness. Such reasoning would be intellectually dangerous because it is untrue. It would be unfair to the Society because it is totally false. This reasoning would represent, moreover, an injurious example regarding the future as it would omit the true and good collegiality experienced during all these years within the Board and the Structure of Service of the Confederation.

I would like to clearly state, in this last message to the Society, that this was never the case. As a matter of fact, the XIVth President General has only been a catalyst of the richness, charisma and effort of so many dedicated and conscientious fellow members. These fellow members are those whom our Good Lord has placed on my path throughout all these years. Deeply spiritual fellow members, who have known how to join prayer with action.

My arrival at the Presidency General in 1999 had been the culmination of many months of a deep questioning during which I doubted of my capacity to assume this mission which various fellow members had entrusted to me. I was very aware of my limitations as I knew them well, so it seemed to me that I should not accept this proposal of service; a ridiculous proposal in my own eyes. It seemed that I should reject it for pure love of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, to which I had been a member since I was 17 years old. Finally, the arguments of these fellow members, of which one day I shall perhaps write, inspired by their good feelings towards the Society, managed to convince me. I finally accepted the possibility of a mission concerning the role of the Presidency General of the Society, if the members subsequently entrusted me with this mission.

After mentioning this part of the story, on a personal as well as on an organisational level, those who know me well understand that I am not a man who admires blissfully neither the past nor the present. I am, as the Good Lord has designed me to be, someone who always strives to look to the future and who dreams; an individual who dreams, without losing sight of the obligation to love and feel loved by God. I have always wished to aspire to a constantly challenging life. This focuses me on the future and on striving to remain alert forever, thus being able to warn fellow members and friends so that, when the time comes, we would not be surprised by events due to the lack of appropriate preparation or awareness.

What will be the fate of the Society in the future?

Taking advantage of this last intervention of the XIVth President General before the International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, before all Conferences that you represent here, please allow me to share with you some

thoughts, intimate thoughts of a fellow member which constitute, in a certain way, my last contribution to the Society; a summary, a complement, an epilogue to the Circular Letters that I have addressed to you during these eleven years. These shall be the last words of a happy man who shall go back to his Conference with a clear conscience of someone who has accomplished his duty, even though sometimes this has been painful. Do not doubt that on many occasions, this mission had been very painful!

Who and what are the poor today?

Throughout all these years as President General which has allowed me to travel to all continents visiting the Conferences of these countries, I have seen many types of poverty which the Society is striving to alleviate. I have seen many Brothers and Sisters suffering. This suffering has sometimes lessened thanks to the generous help given by one of our Conferences through the attention and the dedication of our fellow members.

At the same time I benefited from this enriching experience, the dynamic of an accelerated change in the world made me realise that, despite our efforts to relieve those who suffer, we are not able, on certain occasions, to reach new types of poverty which arise throughout the world. Frequently, we were not even aware of the very existence of these new forms of suffering. We were not, nor did we want to be aware of the changes that have arisen in our civil societies, often due to a lack of training or information. I will come back to this point later. In short, we carried on alleviating the problems, essentially caused by the lack of first necessity products such as food or clothing. These are still needs that exist today and that, indeed, we should continue to alleviate. That is true. Nevertheless, it is also true that in many parts of the world, these needs have decreased immensely and we have not been able to channel this excess energy towards these new types of emerging poverty, be they near or far from home.

Regarding first degree poverty, I have often found myself alongside families which have received our support over many years. Our work, our companionship, our commitment has, however, not led to a liberating spirit that would transform these individuals into full human beings: Individuals who would cease to need the help of others in order to follow their path of life. Sometimes, I have felt that our action has not meant a return to dignity, so often lost, which corresponds to the Children of God.

Not always have we felt this deep need to do whatever was in our reach so that the poor would feel less destitute. We have not always been aware of the need to help them get out of this situation.

If, within the Conferences, this experience has been painful, it has been even more so when I detected the same lack of interest concerning the support between Vincentian countries through the so-called "Twinning Programme". 'Twinning' is a beautiful word which, as you well know, is used to define our exchange of prayers, economic resources, knowledge or expertise, between the richest and poorest Vincentian regions around the globe.

Of course, these 'Twinings' will always exist. This is obvious! Nevertheless, on many occasions, the desire and concern to help these people - being supported by the receiving Conference - recover their human dignity did not even exist; to help them become free individuals. Too many of the Conferences that were helping thought that their work finished with the simple task of sending of funds. This reasoning is not appropriate and is certainly not close to what the idea of 'Twinings' should involve. Either the essence of Twinings lies in the intention of wanting to see these human beings who have lost everything recover their dignity, or it is just a question of putting a plaster over the wound so that we can satisfy our conscience as "good" Christians.

My dear friends, we have got used to not looking beyond what is easy to see and manage. Sometimes, we are afraid to accept greater responsibility which is more binding and time consuming. This would, nevertheless, be precisely the commitment that those who suffer would require from us.

Once more, an Institution as extended and as important as ours should identify and fight against new types of poverty. Councils should devote themselves to making our fellow members, who dedicate themselves each day to the service of the poor, aware of these new aspects and should provide them with this sphere of activity.

Moreover, we should do this, dear friends, respecting that which they are willing to do with their own lives. In other words, we should consider their own desires even though we do not share them. The Society and the Conferences are not here to build a world in its own image and resemblance. The Society and the Conferences are here to help the poor free themselves of their slavery, in their own way, in accordance with their own criteria of freedom. This type of slavery is not always physical it is more often than not, spiritual and moral.

This respect concerning their own choice does not however free us from our own mission and obligation as a close friend and confident. We will always have the duty to point out the difference between right and wrong. But at this very moment, after having shared our opinion in all charity, humility, with affection, it will be up to the poor to decide how they seek to liberate themselves, while counting on us for support. Those we seek to help will receive our message through the example of our life, the humility of our interventions, as well as our words. We should be able to get across what the Good News has meant to us through the example of our life. This should be used as a mirror regarding what the Good News could mean for them.

Undoubtedly, this attitude before our most deprived Brothers and Sisters will cause us conflicts of conscience and even the loss of a certain amount of internal peace. That is true. Nevertheless, it is also true that this is the very respect that we should feel towards the human being we are about to support, in accordance with God's will, and it should also allow us to understand the essential role that is incumbent upon the Conferences today: That of accompanying the poor with total respect regarding their opinions, choices and way of life. A respect that shall only be a pale reflection, but a reflection nevertheless, of what God felt for men when He came to save them through love and not through imposition.

Training, information and communication

For all these reasons, there is a constant need for training and the increase of knowledge regarding all human activities and concerning all that is happening throughout the world. We are not in the XIXth century anymore and the people we have in front of us do not share the mentality of this period. This is why our answers cannot be the same as those of our predecessors.

The era when we were only receiving current news about what was happening near to home, is finished. Today we receive global information at a speed that can sometimes seem scary to those who, like me, have had the privilege to live during other times.

If we really wish to behave in accordance with the commitment we made at our baptism and to respond to the call of God that we received when we first joined a Conference, we should feel the need to be concerned by all that happens around the world. We should be perfectly informed on any aspect that could lead to the suffering of our neighbour, wherever this may be around the globe. We should maintain this attitude and be convinced that our action, whether individual or collective, even if it seems insignificant, will finally help relieve the suffering of so many.

I have never been able to understand why some members of the Society, generally men, do not feel the ongoing need for training or updated information. Constant training, a personal challenge as well as a collective one, within each Conference, is essential to understand the true apostolic sense of our belonging to the Conference. I would even go as far as to state that those who do not feel this need, to constantly improve their knowledge, sin against Love.

Indeed, knowledge, the truth, will make us free as the Apostle stated, and thus more able to serve our Brothers and Sisters in need. Knowledge will firstly allow us to be better prepared to face their shortcomings. Secondly, and of no less importance, we will be more competent to identify, at any given time, new types of poverty which cause suffering to the individuals we aim to help.

Thanks to this ongoing training and provision of information, we will be aware, not only of what is happening near us but also understand events which are occurring on the other side of the world. We have responsibility to respond to both local and international events. Our help alongside our affection must reach around the globe. If it is true that we belong to a determined Conference, to a community of Vincentian Brothers and Sisters, we either open ourselves up to the rest of the world or we are seriously lacking in our service.

The duty to report and to share the work we undertake in our Conferences will make others join us. There will thus be more of us to proclaim the Gospel through the specific example of our lives dedicated to those who suffer.

For this, we need that each of our groups be really alive and open so that we can attract men and women who are interested in joining us, in the same way we were first attracted to the Society that we belong to today.

I will never get tired of saying this: these groups, our Conferences, were created by the collegial will of young Parisians who did not commit themselves to some great and easy cause of the type which moves the masses, but rather felt the need to share the suffering of unique and irreplaceable human beings.

We are the Church, we are in the Holy Church of the poor and we represent this Church in our closeness to them.

Our condition of being baptised, as all members of the Society are, makes us very aware of the fact that, in virtue of the blood of Christ, we are prophets, priests and kings. In other words, apart from the obligations we hold as members of a Holy hierarchical and magisterial Church, we have the important mission of spreading the Gospel. Therefore, even if, for whatever reason, a Christian wished to renounce their membership of the Church, they would nevertheless not be exempt from spreading and proclaiming the Good News.

I recall Isaiah (12,3) where he sets out to us:

“Give thanks to God,
Call out His name
Ask Him anything!
Shout to the nations, tell them what He has done
Spread the news of His great reputation!”

All lay people, especially those who are committed to the Church, must be the voice of Christ and proclaim His message. This is a personal responsibility. Too often, we are satisfied with being just average tools of the Church; contributors who participate in the spreading of the Good News as if this obligation is exclusively incumbent upon the ecclesial hierarchy.

Nevertheless, I think that our personal duty goes beyond this. In order to accomplish this task we should draw our strength and our energy from our intimate union with Christ. That is to say, we should be particularly aware of the fact that, even if some day, somehow, there were to be no ecclesial hierarchy, we would not be exempt from the duty we all share as Christians; that of telling our neighbours that God sacrificed Himself for us, that He died for us sinners, and that He has risen from the dead to redeem us. We should proclaim that we receive from Him the greatest expression of Love and that He expects us to respond to this Love which He gave so freely.

We should feel the obligation, as part of our Vincentian mission, to transmit the **Good Doctrine** to those who have not received it. This teaching, as mentioned above, must be taught with great humility and always through example before words. We need not, however, forget words when they are required; always using the example of what Christ means to our lives through His closeness to us.

This obligation is especially relevant today when everything regarding Christianity and its influence on Humanity, not only in the West, has been attacked in the majority of mass media as well as in the message of those in power. It is our unavoidable obligation as Christians, especially as Catholics and in my opinion, particularly as members of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, to respond to this aspect.

This obligation especially concerns us as Vincentians. In many occasions, we act in many places in the world where the sole presence of Christ is felt through the dedication of the Conferences and its members. Therefore, we cannot merely assist those who suffer without worrying about extending this message of freedom and salvation regarding their souls. This message concerns the life of each of these individuals as well as our own souls.

We all witness, as one more sign of our times, the decline of the Clergy and religious Orders as well as the disappearance of Christian institutions which used to bring Christ's voice to the people through their work. What should we do regarding this situation? If lay people ignore their obligations and responsibilities, the voice of the Holy Church of the poor will not be able to reach those who unknowingly await it; to reach those for whom the knowledge of the Love of God towards humankind will simply make them better and happier. If these individuals were aware of the Good News, they would have the strength to improve and serve the world which they belong to.

I dream about specialized Conferences which would almost exclusively concentrate on extending the message of Christ to all those nearby, as our Rule dictates, assuming that no work of charity is outside our scope. I dream about Conferences of Good News.

Conferences of Good News, essentially in countries where the state can cover all primary needs, which would find, through the spreading of the Gospel - the proclaiming of the Good News, the reason for working in a community of faith as a Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The world as it is today, in which we strive to serve, does not present any greater difficulties than those which our founders were faced with. The means we have at our disposal to serve this world are not the same as those back then. Skepticism, the lack of values, amorality that we witness so much in these times, should make us react and focus our attention.

Romano Guardini wrote this sentence which eloquently sums up the shortcomings of our times: "When men reject the truth, they become ill. This rejection does not appear when men make mistakes but when they abandon the truth; not when they lie, even if they do it profusely, but when they consider that the truth does not bind them; not when they deceive others but when they focus their lives on destroying the truth. It is then when they become spiritually ill."

This is the area of work for these Conferences of Good News: to bring back, wherever possible, the clear concepts of right and wrong and to clarify the enormous difference that separates them. These are differences that we have allowed, in these days, to fade away; to almost disappear.

The aim is to help to recuperate the concept of sin; not only as a transgression of the eternal law of the Creator, but as a concept - the evil that lives amongst us which destroys the individual and makes one unable to serve oneself and others.

We must remain especially close to the Clergy and religious Orders in these times. Close to these members of the Holy Church who have dedicated their lives to the service of the Kingdom of God. We have to help them, on some occasions, even to find the key aspects to their service to the Kingdom of God; aspects which are different today to those that were required yesterday. We have to make them aware of the fact that the lay people who make the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul are close to them and are ready to provide whatever may be needed. This closeness when working together should be carried out in a committed way; it should sometimes involve constructive criticism and not just accompaniment and consent regarding defended approaches, apart from those which happen to be purely and strictly magisterial. We should form an accompaniment of a Child of God with the same dignity that we all receive in our Baptism.

We should then accompany the Clergy and religious Orders, remain close and committed to them without losing our condition as lay people. We should remain outside any ecclesiastic and legal bond except those that we are willing to take on personally. We should be, therefore, their best and most humble collaborators; armed with the modesty of truth, which Saint Therese of Jesus spoke often about.

Legal independence, as an institution within the Church, is absolutely necessary as our Founders discovered. As such, we should proclaim to the world the responsibility and the commitment of all Christians to spread the Gospel. From our legal independence from the Holy Church, more necessary today than ever, let us affirm and reaffirm our vocation to serve the same Holy Church through the desire of our hearts, fraternally united within the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Within the Church: each Conference is a college. Concern for our fellow members. A permanent foundation process.

If there is something worth highlighting in our foundation process, something that is often forgotten, it is that we were born collegially, even though, at a later stage, the historic vicissitudes of France sometimes show the foundation of the Society as a product of the singularity and the extraordinary richness of one determined founder. Nothing could be further from the truth.

All founders were essential contributors, to a greater or lesser extent, of what was to be the birth of the Society. Obviously, they did not imagine, back then, what the Society would become in the future, resulting from common effort and desire. Indeed, the first Conference of Saint Vincent was the result of the desire of several individuals and absolutely not, of only one of them. Each founder provided outstanding qualities so as to enrich this newly-formed society; a society which was to provide magnificent assistance to the poor as well as to become a breeding ground for saints. All of founders were, undoubtedly, flexible tools of the Holy Spirit.

Convinced of the need of this assistance, the Conferences grew due to the fact that they were working as a true and genuine community, as a true college. The members were not pending the greatness of one of their number.

If Frederic Ozanam was essential in preserving the lay nature of the Society and, at the beginning, in providing the radiant energy which drew in his fellow members, Emmanuel Bailly was fundamental in writing the Prologue to the first Rule of 1835. The Prologue has shaped the Society until this very day; this is a text that I do not hesitate to qualify as the true and authentic Founding Charter of the Society. A text we should all study in depth. If Le Taillandier first had the idea to go to the poor, it would have served for nothing, the calling - the dream of Le Taillandier - would have been useless, if others had not discovered the mission to which God had set out before them. If François Lallier would not have written our first Rule, so extraordinarily enriching, the first Conferences would not have reached the unity that they have sincerely shared since the beginning.

If Sister Rosalie Rendu and the first fellow members that joined the founders had not helped the newly-formed Conference, through their sincere and efficient friendship, the Conference would probably not have adopted the customs and the traditions that are so cherished today. It is more likely that without Sister Rosalie Rendu, the desire for personal contact with those who suffer would not have been so deeply enshrined in our collective memory; it would not have become a distinctive characteristic and part of the charisma of the Conferences. Long before, this desire had been expressed by "Mr Vincent", by Saint Vincent de Paul.

They were a group of friends, as the chronicles of the foundation process repeat so often, a group of friends who were concerned about fostering improvement in each one of their fellow members through the practice of both individual and collective acts of charity and prayer. If this desire is not felt by one Conference today, then it merely means that this Conference does not truly exist. Rest assured, dear friends, that if mutual concern is not felt within each Conference, if fellow members are not dedicated to each other, then again the Conference ceases to exist.

Indeed nobody can give what they themselves do not possess. Any group of friends that gather together without love being present will undoubtedly be a group which, although helping the most deprived, even effectively, will never be a true Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul. In order to be a true Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul mutual concern towards each Vincentian must be present. From this interest, from this love, constantly shown, arises the capacity to bring love to the poorest of the poor. If there is no such love, we will obviously not be able to provide it to those who most need it.

Each Conference, dear friends, dear fellow members, shall strive each day to live and revive the experiences of the founders of the Society. If the Society grew, if each Conference gave birth to many others, it was thanks to the intensity of that collegial spirit. This is why each Conference, each work group, should live with the same spirit that accompanied our founders when they first created the Society; as if it was the first day of their existence. We would all benefit from this spiritual aspect and it would lead us to provide a better service regarding our fellow members and the poor.

Working for and alongside young people within each Conference.

When I referred earlier to the spreading of the Good News, our work, the work of each and every Conference, is especially relevant in this aspect regarding young people. If today, humankind needs clear options which will allow them to overcome the rampant materialism present in many societies, this concern is especially true for young people, including our younger fellow members.

In many cases, especially within the most developed civil societies, although present elsewhere, young people find themselves completely demotivated, lacking values and as I have stated before, this negatively impacts on their lives. This reality, which can be seen as a threat, should be seen as a true opportunity for us to provide young people with a service that will help them find their way in life. This will allow them to firstly help themselves and then, at a later date, provide service to the poor.

For this reason, if we do not worry about accompanying the young people that arrive to our Conferences through their training processes, we will not be carrying out the service they require from us. If we do not prepare our Conferences to receive them, if we do not prepare ourselves, each one of us, to serve them in their journey to maturity, we will not provide a service to the young people who will follow us. As I mentioned earlier and repeat now, either our dedication to the Conferences starts with the fellow members themselves or these Conferences cease to exist. We need to show true commitment; commitment as our founders understood the term.

Frequently, we will mistakenly see our younger fellow members as our natural heirs, as those who will provide continuity to our work; this is sometimes the motivation of our concern. To think and act in this way is a terrible mistake on behalf of the Conferences. On the contrary, our concern must be how to serve them, not how to use these young people.

The CCCL Anniversary of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise

With the limitations of humankind, we need some reminders of the events experienced by other human beings to provide us with true examples of how to live our lives. It would be totally inappropriate if, during this speech, I was not to refer to the anniversary of the man who is an example to this big family of ours. We have been celebrating his life throughout the year: Saint Vincent.

What exactly is the use of having a patron if we do not use him as an example regarding our daily life? Who were his most intimate collaborators and what do they represent to us today? What influence did they have on his work? How did they enrich it?

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise are firstly an example of a fruitful collaboration and secondly they were dreamers.

If these two had not dared to dream, if they had not put their dreams into practice, today we would not be able to tell of the magnificent examples of their lives and work, so advanced for their times.

The Daughters of Charity: What a wonderful example! Can you imagine what the birth of a female sisterhood dedicated to God and working outside the convents meant in the middle of the XVIIth Century! How many difficulties did they need to overcome in order to be understood and accepted! How much perseverance was required in order to achieve this! What a tremendous display of overflowing love! How much strength was necessary to maintain that ongoing devotion! To place themselves at the disposal of humankind, in the name of Christ; these women who did so much good and who still do so much good, today, outside the convents. How much effort was required to see their wishes accomplished!

What would have become of the Clergy and the religious Orders at this time if Saint Vincent had not shown concern regarding the lack of training and sought to remedy this problem? What would have become of all those poor people to whom the saint dedicated his whole life; thus fulfilling his desire to protect them.

Let us look at this saint as our own. Let us examine and understand his work. Let us understand this man even during his moments of doubt, his desire to take advantage of his ecclesiastic situation for his own benefit. Let us learn how he overcame his underlying human motivation and substituted it for those of love and encounter with Christ.

This should be our true celebration of the CCCL anniversary, to understand the saint and to adopt him as an example of life and dedication to the poor; to admire him for his intellectual openness regarding the fulfillment of his vision in accordance with the most effective practice; his lack of concern about being accepted by others. He was only interested in providing the best service to those who needed him, for all those in which he saw the poor and suffering Christ.

CLOSE

Before concluding this speech, please allow me, first of all, to request forgiveness. These years, during which I have been serving you as President General, have not always been easy. On some occasions, I can assure you, as I have already mentioned, they have been extremely painful. Indeed, during this time, I have had to make some decisions that have affected others. Undoubtedly their pain has been added to my own discomfort.

Through these lines, I would humbly ask you to forgive me for not having known how to make these decisions, on some occasions, with sufficient charity. I would like to say to all those that have felt pain due to some of my decisions, that these have always been made in accordance with what I believed, at the time, to be the most suitable for the Society as a whole, and for its service to the poor.

Please also allow me to thank you. At the start of this speech I referred to the men and women whom the Good Lord placed on the path of the XIV President General in order to make my mission easier. It would be unfair to name them all, as there has been so many. I would probably forget a couple of names and would then commit a great injustice. I would rather place them, as they could well imagine, in a corner of my heart. So please receive quietly in your hearts this sincere gratitude. I would like

to pay tribute to each and every one who has made this long period of serene and fruitful service to the Council General possible.

Please also allow me to remember the families of my dear collaborators, who have so often managed without a husband, wife, child or grandchild in order to allow them to work in the Society, thus serving the poor. In an institution that is fully integrated in the world, a lay institution, the full and diligent dedication of these faithful collaborators would not have been possible without the full understanding and sacrifice of their families. These families have been the main players in the mission of the men and women who have dedicated all these years to the service of the Society under my presidency. To all of them, I am truly grateful, as I know so well how much you have given, even through specific ideas and initiatives, in order to provide a better service for the poor. I do not wish to forget, and nor should I, my own family. They have collaborated so much during all these years so that I could freely serve you, regarding the mission you had entrusted to me. Within my family, I wish to especially thank my wife, with whom I have the pleasure of sharing the events of today. None of that which I have undertaken for the Society during all these years would have been possible, had she not understood and accepted the mission I was called to fulfill.

Please allow me one last request. A request that I have repeated many times throughout this speech: Do not stop dreaming! Do not stop dreaming of a better world; a world more fully incorporated into Christ, in which each and every one of you, all of my beloved fellow members, play a leading role in the History. Strive, each day, to make the dream come true through your effort and prayer. Make the world a better place! Do not let yourself be carried along by History, play a leading role in it! Do not stop dreaming, my dear friends! Without dreams, without the effort of making them come true, nothing is possible!

Remember our motto; a motto that should underpin every one of our actions: "serviens in spe". Serve with hope. Without this virtue, nothing is possible regarding our journey through life. We live in a world which often lacks this spirit. Take this hope everywhere you go! Make hope an essential companion of your lives! Allow those around you to feel this spirit. Never abandon the virtue of hope!

I would like, in the final moments of my service, to remember the words of Saint Augustin in his sermon 340 and adapt them for this occasion, I say alongside the Saint: If I have been afraid concerning what I have been to you, what I have been with you has reconforted me. For you, I have been President General, with you I have been a Vincentian. The former expresses a duty whereas the latter expresses a grace; the former points to a danger whereas the latter is salvation through service to the poor.

As always, I would suggest that we look to Mary. At the foot of the cross she found herself close to her Son; a son she never abandoned, even when she did not understand the extraordinary task of His affiliation and His saving mission. I pray to her, under whose name we have belonged since the very beginning of our foundation, that She requests the attention of her Divine Son towards our Conferences. I pray that He makes us each day more holy, thus stronger when fighting the causes that make the men of our times and of tomorrow suffer.

For the majority of you, dear friends from so many places in the world, it will be a definitive farewell until we see each other again in Heaven through the Mercy of God. Heaven, where we will join those who have preceded us and whom I especially remember at this time; for Cesar Viana, Gérard Gorcy and for Ernesto Balladares, all of them, dear collaborators who have left us during the years of my presidency. I firmly believe that, thanks to His infinite mercy, this will be the case and we will meet each other there!

Until then, God bless you all! I pray that God will always accompany you and your families, the poor that you serve and in general, the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul throughout the world.

Thank you very much.

José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
XIV President General of the
International Confederation of the
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.
i.n.e.d.

Read in Salamanca, Spain, on the 28th May 2010 during the General Assembly.