



# NEWSLETTER

## INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL

January/February 2015

### Lent 2015: Dr. Michael Thio called to respond to the Pope Francis's letter



During the Lenten season, the Holy Father asks us to meditate especially on the love of God for each one of us in the ecclesial communion at the service of the little and poorest ones with Christ's same heart, as an antidote to the "globalization of indifference". In a message to all members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, The President General spread the call of Cor Unum to respond to the letter of Pope Francis.

« Dear Presidents of National/Superior and Assimilated Councils,

May Mother Mary protect and keep us in her tender care always.

Reference is made to the letter of 26 January 2015 from the Pontifical Council Cor Unum along with Pope Francis's 2015 Lenten Message. Cor Unum has requested for response to the Pope's message regarding its exposure, reception and initiatives the message is able to generate.

To co-ordinate SSVP responses may we request respective National/Superior & Assimilated Councils send their response to Council General International(CGI) for the attention of : Ms Claire-Helene de Parseval, Administration Manager, to her email: [cgi.admin@ssvpglobal.org](mailto:cgi.admin@ssvpglobal.org). The CGI will collate the responses and submit a collective response from SSVP to Cor Unum.

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We appreciate your cooperation and kind attention and we look forward to hear from you.

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten us in reflecting on the Pope's Lenten message and preparing ourselves well for the season of Lent. Let us give praise and thanksgiving to God.

Kind regards and God bless.

Yours in our humble service in Christ,

Dr. Michael Thio  
President General

The Pope Francis's letter and the message of Cor Unum, are available in full version on our website: [www.ssvpglobal.org](http://www.ssvpglobal.org) (section : news of CGI)



# Training meeting at International Head Office: towards a universal training programme?

From 2 to 5 February, a meeting was held at CGI (Paris) to reflect on the foundations needed to establish an international training programme.



Training is one of the priorities in the Strategic Plan that the President General Dr. Michael Thio launched when he took office. Since February 2012, the CGI Training Commission has designed and set up a “cascaded” training programme delivered by International Vice-Presidents and regional coordinators, for National Presidents. Following the success of this first initiative, the CGI then considered extending the training to all members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. A working meeting was held from 2 to 5 February 2015 to establish the basis for an international training programme.

## Working from existing programmes

There is presently no harmonized, general programme, nor a recognized method for delivery of this training within the International Confederation. Noting that some countries have already created valuable national programmes, the CGI invited the presidents and/or training coordinators of the countries concerned to a 4-day meeting in Paris. Chaired by Brian O’Reilly (Vice-President General) and Marie-Françoise Salesiani Payet (International Vice-President for Training) the participants, with their own training material, were encouraged to reflect and work together on the following points:

- Exploring the training programmes of each country.
- Creating and defining a general training programme for new members, existing members and Conference officers
- Identifying a range of training/documentation materials

- Agreeing on format(s) for transmission of the general training programme
- Setting up a working plan and schedule for carrying out this project

**Claudia Nodari** (President – National Council of Italy) attending the meeting, gave us her feelings: *“We have done some good work together, and it was very interesting. Training is really important within the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. We already have some training tools in Italy, and this meeting shows me that we are moving in the right direction.”*

## Passing on the Vincentian spirit

The project relies on two important concepts: harmony and structure. The SSVP needs a unified training programme delivered through a recognized structure; the cascade model forms the most economic and efficient method to achieve this aim, given the size and diversity of the Confederation. This process provides a universal way to address the “authentic Vincentian spirit”, normally provided in the training material, without distortion or dilution.

In the view of **Jean-Noël Cormier** (National President - Canada) attending the meeting: *“It is an excellent initiative, that will perhaps enable development of a shared, real Vincentian culture, which we don’t have at the moment. In Canada, we are frequently asked by African countries (French and English-speaking) if they can use our training programmes, since they do not have the resources to find them elsewhere. So we need a training programme that adapts for use everywhere.”*

After the workshops, a work schedule was produced for the next few months: the countries involved will have till the 1st May to present modules for the future training programme. Some will work together, like Brazil and Canada, working on the subject of the home visit.

**Emilia Jeronimo** (National President - Brazil) explained: *“We are from different countries, but we have shared problems, and it was an opportunity to talk to each other. We need to train Vincentians, no matter how long they have been members of the Society. This training will be useful for us, but for the rest of the world as well. I am sure this will help to overcome problems on the ground, as we listed during the meeting. The aim is to work towards a more global, worldwide vision, developing Vincentian spirituality, working on relationships with other organizations (religious, NGOs) and governments, so we can better serve the poor.”*

# On the ground: with the Vincentians of Boma (Democratic Republic of Congo)

In Boma, the Diocesan Council fights hard to maintain the work of the Society, despite the problems on the ground.



Boma is a district on the right bank of the River Congo, in the province of Bas-Congo. The Society was brought here by Brother Paul BABAKA ba KIKHELA (Congregation of Brothers of Saint Joseph of Boma). The first conference, Saint Anthony of Padua, was formed on 25 April 1954.

Charles MBUINGA MUANDA has been President of the Diocesan Council of Boma since 2011. It has 98 conferences, of which 81 are active, with some 1300 members.

Like many Conferences and Councils around the world, 2014 has been a difficult period for the SSVP in Boma. The continuing global crisis still affects the most deprived people, and the region has faced disasters such as flooding and large movements of people because of upheaval in neighbouring countries.

Nonetheless, the general SSVP assembly in 2014 showed that the commitment of members was as strong as ever, and the Society still has a number of positive advantages.

## The work and the projects

For the past year, the Diocesan Council has been working on a cattle-farming project, and now has 3 animals. The main challenge for 2015 will be to find funds to purchase land for pasture and buildings. With the support of the Aide Fraternelle Salvatorienne, a pig farm has been started. The livestock includes 21 piglets and 10 pigs, and there are also two sheep.

As for conferences, some of the projects seem promising, such as that of Moanda, where a solar farm is being constructed.

The Diocesan Council can also provide help for a number of orphaned and vulnerable children, with the support of the Holy Father through COR UNUM.

The other targets for 2015: set up a small library, develop a fish-farming project, renew and maintain twinning relationships, restoring contacts lost with twinned conferences in Europe, begin initiatives to encourage young people to join the SSVP, not forgetting fund-raising for the various activities and projects.

## Difficulties on the ground

The Society in Boma has to deal with an ageing membership: there are health problems among the members, and deaths, seriously affecting Conference work. Young people are no longer getting involved in charitable organisations, through lack of means for their own subsistence, and without prospects for the future.

The other serious problem is the increased lack of funding because local Councils and conferences are unable to pay their contributions. The solution would be to widen the activities of the Diocesan Council, to provide an assured income and thus support local Councils in the region.

The Council President also highlighted the problem of lack of transport: Boma is in a farming area; acquiring a truck for transporting goods will mean that products can be taken to the urban areas for market. This would make agriculture worthwhile again, encouraging financial contributions and solidarity with the poorest people.

There are some major challenges for the SSVP in Boma in 2015. Nonetheless it can still rely on the active commitment of its members, and the firm support of the diocesan chaplain, who is heavily involved in the life of the Society, through numerous meetings with local Councils and Conferences.

*Sources: Annual report 2014 from the Diocesan Council of Boma - Charles MBUINGA – President of diocesan Council*

# Haiti: the Vincentian Family conducts 300 households along the “Chemen Lavi Miyo” (Path to a better life)

The Saint Vincent de Paul Society is supporting a project begun by the Vincentian Family in Haiti that assists very poor families in rural areas.

The CLM project (Chemen Lavi Miyo in Haitian Creole) was an initiative by the Vincentian Family in Haiti, begun in partnership with Fonkose, a micro-finance organisation well-established in the country. It is mainly concerned with women as heads of families who, according to Bro. Joe Agostino C.M, the international coordinator, “bear the economy of Haiti on their shoulders”.

The purpose is to help them escape extreme poverty to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. On joining the programme, they receive some material help to improve their living conditions: building materials, installation of latrines, water filters, a meal each day, free access to medical care, etc. At the same time, they are trained in income-generating skills: raising chickens, pigs or ducks, or as street vending. The programme also provides schooling for all the children in the families involved.

In February 2014, after the first training period of 18 months, 290 of the 300 participants in the project graduated. Along with the direct impact on other family members, the programme will help to change the life of almost 3000 women.

A 2<sup>nd</sup> contingent of 140 participants, at Gran Boukan (*Les Barradères peninsula – south-eastern Haiti*)), has been undergoing training for the last 9 months. The programme includes targets such as the building of 75 dwellings, the completion of the toilet facilities, and setting up a mobile health clinic near a local state school. Beforehand, 321 goats, 125 pigs, 198 chickens and 24 turkeys were distributed to the participants. Just 9 months later, the livestock numbers had already increased by 30%.

Strengthened by this success, the Vincentian Family in Haiti decided to repeat the operation, developing a new, 3-year strategic plan. The International Council General of the SSVF continues to provide financial support through CIAD (International Commission for Aid and Development)

Visit the website: [www.vfhi.org](http://www.vfhi.org)

## Time of Lent : from 18 February to 5 april 2015



Jesus sends his followers out with  
“no purse, no bag, no sandals”  
(Lk 10:4).

The spread of the Gospel is not guaranteed either by the number of persons, or by the prestige of the institution, or by the quantity of available resources. What counts is to be permeated by the love of Christ, to let oneself be led by the Holy Spirit and to graft one’s own life onto the tree of life, which is the Lord’s Cross.

Pope Francis July 2013