



MISEVI
international

Disciples in Mission

General Guide





Disciples in Mission

G e n e r a l G u i d e



misevinternational.org

The title of this MISEVI Spiritual Formation document, **Disciples in Mission**, expresses our very identity: Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI). We are **disciples in mission** from the early moments of our Christian life.

Pope Francis expressed this so well in his Apostolic Letter *Evangelium Gaudium* #120:

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19) ... Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'."

Disciples in Mission, expresses deeply our Vincentian identity. The Poor are our Masters and our Teachers. We serve them as our masters. We see in them Christ himself. They are our teachers. We listen and learn from them, and at the same time they are our mission. Thanks to them we learn to love God affectively and effectively. We always come and go from the school of life to the source: The Love of God.

PREFACE

This is a guiding document of The International Association of Lay Vincentian Missionaries (International MISEVI), a full member of the Vincentian Family, to offer guidelines for ongoing formation of MISEVI members in all participating countries. As an International organization, the International MISEVI team recognizes the need for these guidelines, while respecting and honoring the distinct uniqueness of the cultural realities of each individual country.

The main goals of this document are:

- To share the history of how MISEVI began.
- To offer spiritual formation guidelines that will support each country's distinct mission.
- To create a structure that allows for guidance and cooperation among the Vincentian Family members with whom MISEVI collaborates, while at the same time recognizing the unique needs and cultural distinctions of each country.
- To formalize guiding principles that will help to clarify our roles in MISEVI countries and our role within the wider Vincentian Family.

The mission of MISEVI is to guide, animate, and support the missionary presence of the laity, especially in those countries and missions connected to the Vincentian Family. The relationship with the Congregation of the Mission, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and other Vincentian Family member programs is spiritual, charismatic and collaborative.

This is a **general guide** for the elaboration of basic formation programs in each MISEVI group; each country can identify unique elements that need to be included. These guidelines can be adapted, enriched and deepened according to the needs and the challenges of daily living one's faith in each MISEVI country and each MISEVI group.

MISEVI formation is composed of the following elements:

1. *Theological Foundation: Jesus Christ, Missionary of the Father; Missionary Spirituality*
2. *Christian Formation*
3. *Human Formation*
4. *Vincentian Formation and Prayer*
5. *Practical Preparation - Some thoughts to consider for sending missionaries*

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Approved by the International Team of MISEVI on **the 8th day of July, 2020.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

MISEVI missionaries are lay women and men called and sent to share the Vincentian charism and spirituality, first initiated by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. This call is always being adapted to present-day cultural realities. As an organization, MISEVI believes that mission is grounded and deepened in experience, born of the free gift of being called by the Gospel to live and act as Jesus taught us.

As lay people, the missionaries respond to the Gospel call to evangelize and be evangelized by those they serve, particularly, those who are living in poverty. These missionaries *"are called, in particular, to make the Church present and operative in places and conditions where the Church cannot be the salt of the earth unless it is through and by them"*¹ and *"their first and immediate task is not the institution and the development of the ecclesial community - which is the specific function of the Pastors - but putting into practice all the Christian and evangelical possibilities which are hidden, but at the same time, already present and active in the things of the world. The proper fields of this evangelizing activity are the vast and complex world of politics, social affairs, economy, and also culture, sciences and arts, international life, mass media communication, as well as other realities opened to evangelization..."*²

MISEVI members, as Vincentian lay missionaries, live the missionary life in different ways. As lay people, each one has different ways of being on mission, always looking for the best and most effective way of building the Kingdom of God together with people who live in certain states of vulnerability. They may be living and serving as MISEVI members within their own countries or with international Vincentian missions. Always, they are in relationship to the Vincentian Family in service to people who are most in need.

¹ Lumen Gentium, Paul VI., Vatican Council II., 1964, par. 33

² Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI., Vatican Council II., 1975, par. 70

2. HISTORY

2.1. NAME DESCRIPTION

- Spanish (Origin):
MISEVI = Misioneros **SE**glares **VI**cencianos.
- English:
MISEVI = Vincentian **SE**cular (Lay) **M**issionaries
(In the USA, the adaptation is **M**ission and **SE**rvice the **V**incentian Way)
- **Seculars** or **Lays** are the body of the faithful, outside of the ranks of the clergy

2.2. TIME LINE

➤ 1984 - 1996

JMV (Vincentian Marian Youth in Spain) began to send Spanish youth on “Ad Gentes” mission during summer time.

Some of them stayed for several years, as missionary lay people, renewing their commitment every two years. These young people carried out different pastoral tasks always in relation with the Vincentian Family; they started to express that they would like to commit to missionary work for their entire lives. The challenge, then, was to find a structure to facilitate their permanent stay as lay missionaries “Ad Gentes.”

Several lay missionaries wished for a choice to provide them with stability as permanent lay missionaries linked to the Vincentian Family, as they believe they could live as missionary lay people. This fact triggered the creation of a new association within the Vincentian family to promote, facilitate, support and coordinate the presence and work of missionary lay people on “Ad Gentes” missions to the Vincentian Family or where the Vincentian Family is present.

➤ 1997 - 2001

A group of young people accepted the responsibility for revitalizing the Association so that it could facilitate the coordination among the lay missionaries who were on mission abroad for longer than two years, as well as provide them with human, moral, spiritual and economical support. A Managing Committee was created and they immediately began their work. Their main task was to prepare the First General Assembly of MISEVI, under the supervision of Superior General Fr. Robert P. Maloney, CM. and Fr. José Eugenio López, CM, who was appointed to inspire and support MISEVI from the very beginning.

The International Statutes for MISEVI were approved with Decree of the same Dicastery on 07 April 1999 by the Apostolic See (Prot. N. P. 53-2/99). MISEVI was canonically established by the competent authority of the Church as an International Public Association of the faithful who desire to share the charism and spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul.

For the first time, the Multicolor Cross Logo was internationally adopted during the first assembly. Previously, it was used for MISEVI Spain only. The Colors on the Cross represent the diversity and richness of our cultures, realities and ways of serving.

➤ 2002 - 2010

The concept of MISEVI was shared internationally with the Vincentian Family, and groups that already existed as Vincentian lay missionaries were invited to join. Many of these groups served either locally or internationally.

The Holy See approved and confirmed the revised text of the Statutes (25 November 2010) presented by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission to the Apostolic See.

➤ 2010 - 2020

Currently, hundreds of MISEVI members are working in short term or long-term missions. Some go to any part of the world and some share the Gospel in their home countries. As of the year 2020, we are established in more than 14 countries on 5 continents.

In January of 2020, the International Committee established the foundation date of MISEVI as **the 6th of January 2001**, the date of the first international general assembly. Not only was this the first general assembly, but it also marks the very special date of the Epiphany of Our Lord and the debut of this millennium.

2.3. GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

❖	2001:	1 st General Assembly	Madrid, Spain
❖	2005:	2 nd General Assembly	Saint Vincent de Paul, France (Berceau)
❖	2010:	3 rd General Assembly	Bogota, Colombia
❖	2014:	4 th General Assembly	San José, Costa-Rica
❖	2018:	5 th General Assembly	Salamanca, Spain

3. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

"...service we owe our neighbor, who is the image of God."

(St. Vincent de Paul)

3.1. JESUS CHRIST, MISSIONARY OF THE FATHER

Jesus Christ is the missionary of the Father, who so loved the world that He sent His Word into the world for our salvation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Jesus came to redeem the world, welcome humanity into the life of the Trinity, and share His mission with us. These were Saint Vincent's two favorite mysteries. He urged us to have deep devotion to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, because our lives and mission flow from communion with the Trinity and Incarnating the good news of God's love among our sisters and brothers, especially those most in need. God is love and full of mercy, and so we are called to be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful.

As the Father has sent His Son, so Jesus sends us. Our mission is to continue the mission of Jesus in our time. Saint Vincent says it very simply: our mission is to do what Jesus did the way he did it. Sent by Jesus our mission is to radiate the love and mercy of God to our brothers and sisters.

Christ fulfills his mission in fidelity to the Father. The fundamental characteristic of Jesus' mission is his absolute and unconditional obedience to the Father. In His unparalleled fidelity with those who have been sent to all to carry out their salvific plan, Jesus remains "obedient to death and a death on a cross" (Ph 2:8), an expression of love and exemplary fidelity.

The following two paragraphs³ from Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - **Lumen Gentium** - speak to the missionary call of MISEVI and can be helpful in our relationship with the Trinity and with the Church:

13. All (people) are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one. It was for this purpose that God sent His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, that He might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the (children) of God. For this, too, God sent the Spirit of His Son as Lord and Life-giver. He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe, and who is the well-spring of their unity in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.

17. As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth.

³ Lumen Gentium, Paul VI., Vatican Council II., 1964, par. 13 and 17

3.2. MISSION SPIRITUALITY

The term "**spirituality**", in Christian perspective, means "*a life according to the Spirit*" (Rm 8,9).

Redemptoris Missio speaks to us of this understanding of our life in the Spirit. The following paragraphs⁴ up to and including "The Call to Holiness" (below) are directly quoted from this document:

87. This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality.

Living the Mystery of Christ, "the One who was sent"

88. An essential characteristic of missionary spirituality is intimate communion with Christ. We cannot understand or carry out the mission unless we refer it to Christ as the one who was sent to evangelize. St. Paul describes Christ's attitude: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (and women). And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

The mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption is thus described as a total self-emptying which leads Christ to experience fully the human condition and to accept totally the Father's plan. This is an emptying of self which is permeated by love and expresses love. The mission follows this same path and leads to the foot of the cross.

The missionary is required to "renounce himself and everything that up to this point he considered as his own, and to make himself everything to everyone." This he does by a poverty which sets him free for the Gospel, overcoming attachment to the people and things about him, so that he (she) may become a brother (or sister) to those to whom he (she) is sent and thus bring them Christ the Savior. This is the goal of missionary spirituality: "To the weak I became weak...; I have become all things to all (people), that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel..." (1 Cor 9:22-23).

It is precisely because he (she) is "sent" that the missionary experiences the consoling presence of Christ, who is with him (her) at every moment of life - "Do not be afraid...for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10) - and who awaits him in the heart of every person.

Loving the Church and Humanity As Jesus Did

89. Missionary spirituality is also marked by apostolic charity, the charity of Christ who came "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, who searches them out and offers his life for them (cf. Jn 10). Those who have the missionary spirit feel Christ's burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did.

The missionary is urged on by "zeal for souls," a zeal inspired by Christ's own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in

⁴ Redemptoris Missio, John Paul II., 1990, par. 87 - 90

people's problems. Jesus' love is very deep: He who "knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25) loved everyone by offering them redemption and He suffered when it was rejected.

The missionary is a person of charity. In order to proclaim to all his (her) brothers and sisters that they are loved by God and are capable of loving, he (she) must show love toward all, giving his (her) life for his (her) neighbor. The missionary is the "universal brother (sister)," bearing in himself (herself) the Church's spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of his (her) brethren. As such, he (she) overcomes barriers and divisions of race, cast or ideology. He (she) is a sign of God's love in the world - a love without exclusion or partiality.

Finally, like Christ he (she) must love the Church: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). This love, even to the point of giving one's life, is a focal point for him (her). Only profound love for the Church can sustain the missionary's zeal. His (her) daily pressure, as St. Paul says, is "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28). For every missionary "fidelity to Christ cannot be separated from fidelity to the Church."

The Call to Holiness

90. The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission. This was the earnest desire of the Council, which hoped to be able "to enlighten all people with the brightness of Christ, which gleams over the face of the Church, by preaching the Gospel to every creature." The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey toward holiness. (End of Redemptoris Missio)

Missionary spirituality is equivalent to the "inner attitudes" of the apostle⁵, which define the style or "spirit": generous fidelity to the vocation and mission of the Spirit⁶, for the fulfillment of Christ's missionary mandate according to the Savior's design of the Father. The reality of the mission comes from the Father, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This reality is adequately captured in the experiential and contemplative encounter with Christ, according to the saving plans of God's Love.

From the encounter with God in Christ, we begin to understand and live the mission without borders in the communion of the Church. Christology and ecclesiology, as well as pastoral and missiology, reflect the spiritual attitudes of the theologian or the apostle.

This spirituality is an attitude of "inner" renewal or "attitudes" from which a missionary renewal of the whole Church can derive. The most important result of missionary spirituality is the joy of feeling called and loved by Christ and able to love Christ, making Christ known and loved. "The characteristic of all authentic missionary life is inner joy, which comes from faith. In a world distressed and oppressed by so many problems, which tend to pessimism, the announcer of the Good News *"must be a human who has found in Christ the true hope"*⁷.

3.2.1. Fundamental concepts of missionary spirituality

The figure of the Good Shepherd is the reference point of all apostolic spirituality. His experience is of personal relationship and generous fidelity regarding the mission received from the Father, from the incarnation (Heb 10:5-7) to the cross (Jn 19,30). This fidelity is concretized in tune with the action of the Holy Spirit that consecrates and sends him to "evangelize the poor" (Lk 4, 18; Mt 11: 5). The

⁵ Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI., Vatican Council II., 1975, par. 74

⁶ Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI., Vatican Council II., 1975, par. 75

⁷ Redemptoris Missio, John Paul II., 1990, par. 91

mandate received from the Father is that of "giving life" (Jn 10: 11) "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). The pastoral charity of Jesus is concretized in giving totally and universally: Jesus gives himself as the one leading every human being. Jesus lived the mission like this and thus communicated it to His people (Jn 20:21).

The missionary spirituality of the apostle is an experience of poverty itself, in which the traces of Christ have been found, thanks to the gift of faith. From this humble and grateful experience is born the desire to devote oneself to the mission with generosity and for life. *"Faith is strengthened by giving it".*⁸

For his part, Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* offers us a motivating and challenging view about the missionary and evangelizing spirit of the Church, part of a missionary transformation in which he does not shy away from an analysis of today's society and offers clues to the evangelical announcement in today's world.⁹ In this announcement, special emphasis is placed on two social issues: the social inclusion of the poor and peace and social dialogue, to include the influence of the Holy Spirit on the missionary announcement; and the example of the Virgin Mary as the mother of the Evangelizing Church. MISEVI members see Mary Mother of Jesus as:

- ***The model of first Christian***
- ***The first missionary***
- ***Mother of the Apostles***
- ***The one who followed Jesus treasuring His Word in her heart and accompanying him up the end.***

Furthermore, MISEVI members use the Miraculous Medal as a means of evangelization.

⁸ *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II., 1990, par. 2

⁹ The exhortation is structured in five chapters and for our training the whole of chapter 5 has special relevance.

4. CHRISTIAN GROWTH

"So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please God in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."
(Colossians 1:10)

4.1. BASIC CHRISTIAN FORMATION OF MISEVI

4.1.1. Introduction

An international guideline for an international Association like MISEVI with a variety backgrounds of its members cannot be but very general and indicative. Each group in different countries needs to start from where it stands, knowing that each group has a different background of Christian formation.

What is presented here is a summary and indication, without being exhaustive, of the basic elements on which each member needs to be formed and informed. Each MISEVI group, lives in a diversified ecclesial, religious and social context. This means some aspects of Christian life are more challenging than others, some aspects need to be underlined more than others.

4.1.2. What is Christian formation?

Christianity is a way of life centered in Christ. It is not a sum of doctrines or principles of wisdom. It is fellowship of Christ who is the Revelation of God's image to humanity.

We consider Christian Formation to be the life-long journey of growing in faith, that leads to personal relationship with Christ. It needs to be cultivated through: worship; participation in the life of Christ through Sacraments; fellowship of Christ through study, meditation, application of the word of God in daily life; and by participation in the mission of Christ through word and service.

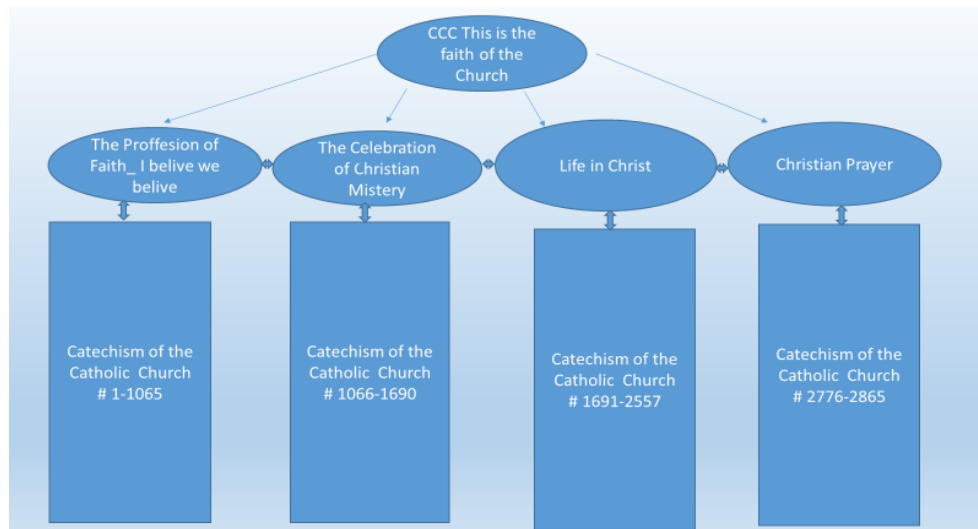
We recognize that Christian Formation is the continual process that gives purpose and meaning to our lives as followers of Christ. Christian life inspires our whole person, our heart, body, mind, will and it guides all our relationships.

4.1.3. Areas of Christian formation

In Scripture, we have a first narration in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:32-37 and Acts 5:12-16) of those who believed and followed Jesus. This narration of the life of the first disciples is the base from which the Catholic Church drew all the elements to train believers to a way of life that Christ has taught. From the teaching of Christ and these narrations of the Acts of the Apostles the Church has deduced the main aspects of Christian life and areas of Christian formation.

For Centuries the main areas of life and the catechetical itineraries have been classified in four areas:

- ***Remaining faithful to the teaching of the apostles***
- ***Remaining faithful to the breaking of bread.***
- ***Remaining faithful to brotherhood/sisterhood.***
- ***Remaining faithful to the prayers.***



4.1.4. Some objectives of growth in Christian life

Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, members of MISEVI:

1. Are able to give reason of their faith

- They are well introduced to the Bible and to the tradition.
- They understand the mystery of Trinity, the mystery of Redemption brought by Christ and continued in the world today by the Holy Spirit acting in the church.
- They are formed in the Christian doctrine.

2. Participate in the Mystery of Salvation

- They encounter God through Jesus' death and resurrection.
- They know and understand the importance of the sacraments in Christian life.
- They participate in the life of Christ through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist).
- They participate in the sacraments of Reconciliation and of the Eucharist regularly.

3. Live a life of Christ

- They renew and deepen their personal experience of love of God and the living Christ.
- They know the base of human dignity.
- They are formed to have a right moral conscience.
- They have a good understanding of Christian morality with a focus on the social teaching of the church.
- They have clear understanding on issues that challenge Christian morality in our modern society and the current culture.

4. Are connected to God - Prayer

- They are convinced of the necessity of prayer and meditation.
- They pray regularly and daily.
- They are initiated to a prayerful reading of the Bible.
- As lay people they are initiated to find God in an ordinary daily life in a spirit of contemplation and reflection, the events of life, people and creation.

5. VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

5.1. WHAT IS VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY?

Vincentian Spirituality is firmly anchored in the Catholic Faith Tradition. But it is a spirituality which reaches far beyond that tradition and draws together people from other faiths and no faith to work together in love and service of the poor. It may be considered by some a simple spirituality, however to fully understand it you have to put it into practice, and that for many, is the hard part. However, for those who live and practice this spirituality, it is also something very fulfilling.

The following reflections are an effort to try and explore what Vincentian Spirituality means and how it can inspire and transform lives, both the lives of the practitioners and the lives of those they encounter in their work.

When trying to explain or understand Vincentian Spirituality, it's good to know who is asking the question.

A person of Faith: who is baptized and trying to live out their calling to follow Jesus in his/her life's journey. They are looking for sign posts to guide them in the right direction. Let's imagine that they have come to a sign post called Vincentian Spirituality and are wondering where such a road might lead them and what is required of them in order to be able to walk this particular path.

A person from a different faith, involved with people called Vincentian where there seems to be a distinctive form of spirituality shaping their response to the people they work with. Working alongside them may lead to a yearning to understand a little more about what it is that motivates and inspires them.

A person of no faith who feels drawn to work alongside people whose lives are lived in the service of others and who draw their inspiration from the example of persons called St. Vincent de Paul or St. Louise DeMarillac. What is the source of their inspiration? How do these people live in community with their particular ethos?

A person who is already living out a Vincentian calling as a priest, a sister, brother, or a lay person in an organization inspired by the Vincentian vision and are preparing to welcome people to join them in their work. It is important for them to take time to reflect on the core inspiration for their mission so as to be able to reflect this to their new partners.

These reflections are intended to help missionaries gain an appreciation of Vincentian Spirituality and its power to direct their lives and their work in the service of the poor.

5.1.1. St. Vincent de Paul: a brief introduction to the person behind the spirituality

St. Vincent was a very bright and ambitious person. When he was ordained, his initial objective was to secure a well-paid position from which he could support his family and live a comfortable lifestyle. He could easily have achieved this as he had developed very close relationships with some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in France.

However, Vincent was also a deeply spiritual person, he was conscientious and had a strong sense of justice. He was unable to ignore the plight of so many people who were suffering and living in poverty. He was always reading the signs of the times and was often compelled to respond to what he observed.

Vincent was profoundly compassionate. Despite his own self-serving plans, he always remained open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So while he was moving one direction, towards security and comfort, the Holy Spirit was actively leading him a whole other direction, towards poverty and service of the poor. His experience of working in areas where people were starving for material and spiritual sustenance led to a deep personal conversion and he became a true champion of the poor.

He was a very persuasive person and had a real gift for engaging people in his work for the poor, especially wealthy people. He was not only interested in the money they might provide for his works; he wanted to engage their hearts in the work, to put them in direct relationship with the poor.

The time he invested in courting popularity with the rich and influential was eventually used to benefit the poor. He was a great organizer. He brought together a group of wealthy women and formed them into the **Ladies of Charity**. These ladies not only provided funds for the poor, but went out themselves into the communities, to witness first-hand the suffering of people, to encounter Jesus Christ present in each poor person and to be themselves an image of Christ, reaching out to the poor with compassionate love.

Vincent's practical approach to life and to the situation of the poor meant that he first of all focused on their physical needs before responding to their spiritual needs. In one of his famous quotes, he states, *"There is no point in preaching God to people who have empty stomachs."*

His relationship with the poor people living in rural parishes had revealed an almost complete pastoral neglect of poor by the clergy. It also highlighted a dreadful lack of any proper formation of the clergy of that time.

5.1.2. Development of Groups / Organizations

St Vincent himself had a very significant and life-altering experience while hearing the confession of a poor man who was dying. The man was deeply distressed about the condition of his soul. The subsequent joy and relief that the sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) brought to him, convinced Vincent that there was a need for a group of priests to reach out to poor rural people and bring them the comfort and hope that only the Word of God can offer. This led to the birth of the Congregation of the Mission, the order of Vincentian priests and brothers.

He also recognized that the church of his time had wandered far away from the person of Christ and he began a radical overhaul of the formation of clergy, which helped revolutionize the church.

His relationship with St. Louise de Marillac the founder of the **Daughters of Charity** led to a radical rethink of how religious sisters should engage with the poor. At that time all religious sisters were confined to the cloister (convent). Vincent and Louise insisted that the Daughters of Charity should be out on the streets and in the homes of the poor, especially the sick, tending to their needs. It took Vincent a great deal of time and lot of difficult negotiation with Rome to get such permission.

Frederick Ozanam, who co-founded **the Society of St. Vincent de Paul**, took St. Vincent as the Patron of the society. He wanted a Saint whose own life reflected the sort of ideals he wanted the members of the SSVP to imitate.

There are numerous other orders and organizations who have taken their inspiration and charism (commitment to serving the poor) from Vincent. Each member has its own unique mission and characteristics. In recent years the Vincentian Family (FAMVIN) has managed to identify up to 268 institutes (including some Anglican orders) who fit the criteria of being Vincentian.

Common characteristics include:

- St. Vincent de Paul as founder or source of inspiration.
- Thrust towards serving the poor.
- Spirituality based on St. Vincent's emphasis on concrete, practical charity, lived out in simplicity and humility.

Members of the Vincentian Family have come together and agreed that they have a *"shared vision for a shared mission."* MISEVI members are part of this extraordinary family network who respond to those who are poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul.

From a Scriptural point of view, Vincentian Spirituality is rooted in the following passage from St. Luke 4: 18-19: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Vincent understood that the mission he was inviting people to share in was difficult and challenging, but as the Gospel passage reminds us, we are not being sent out alone. *"The Spirit of the Lord is with you."*

This is something Vincent never forgot and is something anyone engaged in a difficult or challenging Vincentian work should remember and draw strength from: the Holy Spirit is with us to encourage, inspire, direct and protect us. (If you are a volunteer of no faith, it's vital that you appreciate that this is the overall motivation and inspiration of those you will be working with.)

Another passage worth reflecting on is from St. James 2: 14-26: *"What does it profit, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save them? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works..... You see then that a person is justified by works, and not by faith alone."*

5.1.3. Some defining characteristics of Vincentian Spirituality.

Vincentian Spirituality involves both the hand and the heart or as St. Vincent put it, *"It is both Affective and Effective."*

A heart that:

- has opened itself to Christ.
- is capable of feeling the sufferings of the poor.
- has a desire to respond to their needs.

Hands that:

- reach out to poor in friendship and service.

St. Vincent's words to the Daughters of Charity help us appreciate this a little more: *"The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender; it is effective, because you serve the poor concretely."*

It is also a spirituality that aims to balance **action and prayer**. St. Vincent himself prayed for up to three hours a day and it was this prayer that informed all of his decisions and his actions for the poor. Action led Vincent to prayer and prayer led him back to action. In Vincentian Spirituality there is a constant conversation between action and prayer. This balance is a vital part of his spirituality. He understood that we are vulnerable to becoming too focused on one thing or the other.

If you are called to respond in a practical way to the often desperate needs of the poor, it might be possible that you would fail to take time to pray or to offer the people you are working with some words of faith. So Vincent advises us to always share our faith with the poor, to infuse our actions with the word of God. In that way, our words won't be empty or meaningless, as our connection to the person means we are a true witness to this word.

If a person's focus is more on evangelizing through the Word of God, Vincent advises them not to think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms, but to be sure that you also reach out and take care of the sick, the orphaned and the most abandoned.

Even if we were to read every letter, every conference that Vincent wrote (of which there are thousands), and if we were to read all of the many articles and books written about this topic, we would not be able to fully appreciate Vincentian Spirituality. To achieve such an understanding, we need to have a direct contact or relationship with the poor, the marginalized, the rejected. This connection with the poor, with the Christ that Vincent loved and followed in his life is absolutely necessary.

There are **six virtues** which are at the heart of the Vincentian calling. Whether you are a priest, brother, sister or lay person, these virtues shape and inform the life, mission and work of a Vincentian.

*In our modern world these virtues can be understood as follows:

SIMPLICITY

- Speaking the truth: Yes means Yes and No means no.
- Practicing the truth: Doing what I say I do and stand for.
- Simplicity of life: Using only what I need.

HUMILITY

- An honest recognition of our total dependence on God and others.
- Living in gratitude for all gifts.
- Living as a servant to others, especially the poor.

MEEKNESS (GENTLENESS)

- Be approachable – welcoming.
- To endure offenses with forgiveness and courage.
- Manage one's anger and express it appropriately.

MORTIFICATION (DISCIPLINE)

- Set goals and work toward them.
- Don't waste time: TV, useless chatting, internet
- Fully participate in activities that we don't find interesting.

ZEAL

"If love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame; if love is the sun, zeal is its ray."

- In for the long haul – persevering and faithful to the mission.
- Excitement for the work of serving the poor.
- Creativity: looking for new ways to accomplish the mission.

CHARITY

Continuing the involvement of the incarnate God in the history of humanity.

- Putting love of our neighbor into action in the service of the poor.
- Ensuring the marginalized fulfil their full potential as children of God.
- Serving those who live in poverty without favor or discrimination.

(*Thanks to Robert Maloney, CM and Paul Golden, CM for this reflection on the virtues. See References.)

Some quotes from St. Vincent's letters and conferences help us appreciate his spirituality.

"Serve God, with the sweat of your brow and the strength of your arm."

"If you are at prayer and a poor person calls to the door, leave God to go to God."

"We must ask forgiveness from the poor for the bread we give them."

St. Louise de Marillac has advice for how we should enter into a relationship with the poor:

"You should never take the attitude of merely getting the task done, you must show affection, serving from the heart, inquiring of people what it is they need, speaking to them gently and compassionately, getting the help they need without being too annoying or too eager."

The pastoral letters from **Pope Francis** seem to be very Vincentian in their tone. They indicate that the charism of St. Vincent is still very relevant for today and is something the Pope says should be at the heart of the Church's mission. Pope Francis says the church should not become isolated, but should always be going out, especially to the poor.

St. Vincent's vision of charity and justice extends to this day and includes MISEVI. Despite all of the progress and all of the wealth in the world, St. Vincent's efforts for equality and liberation of the poor is as important now as it was in his day.

Vincentian Spirituality is all about the discovery of God in self and in others, especially the poor. It is a journey of mutual transformation. Vincentian Spirituality is not about a relationship of equals; the relationship is very much balanced in favor of the poor, who Vincent describes as our Lords and Masters. Fr. Bob Maloney, CM describes this as Vincent turning the world upside down. If we are struggling to find God in our lives, then Vincent offers a sign post and it points directly to the poor. As he told the Daughters of Charity during a talk:

"Ten times a day you will go to serve the poor and ten times a day you will find God."

Finally, an important aspect of Vincentian Spirituality is a deep sense of trust in God's providence, in the wisdom and love of a God who cares for and directs all things. Where there was an urgent need to respond to a situation, Vincent was not found wanting. But, mostly, he counselled people to be reflective, considerate and patient with their projects and plans. To trust in God's providential ways.

5.2. A SIMPLE VINCENTIAN METHOD OF PRAYER

Vincent had a very simple approach to prayer. St. Vincent wanted people to give the first moments of their Day to God so that they could use the day well.

Once you enter prayer you have the opportunity to sit and connect with yourself through your mind, heart and soul and of course to connect each of these with God.

Mind: allow prayer to be a place where you can be self-aware. Let your feelings, attitudes, emotions or ideas bubble to the surface and ask God to help you deal with these.

Heart: prayer is a time to be with God in a calm and peaceful way. Allow the Holy Spirit to enthuse and inspire your heart about your work and your actions in the service of the poor.

Soul: prayer is that place where we can feed our own soul so that we can leave prayer with a desire to feed the souls of others.

He had a lovely expression:

Prayer to a heavenly dew that strengthens our hearts to do good in the service of others.

5.2.1. Promise / Resolution:

Vincent's practical approach to life transferred to his prayer. So before leaving prayer he encouraged people to make a small resolution or promise about what they wanted to do during the day ahead.

Vincent believed that having nice thoughts, wonderful ideas and good intentions are of no benefit unless they are put into action. He understood prayer to be the place where you are prompted by God's grace to commit yourself to a task and the place where you receive the resolve and the motivation to respond. He often said that you can judge the quality of a person's prayer by the good works it inspires in them. So when you leave prayer, make a resolution, a little promise that you will put whatever idea or inspiration you had into action.

5.2.2. Prayer Can Be Difficult

Sometimes people are blessed to enter prayer, to sit and place themselves before God and the experience can be like sitting in a boat when suddenly the wind of the Holy Spirit catches the sails and you are carried along in prayer by a heavenly wind. You are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

However, sometimes prayer can be very difficult. He once described prayer as feeling like he were rowing a boat into the wind, it was a real struggle. Sometimes we can feel a little troubled in prayer. Vincent believed that we should never use prayer to avoid ourselves, but to see it as an opportunity to iron out some of our more obvious flaws. He reminds us that when Jesus himself was confronted with struggles, when he was in deep distress or feeling abandoned, he did not stop praying, but prayed even more.

*If prayer is a struggle: sit and use the phrase Jesus taught his disciples:
'Lord teach us to pray.'*

We might find ourselves sitting in prayer wondering what we are doing there. When suddenly a word will come into our mind. Such a word can encourage us, challenge us, inspire us, intrigue us, but somehow it seems as if it has been dropped into our mind by God. Vincent said that to receive one

single word from God in prayer is better than a thousand reasons and all the speculations of our minds. What we receive from God we must give to our neighbor after the example of Jesus Christ.

We have probably all experienced times in prayer when our minds wander and we get completely distracted. It's important to try and control your imagination. When you find yourself being carried away in a day dream, focus on your breath, remind yourself why you are in prayer and begin again to place your day before God.

5.2.3. Preparation

Vincent recommends that before we enter prayer, we should make some small preparation. So he asks you to think to yourself:

- What am I about to do?
- Before whom am I about to appear?
- What do I wish to say to God?
- What Grace am I going to ask for?

At the end of prayer he wants you to ask yourself:

- What resolution am I making?

5.2.4. End of the Day

Finally, at the end of the day, Vincent recommends that people take a moment to reflect on their day, to examine how they were in relationship to the people around them. To express thanks for some blessing they may have received. Did you manage to put your resolution into practice? He called this an examination of consciousness. Reflecting on your day, the people you met, the situations you found yourself in, the blessings you received are all the things that will lead you into prayer in the morning.

As a lay missionary, Vincent's little method of prayer can be very helpful and can encourage you, not only each day of your mission, but each day of your life.

PRAYER FOR THE MEMBERS OF MISEVI

God, Father of goodness, you called each one of us to be
“salt and light for the world”.

Help us to be faithful to our vocation.

Help us bring your Son Jesus Christ to the places we have been sent,
and to be the witnesses of your Kingdom by living the Beatitudes.

We want to serve you in the person of poor people
“with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow”
with an “affective and effective” love.

We, lay missionaries, want to welcome the gift of community
and to renew ourselves in the light of your Gospel.

Holy Spirit be upon us, so that we live as a Church,
and serve in communion with others
in a spirit of charity, humility, gentleness and zeal.

We rely in your providential care for
the joys, the suffering and the hope of poor people.

May Mary, Queen of the Apostles,
accompany and inspire each Member of MISEVI
all over the world.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

(Revised by Sr. Neghesti Michael, DC, June 2020)

6. HUMAN GROWTH

"Gentleness, cordiality and forbearance must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity just as humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ, who is perfect charity, is their spirit."

(St. Louise de Marillac to the Daughter of Charity in Richelieu, c. October 1652)

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true model and the great invisible picture with which we are to conform all our actions."

(St. Vincent de Paul, Complete Works, XI a, 129-130)

The MISEVI member has chosen with full freedom and after feeling the call of God, to live in communion with the Church with authenticity and commitment; to live as a Vincentian missionary with the preferential option to serve and be at the side of those who are the poorest.

Each MISEVI missionary is a lay person, with emotional maturity, who shows a solid and continuous formation in the experience and foundation of the faith and works every day to strengthen the five Vincentian virtues (simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal) through self-knowledge, interpersonal relationships and relationship with the environment.

Essential human qualifications include the following:

1. MISEVI members need to know themselves in order to discover and develop the characteristics listed below:
 - Capacity for initiative, reflection and perseverance in making and executing decisions
 - Adequate levels of responsibility and the ability to complete tasks
 - Patience and perseverance
 - Flexibility and adaptability to new realities
 - Creativity and dynamism
 - Good self-esteem and emotional management appropriate to situations
 - Discovery, acceptance and healing of past concerns, wounds, issues, etc.
2. MISEVI members, for social relations both within the missionary community and outside it, require showing:
 - Ability to work as a team, offering their gifts, accepting their limitations and trusting their brothers and sisters for the development of the Mission
 - Empathy and assertiveness in communication and relationship with others
 - Openness to dialogue and understanding as the basis of interpersonal communication
 - Acceptance of criticism as an opportunity to improve
 - Acceptance of the differences of wealth
 - Sense of belonging to a lay missionary community
3. For MISEVI members, the relationship with the culture begins with an attitude of deep respect and value to it and to the people who inhabit it as well as to the work done by those who have preceded us. It is important to look for ways to anticipate, learn and understand more about the culture of the community that welcomes us in order to cooperate and develop common tasks for the benefit of the culture and its inhabitants.

In this way, MISEVI as an organization that serves missionaries, in addition to ensuring that their basic material needs are met, addresses their human growth and the development of missionary attitudes, as follows:

- ✓ Offering opportunities for positive social relationships and community prayer.
- ✓ Ensuring an adequate balance of work, leisure and spiritual connection.
- ✓ Helping to clarify expectations about job responsibilities and clear boundaries of structure and support.
- ✓ Advising for the proper integration into the community that welcomes them in the missionary experience as well as when they return to their home community so as to minimize the impacts of reverse culture shock.

7. PRACTICAL PREPARATION

The Spiritual Guidelines lay the foundation for our identity as missionaries grounded in the Vincentian charism, following the Gospel call of Jesus. Listed here are a few of the areas of need as we prepare for the practicalities of being sent as a MISEVI missionary.

- **Cultural reality** of the community being served. Care needs to be taken to inform missionaries of the particular culture in which they are immersed and the importance of being a listening presence, learning from the people themselves. This includes the culture of those who are living in poverty.
- **Clear communication** on schedules and calendars among the participants, the MISEVI group, and the local community.
- **Establishing a covenant/contract** that defines the necessary aspects of being a missionary. What are the roles and responsibilities? Benefits?
- **Reflection on lifestyle.** MISEVI programs need to clarify for their members the expectations for those who become members. Information regarding values and lifestyle choices can be an important document.
- **Logistics:** where do I go; how do I get there, what do I need to bring, who will be there, what are the financial obligations and benefits, etc.
 - Transportation needs to and from a country
 - Transportation needs within a country
 - List of what the missionary needs
 - Support community: who are the Vincentian Family members in the area? What is our relationship with them? Counselors who are nearby? Advisors?
 - Availability of a handbook that outlines the details. Some of the items to include are:
 - Job description and supervisor's and/or advisor's names
 - Importance of talking about professional boundaries with those being served
 - Criminal Background checks (where needed)
 - Attention to their physical and mental health; health insurance needs
 - Financial responsibilities and needs
 - Community living preparations and processes; possibly include conflict resolution tools

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Other resources are available through MISEVI International upon request.



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