



17th President General International

Circular Letter from the President General

January 31, 2024

Dear colleagues and friends:

Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ!

Introduction:

My dear fellow members, aspirants, employees at our offices and social works, dear collaborators and volunteers:

As you know, on September 9, 2023, in the Chapel of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris, I had the honor of being invested as the 17th President General of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul by my predecessor, brother Renato Lima de Oliveira. For me it is a great responsibility and a special challenge to personify the unity of the Society in the world. Thank you very much for your trust.

From the General Council, I invite you, together, to continue strengthening the advances in training, youth, communications, governance, institutional relations and other strategic aspects developed during the previous mandate.

Leading the Confederation with a spirit of service, which by the will of the Lord is implanted in 155 countries, each with its own culture and particularities, requires an effort, not only from the President General but also from the entire structure and ultimately from all the members, in order to maintain our unity and to **be recognized as a community that is a sign of the love of Christ**. To this end, we need to feel this unity, that of being part of a single Conference of friends, which extends throughout the world.

Community identity:

The Conferences were born with a strong sense of community, of global community and have remained so for 190 years, far removed from the more individualistic and abstract modern concept of universality, reduced to economic or technical relations.

The principle of our Conferences is friendship and the double purpose for which they are founded is to be useful to our brothers and sisters and to ourselves. After the act of faith came the act of charity, but as Ozanam writes: "*charity must be a means, not the end of our association, which is rather to spread the spirit of Christianity, which is the spirit of Love*".



From this sentiment, the motto of my presidency is taken from a letter of Ozanam from Pisa in 1853, when he was already mortally wounded: "*Although they speak different languages, their hands always meet with such fraternal cordiality that they could well recognize us by the same sign with which they recognized the first Christians: Look how they love each other!*"

Sometimes we are busy with Conference matters and we tend to secularize ourselves, to measure ourselves by the kilos of food or clothes we give and not so much by the spiritual assistance we give to the suffering people. As our founder in Spain, the now Venerable Santiago de Masarnau, who knew Frederic Ozanam in Paris, used to say: "*If we measure ourselves only by this, the Conferences will disappear, not in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God*".

Presidential program:

In order for this Vincentian mission to give greater meaning to our life, and with the approval of the General Council, I have commissioned the Spiritual Advisors of the General Council, Father José Francisco Orozco CM and Father Andrés Motto CM, to **develop a program entitled: "Growing Together in Faith"**. Ongoing Vincentian Formation is of fundamental importance in the life of the Conferences.

In addition, I would like to highlight some of the strategic priorities of this presidential mandate - the full program, for more details, is on our corporate website - that are rooted in our Rule, which underpins our unity and friendship:

- **To institute once a year an International Vincentian Day** in an important city of each continent, to be an event of worldwide repercussion, in order to make our Society and its social actions better known. An annual international event, through art and culture as a universal language, to give greater visibility to all that we do and to assert ourselves as faithful transmitters of the Word of God. An initiative ratified by the General Council that must have the support and help of the National Councils.
- **Strengthen and increase our support to international twinning and solidarity projects**, this is a request that is always present at all meetings. In this line, from the General Council, we are studying how we can implement or join projects in line with the encyclical 'Laudato Si'. The initiative is to try to contribute to solving the dramatic consequences of environmental degradation in the lives of the world's poorest.
- **Encourage the presence of young people in local and international events and activities**, since our young people are the natural successors in the Conferences. Therefore, it is a requirement, to maintain and enhance the annual collection to finance their activities.
- **To revise the Annual Report of the Council General International to add, for information purposes, the Annual Reports of all the National Councils, in**



order to demonstrate the global impact that SSVP represents in the world, to increase its credibility and to ask for more support. I hope that all of you will enthusiastically support this initiative, approved by the General Council, and that you will bring your **Annual Reports for 2023 (Income and Expenses only, both of the National and Superior Councils, as well as of the social works in which the SSVP participate), to the Paris Office, before March 18, 2024**, in order to consolidate them for information purposes only. If your fiscal year does not coincide with the calendar year, you can extrapolate the data.

- **To study new creative forms of financing**, so that the Councils and Conferences can address the changing types of poverty we face in our countries, as well as to seek and raise resources to finance these initiatives. From the team that forms the International Commission for Aid to Development (CIAD), we will lead this initiative.
- **Finally, and as a priority to be emphasized for a better governance, transparency and unity of the SSVP, I have instituted a third deputy vice-presidency**, with the agreement of the General Council, to organize a team to review and, if necessary, make proposals for the modification of the international statutes.

As well, from February 8 to December 8, 2024, the International Year will be dedicated to the Venerable Jean-Léon Le Prévost, (1803-1874). Le Prévost asked at the February 4, 1834 meeting that the Conference of Charity be placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul and celebrate his feast day, and that each meeting begin and end with a prayer. Ozanam, in turn, requested that the Conference be placed under the protection of the Virgin Mary and celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. Since then, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has maintained two patronages, that of the Immaculate Conception and that of St. Vincent de Paul.

Community as the path to holiness:

The Conferences, from the beginning, demonstrated a committed social action rooted in the Gospel. Now more than ever and in view of the sanctification of Frederic Ozanam, we need a greater commitment to strengthen our social actions, not only to know the immediate fruits of our help to alleviate material and spiritual needs, but also to awaken the social conscience of many.

It will be by our example of unity, of mutual love, with a greater sense of community, that contagious joy, that Christian commitment, with which we will inspire and promote the healthy growth of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, will be manifested to others.

The General Council is open to listen to all ideas and proposals to carry out this program and improve it. It is in the community that we are perfected, where we pray together, grow in faith and mature as persons.



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This is why I **ask for your participation, contributing initiatives, sending articles, photos and news of all that you do, to International Communication**, to awaken the consciences with our example and to make us stand out as messengers of the Word of God.

Acknowledgements:

Finally, I would like to thank first of all our outgoing President General, Renato Lima for his generous dedication and devotion and all the members who made up the previous team, for all the positive things they have contributed. I would also like to thank the members who have joined the new team and have accepted a position of service, as well as all the members and volunteers in general, for their selfless work, always recognized in the eyes of God.

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Also to all the employees, benefactors and friends of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for their support for a more socially just society. Thanks to the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and all the branches of the Vincentian Family with whom we collaborate to strive to make the world a better place, in the spirit of the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul, our patron saint.

I would also like to make a special mention of gratitude to the spouses and relatives of the members from all over the world, who patiently put up with the absences and sometimes also suffer changes in family plans due to a service assignment.

In this year 2024 that is beginning, I implore the Miraculous Virgin to protect the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Family, us, our families and the people in need we serve.

Receive a fraternal embrace in St. Vincent de Paul and in Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Juan Manuel B. Gomez

XVII President General