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Message

Vincentians and Authority

Today Church in India is amidst of various challenges and criticisms. The leaders of the Church are challenged of their identity and their exercise of authority. The Christian faithful are ridiculed of their fidelity. The journalists use their every proficiency to enlarge the shortcomings of the clerics and laity through media. Anti-socials are taking maximum advantages of the weaknesses found in some of the members of the Church and celebrate it through various ways. Certainly the poor are going to be the loser. Hence, as Vincentians first of all what we notice in and around us? Secondly as Vincentian how does we address these deplorable situations? One of the root causes of these chaoses in the church and society is the misuse of authority. Criticisms, condemnations, etc., will not bring solutions. At this juncture, it is good to look back to St. Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam who too lived and worked amidst of similar situations.

In the Seventeenth century, during the time of Vincent de Paul, the Church of France was organized in a hierarchical manner, in the image and likeness of the civil society. It was a church that was intimately and totally bound up with the political powers. It was a church in which ecclesiastical figures, such as Cardinal Richielu and Mazarin, reflected this identification of the Church with power. It was a church that possessed many material goods and benefits that were meant to be utilized on behalf of the poor and because they were not used in that way, those possessions, in turn, disfigured the image of the Church. At this juncture, St. Vincent introduced a very significant aspect into the Church that was characterized by the hierarchy: the hierarchy is called to serve in a disinterested manner, they are to give themselves to others (CCD: I: 525-526; II: 335-336; IV: 181-182; V: 59; VI :77-78; XI: 312-313).

For St. Vincent authority is exclusively for service. He was a servant leader of his time. He was concerned about always the growth of those he served: his Confreres, the Daughters of Charity, the Ladies of Charity, the Council of Conscience and the poor. The words, “the poor are our lords and masters....they represent Jesus Christ” reveal the attitude of St. Vincent towards those whom he served. It is nothing other than ‘kenosis’ or self emptying attitude of Jesus in the work of redemption of the mankind. Because of this attitude he could make reformation in the Church and society. Thus Vincent gave a new perspective to the theology of authority and service in the Church. Hence during the burial ceremony of St. Vincent, the officiating Bishop said, “*Yes Messieurs, it is necessary to tell you it was Vincent de Paul who all but changed the face of the Church*”.

In the Nineteenth century we see another St. Vincent in the person of Bl. Frederic Ozanam. During his time also the situation of the Church was in no way better than Seventeenth Century. At one meeting there was a heated debate in which Ozanam and his friends were trying to prove from historical evidence alone the truth of the Catholic Church as the one founded by Christ, their adversaries declared that, though at one time the Church was a source of good, it no longer was. One voice issued the challenge, “What is your church doing now? What is she doing for the poor of Paris? Show us your works and we will believe you!” In response, one of Ozanam’s companions, Auguste de Laillandier, suggested some effort in favor of the poor. “Yes,” Ozanam agreed, “let us go to the poor!”. That is the beginning of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Federic Ozanam uses his power, resources and whatever he had for serving the poor. Hence he said, “...the poor we see with the eyes of flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer

has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the Apostle, *Tu est Dominus et Deus meus* (You are my Lord and my God!). You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise shall we not love Him in your person?”. This attitude of Frederic Ozanam could change the face of the Church. The first formal and official social teaching of the Church “*Rerum Novarum*” is the reflection of Federic Ozanam’s contributions to Church and society.

Reflecting on authority in the New Testament it is clear that the authority which Jesus bestowed on his disciples was, above all, the authority for mission, to preach and to serve the poor and the needy (Mt 10: 7). The Risen Christ empowered them to spread the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mt 28: 18-20). In the early Church, the preaching of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit was seen as the defining characteristic of apostolic authority (cf. 1 Cor 1:17, 2: 4-5). Thus, the exercise of authority within the Church has a radically missionary dimension. Authority is exercised within the Church for the sake of those outside it, that the Gospel may be proclaimed “in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess 1: 5). This authority enables the whole Church to embody the Gospel and become the missionary and prophetic servant of the Lord. Vatican II and post conciliar documents underlines this perspective of the Church. To conclude, the teachings of Jesus, church documents, St. Vincent de Paul and other Vincentian saints and blessed highlights the service aspect of authority. The history of the church reveals to us that when this aspect is ignored abuses will creep in. One of the main causes of present day crisis in

Indian church is this misuse of authority. At this juncture as Vincentian the best thing that we can do is to replicate what St. Vincent, Bl. Federic Ozanam and others did to change the face of the church.

Dr. Francis Puthenthayil CM
National Coordinator of Vincentian Family

International Conference of the Famvin Homeless Alliance

The International Conference of the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) will take place in **Rome (Italy)** over three days on **26-28 November 2018**, with approximately 100 participants from across the world. The FHA was set up in 2017 to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian Charism. The Conference brings together Vincentian experts in homelessness to educate and train other Vincentians working to help homeless people. We hope this will improve the current services we offer our homeless brothers and sisters. Two members of Vincentian Family India will be participating in the conference.

The Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) supports established and emerging Vincentian homelessness initiatives across the globe. We take a broad definition of homelessness – encompassing those living on the street, refugees and those displaced from their home, and slum dwellers in inadequate housing.

The Vincentian Family is a global Catholic movement rooted in the spirituality and example of St Vincent de Paul. With a membership of over two million people, there are Vincentian homelessness projects across six continents helping hundreds of thousands of people each year. The FHA acts as a bridge for those projects, fostering cross-border learning and supporting their development. The FHA is also helping to create new homelessness projects.

1. National Executive Body Meeting: July 28, 2018

The National Executive Body Meeting of Vincentian Family in India was held at Provincial House of SCN in Chandapura, Bangalore on 28-07-2018. The members participated in the meeting were Rev. Fr. Francis

Puthenthayil C M, Rev. Fr. Alex Chalangady V C, Rev. Fr. Vijoy Kumar Nayak C M., Sr. Amrita Manjaly SCN, Sr. Rose Chirayil D C, Sr. Ancita SCV, Br. Tomy Varghese SSVP and Br. Francis Victor SSVP. The meeting started with a prayer led by Sr. Amrita Manjaly SCN. Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil C M, the national co-ordinator welcomed the members.

Detailed discussions followed on the different items included in the agenda. On **Annual Gathering 2019**, the theme would be Sustainable Development Goals and Vincentian. The main talk could be on the theme. Fr. Alex V C will offer the second talk. On Visits of Superiors General, Fr. Thomas Marvic CM has to be invited to attend the AGM 2019. Sr. Sangeeta SCN has agreed to address the gathering on the second day.

On **Kandhamal Project**, a team has been formed, together with the existing team for designing the project and Bro. Joseph Pandian, Sr. Manisha, Sr. Sheela and Fr. Francis Puthenthayil are included. Teams are constituted for implementing the project and for fund raising. Fund raising, it was decided, to have separate account operated in Orissa and shall be a joint account.

The South Indian Province of D C has offered half an acre of land (50 cents) at Halehalli near to St. Vincent's Seminary, on renewable lease for a period of 33 (thirty -three) years. We have drafted an agreement and the contract signed. And it has been approved by the Council General. On **Master Plan for Vincentian Family Resource center cum Secretariat**, a five-member committee is formed for the consultation and preparation of the master plan. The committee had a meeting at St. Vincent's Seminary on the very next day with a leading architect and contractor who is also a Vincentian.

The meeting also discussed in detail other matters like the activities to be taken up after the secretariat is being established, the staffing and their remuneration, volunteers for the smooth functioning of the secretariat and ultimately the fund that is required for the running of the secretariat.

On **Vincentian Literature**, we discussed on improving the content of the News bulletins, publishing Books on current needs and responses and having a panel or pool of Resource Persons.

The meeting was concluded with a thanksgiving prayer by 3 p m.

2. Formation Commission



Evaluating the opinion of the participants of the five-day seminar conducted in the last week of April 2018 and understanding the church's concern to on youth, their faith and vocational discernment, the Formation Commission organized another three-day seminar. It was held from August 30 to September 2, 2018 at St. Vincent's Seminary, Hallehalli in Bangalore. There were 35 participants. The seminar began with a prayer dance by the sisters of the Daughters of Charity. Rev. Fr Shajan Pudussery CM, the Chair Person of the Formation Commission welcomed the resource persons and the participants. Sr. Rose Chirayil DC, the Visitatrice of South Indian Province inaugurated the seminar. Rev. Dr. Joy Pulikan SDB, Mr. Livin (Jesus Youth) and were the resource persons. On the final day of the seminar, Rev. Dr. Francis Puthenthayil CM, the National Coordinator together with Rev. Fr. Shajan Pudussery and Sr. Sabina DC facilitated to have an evaluation of the seminar. Many were extremely happy. Hence the participants decided to take up some action plan. Sr. Sibina DC, the secretary of the Formation Commission proposed vote of thanks. The

seminar was concluded with Holy Mass presided over by Rev. Dr. Francis Puthenthayil. All appreciated the hospitality of Sr. Mary Pudussery DC, the Sister Servant, Sr. Joana DC, the Asst. Provincial and all the DC sisters of the Hallehalli community.

3. Kandhamal Project

In the last General Body Meeting, it was decided to take up a common project in Kandhamal, the riot affected district in Odisha. Accordingly, a committee was set which consisted of Rev. Fr. Vjoy Kumar Nayak CM (Visitor of North India), Sr. Martha Pradhan (Visitatrice of North India), Sr. Grace Moolan DC (Regional Coordinator of Eastern Region), Fr. Pratap Chandra Misal (Secretary of Eastern Region) and Pascal Guru SSVP (CC President of Berhampur). They identified a village located in the parish territory of Padangui. The name of the village is Toganaju. The committee made a visit to the village and had interaction with the people. The report was submitted to the executive body meeting held on July 28, 2018 at Provincial house of SCN, Chandapura in Bangalore.

The National Executive Body made the following observations to the Kandhamal Project Committee:

1. It should reflect more clearly the values of the Systemic Change
2. There were many proposals for action. Taking up needs and activities on priority basis with the villagers with our help would be able to respond to the root causes of poverty in their village.

The Executive Body also felt the need of more members who are well versed in systemic change concept in the Kandhamal Project committee. Thereby the project could be prepared taking into consideration the Systemic Change

concept. The following are included in the said committee: Bro. Joseph Pandian SSVP (chair person of the Commission for Systemic Change), Sr. Manisha SCN (member of Commission for Systemic Change), Rev. Fr. George Mampilly CM (parish priest of Padangui) and Sr. Goretti DC.

The meeting of the committee was held on September 29-30 at Provincial House, Marillac in Berhampur. The purpose of the meeting was to make a clearer study of the systemic change project application already presented to the Executive Body of VFI.

The following were present at this meeting:

1. Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil CM, the National Co-ordinator
2. Rev. Fr. Vijaykumar Nayak CM, the Provincial Superior of the CM Fathers (NIP)
3. Bro. Joseph Pandian, SSVP, Asst. General and Coordinator of the Systemic Change Committee,
4. Sr. Martha Pradhan, Visitatrice of the Daughters of Charity, North India Province
5. Bro. Pascal Gurudia, SSVP, CC President, Berhampur Diocese
6. Sr. Grace Moolan DC, Regional Co-ordinator for Eastern Region
7. Fr. George Mampilly CM (parish priest of Padangui)
8. Sr. Goretti DC

After prayer by Rev. Fr. Vijay Kumar Nayak and words of welcome by Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil, we entered into the study of the project application already presented by the Project Committee to the Executive Body of VFI. During the meeting and sharing, the committee realised by noon that a visit to the village would be necessary to have direct experience of the situation of the people of the Toganaju village. Hence it

was decided to undertake a journey to Padangui, the parish of Gardingia village. It would facilitate meeting with the Parish priest, the beneficiaries and the other branches of Vincentian Family. In the evening of the same day, the committee reached the spot and had a meeting with the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. George Mampilly. On the next day as planned the committee visited the village. It was a wonderful experience for them and for the committee. In the afternoon, the committee had another meeting with the village leaders in the presbytery of Padangui. During this meeting, Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil proposed that following the methods of the systemic change projects we need to have three groups for its smooth functioning such as: motivating group, Village animators' group and Evaluation group. The village leaders shared on their needs, and on what and how some of the activities could be carried out. With a prayer led by Sr. Martha, the meeting was concluded. The committee will present a detailed report with a project proposal in the near future. But here we give brief information of the site of the project as well as their difficulties:



Toganaju village is one of the 11(eleven) Catholic villages of the Padangi Parish in Kondhmal district under Cuttack- Bhubaneswar Arch Diocese. It is nearly 140 kms. from Berhampur, the CM Provincial House and nearly 280 kms from Bhubaneswar Diocese, Bishop House. During the riot in 2008 all the houses were attacked. And the worst part of the story is they are ostracized by the neighbouring villagers and these villagers remain stumbling block to all government developmental works in the village. There are 22 houses and the people belonged to SC or ST communities. Their main source of income is traditional agricultural practices like shift cultivation and seasonal cultivation. They live hand to mouth but in faith they are strong.

What needs to change (the barriers)

- Degrading illiteracy, Ignorance and Fear complex:
- Low production due to traditional agricultural practices.
- Unemployment
- Absence of any income generating schemes or socially useful product
- Superstition, customs and beliefs harmful to growth and development.

- Presence of children without qualitative primary education and school drop outs especially girls.
- Lack of Skill and leadership qualities among the community
- Inadequate health care facilities
- Unhygienic village surroundings.
- Neglect of personal hygiene and reproductive health problems.
- Gender bias and consequent gender oppression by the male dominated patriarchy.

The aim of our project is to make Toganaju village of Gardingia Gram Panchayat a model village with all basic facilities. This project shall be piloting to intervene in the entire parish in the days to come. Hence let us join our hands together to change the situation of these people

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the major superiors and heads of the various branches of the Vincentian Family in India will be held on 23rd and 24th of February 2019 at SCN Provincial House, Chandapura in Bangalore. Sr. Amrita SCN, the Provincial Superior will be the hosting superior. Please be in touch with Bro. Tomy Varghese SSVF, the National Secretary of VFI for details.