

Vinfam India

News Bulletin of the Vincentian Family in India



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Message

Christmas and the Periphery

A few weeks ago, the North Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission had their Provincial Assembly. The theme chosen was “to go to the peripheries”. The members of the province were asked to make a retrospection, introspection and prospection of their Vincentian life and mission based on the inspiring and challenging invitation to “go to the peripheries”. The word “peripheries” is a curious word today to all of us. We do not find this word in the Scriptures or in the Catechism or even in the Compendium of the Church’s social doctrine. It turns up only in a few random places in recent ecclesiastical documents.

In fact, for Pope Francis this is a recurrent word as he is inspired by the ‘*Poverello* of Assisi’. Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio in a pre-conclave speech to his fellow cardinals that might well have sealed his election, he provided an insight into his agenda for the Church. There is a tension between the centre and the periphery.... We must get out of ourselves and go toward the periphery: the mystery of

sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery... We must avoid the spiritual disease of the Church that can become self-absorbed: when this happens, the Church itself becomes sick...”Between a Church that goes into the street and gets into an accident and a Church that is sick with self-referentiality, I have no doubts in preferring the first.”(Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to the pre-conclave General Congregation of the Cardinals, March 9, 2013).

The word is well clarified when Pope Francis said: “Church that is poor and for the poor.” (Address to members of the communications media. March 16, 2013) Further, the intended periphery now comes into focus: he is calling the Church to discard the trappings of wealth and identify with those who are materially poor. Pope Francis’ embrace of poverty at the periphery was particularly evident in some of the heart touching events such as washing the feet of prisoners on a Maundy Thursday, celebrating his birthday in 2017 with a few

homeless people etc. Pope Francis' view on periphery has a broader and deeper notion of exclusion, alienation and expulsion of the unprivileged and the underprivileged, rather than a geo-political or geo-economic concept. In other words, the metaphor 'periphery' represents an updated revised version of the "preferential option for the poor"; it implies not only "to hear the cry of the poor", but, also will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. Pope Francis is helping all of us in the Church to "see" the world with new eyes and to judge the signs of the times with new insight.

As we are at the threshold of celebrating the great feast of Christmas, I would like to examine what it means the periphery and particularly its relevance during this Christmas for Vincentian communities as they determine their apostolate among the poor. The peripheries are the parts of our cities and the rural areas that we seldom visit. The peripheries are the bitter fruits of neglect, exploitation and injustice. They are all the places our society is ashamed of and would rather forget about. They are more than a physical location or a social category. They are places where poverty is not only material, but also spiritual. There are also "existential peripheries" — places where people are wounded and feel their life has no meaning and makes no difference. In the existential peripheries, men and women are caught in the webs of sin and addiction, in many kinds of slavery and self-deception. These peripheries are growing in our country. And these peripheries are the new mission territory. Perhaps we may think that we have been present in the peripheries — through our schools and medical institutions, social works and our other ministries. Sometimes we are the only ones serving in these communities. But we can do better, we are called to do more. That is our challenge.

If we listen to Gospels of these days especially Lk 2: 1-14, we find that it is exactly what God does, working through the angels at the birth of Jesus. Even though in the book of Genesis, the children of Jacob were mentioned as shepherds and considered it as their only profession (Gen 47: 3), at time of the birth of Christ, those shepherds were the people on the margin; they were on the periphery. Shepherds were almost like outcasts in the society. They

lived a rough and tough life, spending their time in the countryside, sleeping outdoors, but protecting their sheep. They were illiterate and had insignificant place in the society. But those were the ones who received the first message that the Son of God had entered into human history.

God sent the message about Jesus first of all to people on the margins, to the poor, the rejected. That lesson is reinforced not only because the Word was sent out to those shepherds, those on the periphery, but also because Jesus became part of them. In the words of St. Paul, Jesus— "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" (Phil 2: 6-7). It means that the Son of God entered into human history as helpless, homeless, poor — poorest of the poor. He was born with nothing, totally poor - "You will find Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger" (Lk 2: 12). Jesus indeed, wanted to identify with those who are the poorest in our society so he could lift them up, proclaim good news to them (Lk 4: 18). Jesus too became a refugee. When Herod was killing all the infants in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph fled with the child Jesus to Egypt (Mt 2: 14). Again, they were homeless; they were dependent upon others. They went to a place for safety but became refugees. Today we have the terrible plight of migrants and refugees in our country.

Pope Francis has given us such a great example by what he says and by what he does, how he goes to the periphery to find Jesus. Jesus present in the poor, the desperately needy, those suffering from persecution, those victims of natural disasters, those sufferers of rampant corruption of our country etc. If we are to celebrate Christmas truly and really, we must find the way to go to the peripheries to find Jesus in the poor, the homeless, the migrants, the forsaken, etc. Then we can hear with great joy the promise that the angels sang in their song. God's peace will come upon the earth and bring that peace to all people of goodwill.

Fr. Francis Puthenthayil CM
National Coordinator, VFI

International Conference on 'Home for the Homeless'

Rome: November 26-28, 2018.

The International Conference of the **Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA)** was conducted in Rome from 26th to 28th November 2018. FHA was set up in 2017 by the Vincentian Family to mark the 400th anniversary of Vincentian Charism. It is an initiative and movement to encompass Vincentians working across the world in support of our poorest brothers and sisters. 110 members of various branches from 35 countries participated in the Conference. From India, three members participated in the conference. Br. Tomy Varghese SSVP, the National Secretary of Vincentian Family India, Br. Stanley Michael SSVP, the National Project Officer of SSVP and Fr. Varghese Perinchery VC.

The FHA is focusing on three manifestations of homelessness. Refugees and displaced people, Slum dwellers and street homeless people. The conference provided an occasion to listen and understand more about these issues and to know how we can improve our service to the poor. The organizers reiterated that the conference is only worthwhile, if it turns into action. And the question is, how we are going to change and improve to better serve the poor.



Famvin Homeless Alliance

Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness

Vision: Everyone has a place to call home and a stake in their community

The Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) was launched in Rome on 14 October 2017 in front of 10,000 Vincentians from around the world. On 26-28 November 2018, the inaugural FHA International Conference was held in the same city resonated strongly in the hearts and minds

of the participants gathered from 35 countries and 18 branches.

The conference was a unique opportunity for Vincentians serving homeless people to understand the scope of the challenge of homelessness, but also to realize that the Vincentian Family is well positioned to respond to a challenge of this magnitude through effective collaboration and systemic change. Participants grasped better how the work with homeless people is embedded in their Vincentian spirituality, the Family's tradition and how integrated approaches and innovation, both locally and globally, are essential to tackling the problem.

Although the Alliance is a global movement that can provide support, action must be local to be effective. FHA intends to work on many activities throughout 2019: mapping the Vincentian work, networking, Ambassadors Program, 13 Houses Campaign, formation and others. May our presence and friendship, our actions and efforts, hold hope alive for them and bring about a world where each person has a place to call home and a stake in its community.

“TO BE OUTSIDE”

A “SPIRITUAL” EXPERIENCE!

Summary of Mgr. Bruno-Marie DUFFÉ speech at the FHA International Conference

To be outside is to be in the high winds of uncertainty, in the cold facing its own limits, at the mercy of the rain, the wind and the hunger... it is the anxiety of not knowing if it is possible to find, in this world, a little confidence.

To be outside is to be on the street, a place of anonymity and ignorance.

Nevertheless, this “outside” space can be also, and “paradoxically”, a space for an “unexpected and luminous encounter”, a space where a spiritual experience can be lived: A “spiritual conversion to the welcoming each other”.

This “spirituality of encounter with our homeless brothers and sisters” is built, according to Mgr. DUFFÉ, on three major pillars: the *look*, the *presence*, and the *Word*.

This experience of the Way begins with the look, a “calm and shared look”. The look is a door between the physical, the spiritual, and the community life in which everyone is called by his name. To be looked at is to be recognized, to be named, to be considered; it is a re-knowledge, it is “to be for someone in the crowd of humans”. It is an experience of an exodus that will allow us to live an encounter in the truth.

In the encounter, we discover ourselves “poor and rich at the same time”, we discover that “the one who is outside has a beautiful face and that the only richness is that of the exchange”.

This exchange, this dia-logos, this exodus of ourselves, begins with the Word because the spiritual life - in the footsteps of Christ, the Servant and the Messenger - expresses itself with the words of our human condition, with the eyes that meet and with the lives that are revealed in their needs of humanity.

But for most homeless people, the street is often silent. These people lose the Word, which means the ability to participate in a dialogue.

To give them “the word” is to give them the “dignity” that makes each of us a subject capable of receiving and giving.

Indeed, it is about a presence: it is about being there, present for the other, sometimes in a shared silence where one is close to others to listen to it. To speak is to be there, it is a presence.

This exchange, in the street, with the homeless people, commits us “further than where we had planned to go... The charitable approach “to the other” becomes the fraternal approach “with you”.

Referring to the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), on the call to holiness in today’s world, Bishop DUFFÉ evokes three ingredients of any “encounter in truth”:

Humility or gentleness: a style “proposed by Jesus” and that “goes through humility”. In the Bible, gentle and poor are referred to by the same phrase. So the most humble are for us masters. The spirituality of

the presence to the poorest is a spirituality of proximity in humility and gentleness.

Fervor(or daring), that is “to live what we believe deeply, in a great availability to the inspiration of the Spirit and in a great listening of the other”.

Attention to details, and that means paying attention to the simple things of everyday life. It is Jesus who exhorts all of us to pay attention to the details, the little things that concern others and their happiness. It is “the contemplation of the face of Christ in the presence of the homeless brother or sister” that “leads us to receive Christ in this other that we can never reduce to what he is or what he became”

And this is how we evangelize and let ourselves be evangelized by the other: he and she who pose on us a look that raises us; he and she who, in the moment of gratitude, pronounce for us, the Word that calls us out (of our certainties and our comfort), to pass from fear to love, from death to life.



How can the Vincentian Family help some of the 1 billion people experiencing homelessness right now around the world? Collaboration and action. These two themes permeated the 3-day FHA conference in Rome.



At the very start of the gathering, Fr Robert Maloney reminded members that the Vincentian Family’s initiative on homelessness is rooted in the collaborative efforts of the founding branches 400 year ago.



This heritage is the inspiration for the FHA’s 13 Houses Campaign, officially launched in Rome. The Campaign uses Vincent’s own 13 Houses for orphans as a basis for new projects for homeless people today.

Over the three days, the participants heard from practitioners from all six continents. They came from across the Vincentian Family as well as other Catholic agencies. Dozens of speakers inspired those gathered, leading workshops and discussions



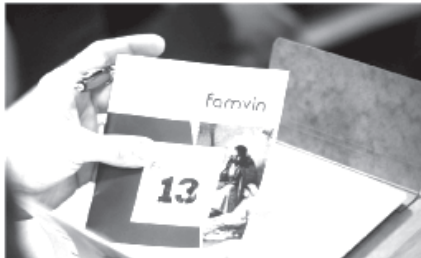
Many offered support and expertise to help realise the dream projects. The Collaboration Commission led a lively and productive session during which individual relationships and informal coalitions were formed



As a Family, the participants celebrated the Mass of the Miraculous Medal on the second evening. The sense of communion was powerful. And as Vincent taught us, if we replicate this communion in our charity by working together, our actions for the poor are magnified, become systemic. The conference provided a space for this – a start of greater ministries to come. This collaboration underpins and amplifies our action. By the end of the conference, 20 countries were committed to joining the 13 Houses campaign, two days after its launch. All participants wrote individual pledge cards on how they will improve their service over the next year.

Conferences are a place for talking and thinking and discussing. The action that comes afterwards is of course harder. The participants left Rome with a commitment to act, to improve, to help. The true Vincentian spirit.

THE 13 HOUSES CAMPAIGN



The 13 Houses Campaign of the Famvin Homeless Alliance was officially launched on 26th November 2018 at the FHA Conference in Rome. Since then, we have heard many inspiring ideas about potential projects around the world that will improve and transform the lives of street homeless people, slum dwellers, refugees and internally displaced persons in their communities. The Just before the FHA conference, we were happy to be in a position to support a remarkable 13 Houses project in Guatemala through the Solidarity Fund. This project is an amazing example of collaboration both within and beyond the Vincentian Family and will improve the quality of life of the

victims of the Fuego Volcano eruption by constructing a total of 35 houses! The beneficiaries are families that lost everything during the eruption; their homes were destroyed or are no longer habitable.

Beyond the provision of homes to the vulnerable families, the project will also offer access to vocational training which will not only benefit the families but also the local economy.

ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING

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, Old Chandapura in Bangalore.

Sr. Amrita SCN,

The Provincial Superior (Phone:

9481306850) will be the hosting superior.

Please be in touch with Bro. Tomy Varghese

SSVP, (Phone: 6447475163)

the National Secretary of VFI for details.