



Vincentian Educational Ministry in Asia: Challenges Beyond 400 Years

Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, C.M.

Adamson University, Manila
danielfranklinpilario@yahoo.com

Abstract

Unlike other religious congregations known for their educational institutions, the Vincentians have distinguished themselves primarily through the formation of diocesan clergy, a mission central to St. Vincent de Paul's vision. Recognizing that sustainable evangelization requires well-trained and compassionate pastors, St. Vincent pioneered clergy education long before seminaries became institutionalized. Over the past four centuries, Vincentians in Asia, the Americas, and Europe have continued this mission, sometimes extending education to laypeople, as seen in Vincentian seminaries in the Philippines, China, India, and Indonesia. Beyond priestly formation, the Vincentian Family, including the Daughters of Charity, Frederic Ozanam, and Elizabeth Ann Seton, has historically engaged in lay education. This study surveys Vincentian educational efforts in Asia, identifying challenges and assessing the relevance of education as a ministry of social transformation in today's world. In an era where education is not neutral but a site of both hope and conflict, the Vincentian commitment remains crucial.

À la différence d'autres congrégations religieuses connues pour leurs établissements d'enseignement, les Vincentiens se sont distingués principalement par la formation du clergé diocésain, une mission au cœur de la vision de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. Reconnaissant qu'une évangélisation durable nécessite des pasteurs bien formés et compatissants, Saint-Vincent a été le pionnier de la formation du clergé bien avant l'institutionnalisation des séminaires. Au cours des quatre derniers siècles, les Vincentiens d'Asie, d'Amérique et d'Europe ont poursuivi cette mission, étendant parfois la formation aux laïcs, comme en témoignent les séminaires vincentiens aux Philippines, en Chine, en Inde et en Indonésie. Au-delà de la formation sacerdotale, la famille vincentienne, y compris les Filles de la Charité, Frédéric Ozanam et Elizabeth Ann Seton, s'est historiquement engagée dans l'éducation des laïcs. Cette étude passe en revue les efforts éducatifs vincentiens en Asie, en identifiant les défis et en évaluant la pertinence de l'éducation en tant que ministère de transformation sociale dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. A une époque où l'éducation n'est pas neutre mais un lieu d'espoir et de conflit, l'engagement vincentien reste crucial.

A diferencia de otras congregaciones religiosas conocidas por sus instituciones educativas, los vicentinos se han distinguido principalmente por la formación del clero diocesano, una misión fundamental en la visión de San Vicente de Paúl. Reconociendo que la evangelización sostenible requiere pastores bien formados y compasivos, San Vicente fue pionero en la educación del clero mucho antes de que los seminarios se institucionalizaran. A lo largo de los últimos cuatro siglos, los vicentinos de Asia, América y Europa han continuado esta misión, a veces extendiendo la educación a los laicos, como se ve en los seminarios vicentinos de Filipinas, China, India e Indonesia. Más allá de la formación sacerdotal, la Familia Vicenciana, que incluye a las Hijas de la Caridad, Federico Ozanam y Elizabeth Ann Seton, se ha dedicado históricamente a la educación de los laicos. Este estudio examina los esfuerzos educativos vicencianos en Asia, identificando los desafíos y evaluando la relevancia de la educación como ministerio de transformación social.



en el mundo actual. En una era en la que la educación no es neutral, sino un lugar de esperanza y conflicto, el compromiso vicenciano sigue siendo crucial.

Keywords: Education, Vincentian, Asia, Charism

Unlike the Dominicans, the Jesuits and many other religious congregations, the Vincentians are not quite known in the educational field.¹ But their work in the formation of the diocesan clergy which forms part in the vision of the Founder is also a great work of education.² At a time when the parish priest was the central figure of the local church, the work of their formation contributed to the empowerment of the laity as well. St. Vincent de Paul did not only gave missions; he also sent his priests to train the local clergy at a time when conciliar seminaries were not yet in place. He believed that the missions can help ignite the fire of faith among the people. But without responsible and compassionate pastors, this work is not sustainable.

Vincentians in Asia have been doing the work of priestly formation for a long since the pre-revolutionary China, colonial and post-colonial Philippines, Indonesia, India.³ In some areas like the Philippines, the seminaries accepted lay people to study together with priests since in those marginal locations other institutions of higher learning did not yet exist. Vincentians in the other continents — United States,⁴ Latin America and Europe⁵ — also distinguished themselves in their work in the seminaries. All these efforts also educated the local churches.

¹ In the Vatican presentation of the document “Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines” (28 October 2002), Msgr. Guisepppe Pittau mentioned many religious congregations together with their founders who made inroads in the educational field (among others, Somascans, Barnabites, Jesuits, Piarists, La Salle, Salesians, Ursulines, etc.) but not the Vincentians. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20021119_press-release_en.html

² Robert Maloney, “Our Ministry to Help Form the Diocesan Clergy: Yesterday and Today,” *Vincentiana* 41, No. 1 (1997), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1926&context=vincentiana>; Vincent de Paul was not alone in the formation of the clergy in the France of his times. There were several others with him: Pierre de Berulle, Jean-Jaques Olier, John Eudes, Charles de Condren, among others. Cf. Luigi Mezzadri, “The Clergy in the France of St. Vincent,” *Vincentiana* 44, No. 3 (2000), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2696&context=vincentiana>

³ Robert Maloney, “Our Vincentian Mission in China: Our Vincentian Mission in China: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Vincentiana* 45, No. 1 (2001), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2812&context=vincentiana>; Eko Armada Riyanto, “Mission and Engagement of The Vincentians to Priestly Formation in Indonesia: A Historical-Theological Revisit,” *International Journal of Indonesian Philosophy* 1, No. 2 (2020), <https://aafki-afti.org/IJIPTh/article/view/9>; Rolando dela Goza and Jesus Ma. Cavanna, *Vincentians in the Philippines 1862-1982* (Manila: Congregacion de la Mision en Filipinas, 1985).

⁴ See among others, John Rybolt, “The Congregation of the Mission in the United States: A Historical Survey,” *Vincentiana* 45, No. 3 (2001), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2859&context=vincentiana>; “St. Vincent, Seminaries and Higher Education,” <https://www.vincentian.org/st-vincent-seminaries-and-higher-education/>;

⁵ Rafferty writes about the situation in Europe: “At the beginning of the century we were actively involved in staffing and administering seminaries in many dioceses and today we have withdrawn from most of these, although we continue to maintain a presence in a number of seminaries where confreres work on an individual basis. We have always regarded seminary formation as the second foundational work of the Congregation and we know how St. Vincent, as he began the parish mission movement across France, was drawn into the formation of priests in a number of dioceses, either through the Tuesday Conferences, or being actively involved in implementing the Decrees of the Council of Trent.” Kevin Rafferty,

But beyond the formation of clergy, the Congregation of the Mission also ventured into the education field itself.⁶ Education of the lay people is not foreign to the Vincentian Family. Louise de Marillac and the Daughters of Charity took care of the orphans and educated them. Frederic Ozanam distinguished himself in the field of education and care for the poor. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the first free Catholic school for girls in the United States.⁷ Other groups in the Vincentian Family also ventured into the educational ministry in their own history.

How do Vincentians do the work of education 400 years after Vincent de Paul? What are its present challenges? In what forms does education ministry take in our times?

Let me begin this reflection with a quotation from Pope Francis on education which he said on 10 May 2014 — barely a year after his election to the pontificate: “Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful.”⁸

We always thought that schools are safe spaces; schools are supposed to protect us. But no, even schools are bombed in Gaza; and children are in constant threat and fear. To illustrate what Pope Francis means, let us see this slide and what happens in just four days in Gaza when Israel attacked four schools in four days of July 2024, killing around 50 Palestinians.⁹ **In less than a year after, here is the final list of child-victims mostly school children as of November 2024: 710 babies** below the age of one; **1,793 toddlers** (1-3 years old); **1,205 preschoolers** (4-5 years old); **4,205 primary school children** (6-12 years old); **3,442 high school children** (13-17 years old).¹⁰ From the violent society where St. Vincent lived to our own, the work of education will never be neutral. That is how crucial the work of educators is.

When this topic was assigned to me, I did a little survey among the CM Provinces in Asia on the state and challenges of their educational apostolate. It was my objective to assess the data on the ground and where does this data lead the Vincentian family after

“Vincentians in Europe 1999 a Time of Crisis,” *Vincentiana* 44, No. 1 (2000), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232972782.pdf>

⁶ John Rybolt, “Vincentian Education: A Survey of its History,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 28, No. 2 (2008), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232975811.pdf>; Anthony Dosen, “Vincentian Education and the Charism of St. Vincent de Paul,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 9, No. 1 (2005), https://www.academia.edu/110393049/Vincentian_Education_and_the_Charism_of_St_Vincent_de_Paul; L. Sullivan, *The Core Values of Vincentian Education* (Chicago: DePaul University, 1997); Dennis Holtschneider and Edward Udovic, *The Vincentian Higher Education Apostolate in the United States*, <https://offices.depaul.edu/mission-ministry/about/Documents/Vincentian%20Higher%20Education%20Apostolate%20in%20the%20United%20States.pdf>

⁷ Vincentian education of lay people was spearheaded by people like Frederic Ozanam and Elizabeth Ann Seton. Cf. J. P. Derum, *Apostle in a Top Hat: The Story of Venerable Frederic Ozanam, Founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul* (St. Clair, MI: Fidelity Publishing House, 1995); J. I. Dirvin, *Mrs. Seton, foundress of the American Sisters of Charity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962).

⁸ Pope Francis, “Address to Students and Teachers of Schools in Italy,” https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140510_mondo-della-scuola.html

⁹ “Gaza: Four Schools hit in the last four days,” <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/gaza-4-schools-hit-last-4-days>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/7/10/israel-war-on-gaza-live-israel-strikes-fourth-school-in-gaza-killing-29>;

¹⁰ “A to Z of Children Israel Killed,” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/11/20/an-a-z-of-the-children-israel-killed-in-gaza>

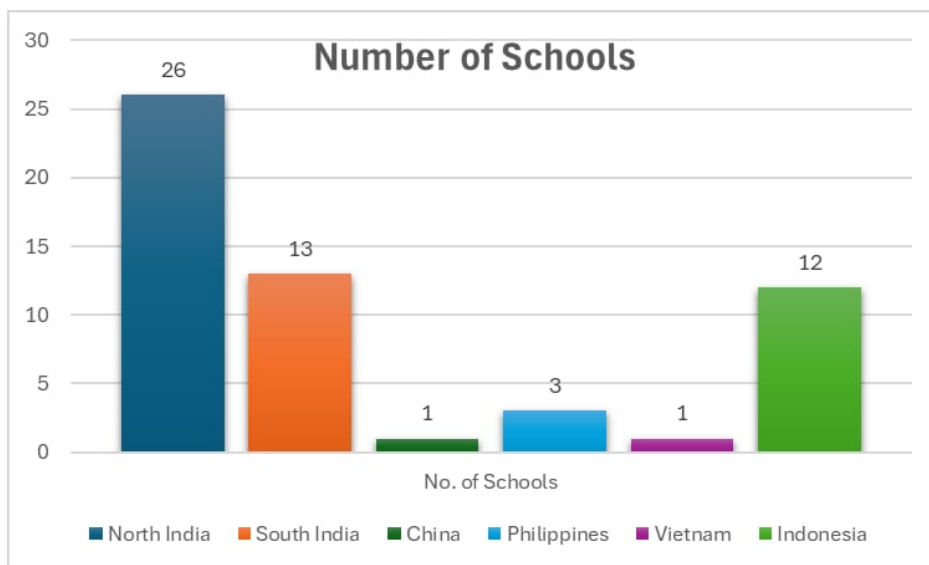
400 years of our charism. There are six CM provinces in Asia: North India, South India, China, Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia.

I asked some confreres from these Provinces the following questions: (1) How many educational institutions does your Province have and what categories are these? (2) How many CM confreres are engaged in educational ministry? (3) What are the challenges do you meet? (4) What does St. Vincent want us to do after 400 years?

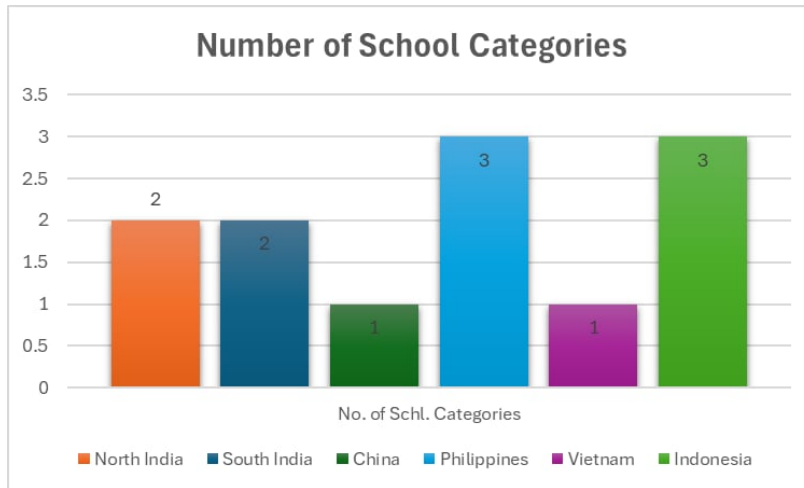
The limitation of this little survey is found in the following areas. First, these responses only come from a number of CM confreres whom I contacted online. Because of my personal and logistical restrictions, there was no attempt to ask more confreres nor visit them in their schools. Second, there are other educational initiatives within the Vincentian family in Asia beyond the CM apostolate. For instance, I have no access to the extensive educational work of the Daughters of Charity (DC), Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), Ladies of Charity (AIC) and other member organizations of the Vincentian Family in Asia. Third, I also limited this survey to formal education; there is no attempt to inquire about informal educational initiatives. This means that this survey can be expanded to more respondents, more Vincentian Family initiatives, more areas in Asia, and deeper analysis of factors on the ground.

A. OBSERVATIONS ON THE DATA FROM THE GROUND

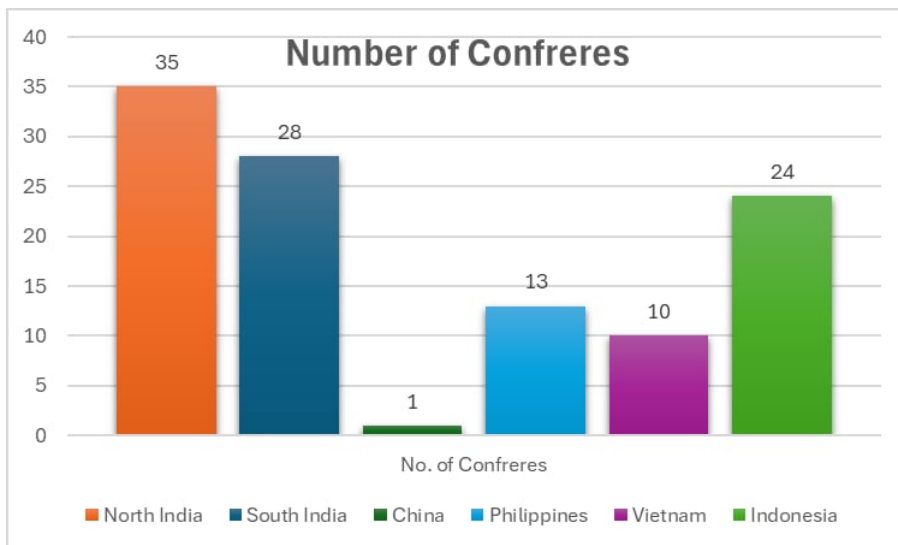
Here are some of my observations on the gathered data.



1. There are 56 formal educational institutions handled by the CMs distributed in the different Provinces of Asia.
2. The greatest number of schools is found in North India (26); understandably, the least number is China (1) located in Taiwan, and Vietnam (1) mainly because of political reasons.

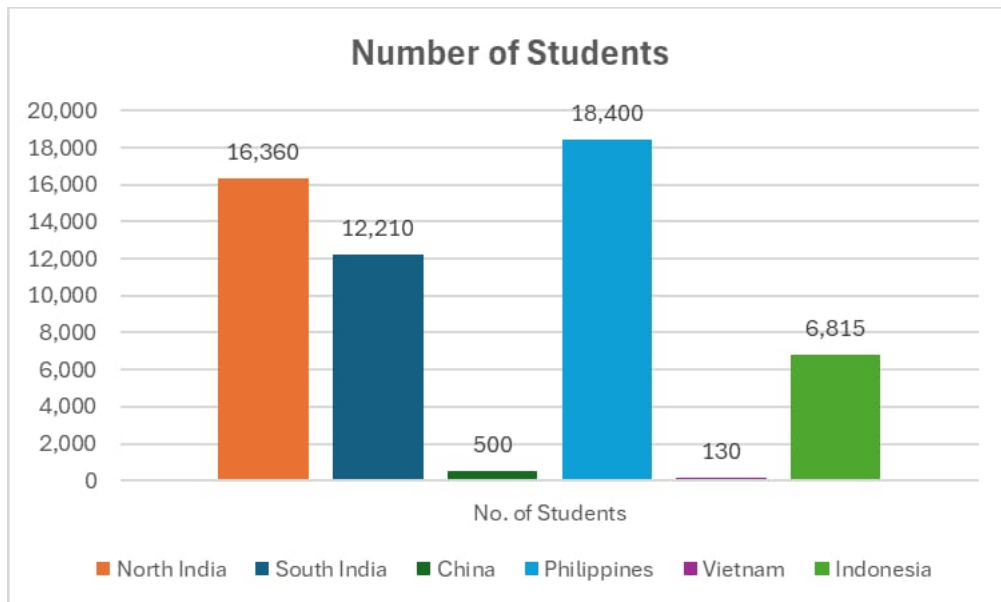


1. From the data, we classified four categories of CM educational institutions in Asia: (a) university/college; (b) elementary and high school; (c) vocational schools; (d) seminaries or pastoral centers.
2. Indonesia has all the categories including vocational schools.
3. North India and South India mainly have basic education schools (elementary and/or high school) though some of these have college courses.
4. Only the Philippines has a university (college level and graduate schools); though the theology school in Indonesia also offer college and graduate studies.

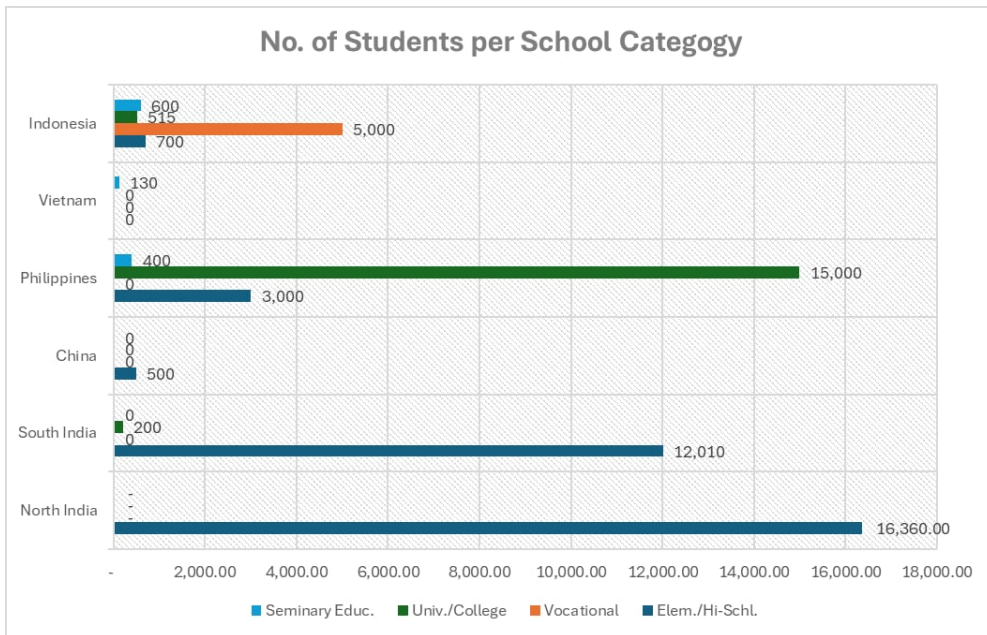


1. There are approximately 111 CM confreres (fully or partially) engaged in school apostolates in Asia. This is around 22% of all confreres in Asia based on its latest catalogue.

2. Among Asian countries, North India has the most number of CM conferees fully involved in the educational ministry; second is South India and Indonesia.
3. Understandably, the Province of China has the least number.



1. Statistics tell us that we are servicing approximately 54,415 students in CM formal educational institutions all over Asia in 2024.
2. Philippines has the highest number of students served in their schools. Most of these students are in the university level.
3. It is followed by North and South India serving students in the elementary and high school levels.



1. Philippines has the highest number of college/university students. Only Philippines has a university.
2. North and South India has the highest high school students.
3. Only Indonesia administers a vocational school.
4. Most of the Provinces, except China, have seminaries or pastoral training centers.

B. CHALLENGES TO VINCENTIAN EDUCATION IN ASIA

What are the concrete challenges to Vincentian educational apostolate according to what the data tell us? These challenges can be categorized into five areas: student population, school administration, resources allocation, teacher training and support, digital access, religious and values education, CM confreres in the educational ministry.

1. **Student Population.** On the one hand, some countries have no more students because the government takes charge of the work of education (China-Taiwan); or private groups are not given permits by the government to operate (Vietnam). On the other hand, other countries have overflowing students but they could not accept more because of lack of financial resources (Philippines, India, Indonesia) making institutional sustainability one of the more serious concerns in Asia.

This challenges us to search for new ways to educate people at the margins beyond formal institutions (e.g., non-formal education in new contexts of poverty, technical vocation education). Beyond formal educational structures which need to be financially sustained, the Vincentian family needs to explore these areas which could not be reached by our schools. Millions have no access to formal education because of their situations and locations (refugee

camps, war zones, border areas, migrants, etc.).¹¹ This is also in line with the UN SDG 4: to ensure inclusive, equitable and lifelong education for all. It is these people who are most vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse because they do not know how to read or write or count or think creatively.

In other contexts and places, technical-vocational education is more necessary for people to land in practical jobs right after high school.¹² Adults who had no access to college education or who want to venture into other fields can earn and work in these practical courses. Lifelong learning is also part of the vision of UN SDGs.

2. **School Administration.** Though there are Provinces who have conscious educational direction in governing their school apostolate through a Vincentian Board of Education (e.g., North India), there are also those purely following government regulations because they are prevented from deviating from it. Some schools are solely run by confreres. Others have strong collaboration with other stakeholders.

This challenges us to institute an ongoing formation and empowerment of the lay educators in our schools to take on more crucial leadership roles.

3. **Resource Allocation.** On one hand, some schools are “earning institutions” that help in the financial needs of other apostolates in their Provinces. On the other hand, most of the schools are quite difficult to sustain. They find it challenging to improve their infrastructure needs; they could not offer scholarship nor provide essential support.

This challenges us to seriously think of ways towards institutional sustainability for our formal school institutions by a sharing human and financial resources among Provinces, among the members of the Vincentian family, and by collaborating with government bodies (whenever possible) and non-government organizations. Poorer Provinces can network with Provinces with greater resources. Such network can be structured among Provinces in one region or internationally within the whole Congregation.

4. **Teacher Training and Support.** On the one hand, we see dedicated teachers and faculty members willing to sacrifice their time and resources for their students. On the other hand, due to our meager resources for their upkeep (e.g., salary, professional training, teacher support, etc.), teachers leave for “greener pastures” outside our institutions.

This challenges our institutions to prioritize the well-being of our teachers and personnel in the management of our resources. We need to network

¹¹ The recent UNESCO data tells us that out of school children has risen on the global scale by 6 million, now totaling 250 million. Cf. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386852>

¹² Asian Development Bank assessment on education writes: “The main challenge in developing Asia and the Pacific is to upgrade technical vocational education and training (TVET) so that it more effectively meets the needs of current, as well as future needs of labor markets. The ongoing rapid economic and digital transformation across the region means marketable skills tend to have a short shelf life. This means that incorporating 21st century and digital skills into TVET programs to enhance the employability of graduates is an emerging priority.” Cf. “ADB’s Work in Education Sector”, <https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/topics/education/overview#tvvet>

with other professional organizations in the Vincentian family and outside it in order to help in the training of our teachers and staff.

5. **Digital Access.** On the one hand, there are schools who have sufficient access to digital resources. On the other hand, many schools in rural areas suffer from digital divide. This digital divide also distinguishes affluent students from underprivileged sectors.

This challenges us to share digital resources and knowledge among institutions in one Provinces or among Provinces in order to lessen digital divide among our students and countries. This collaborative network can also be structured among the members of the Vincentian Family, among Vincentian schools and universities worldwide.

6. **Religious and Values Education.** On the one hand, most Provinces have religious education centers. On the other hand, there are countries (those under dictatorial regimes and strict government policies) which are not free to adjust their curriculum for religious or Vincentian formation, or to discuss topics on social justice, religion, environmental issues, and ethical values.

This challenges us to search for new ways and forms of evangelization and values formation in the educational ministry in our times, especially in the dictatorial and interreligious contexts. We also propose to mainstream Catholic Social Teaching in our educational institutions and ministries to teach our students the values of justice and equality, peace and solidarity, option for the poor and common good, respect for human dignity and care for our common home.

7. **CM Confreres in Educational Ministry.** On the one hand, there is still a substantial number of the CM confreres (22%) and a good number of lay collaborators engaged in formal education. On the other hand, less and less confreres are being prepared for the educational ministry in the future.

First, this challenges us to direct our resources for the training of confreres in this apostolate. Second, we need to search for ways where lay people are formed in the spirit of St. Vincent in order to lead and be at the forefront of Vincentian educational institutions. Third, we also need to collaborate with others outside the Vincentian Family to strengthen our impact in the educational sector.

C. DIRECTIONS TO VINCENTIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY IN ASIA

What are some common directions for the educational apostolate of the Vincentian Family after 400 years of the charism? Like Vincent de Paul who look up to the directions the Church has proposed in his times, we also need to discern where the present Church wants us to go inspired by the directions of Pope Francis.¹³

In recent years, Pope Francis issued to important documents on “Catholic Education: Global Compact on Education” (2019-2021) and “The Identity of

¹³ Cf. Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Go, Rebuild my House: Empowering the Church of the Poor through the Eyes of St. Vincent de Paul,” 28, No. 1 (2024), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol38/iss1/8/>

Catholic Schools for a Culture of Dialogue” (2022).¹⁴ Following his lead in these documents, let me outline four areas where Vincentian educational ministry can proceed.

1. Vincentian education is inclusive. It is an “education that goes forth”, an education for all.

Following the ecclesiological direction set by Pope Francis about a Church that goes forth helping people at the wayside, Catholic education should also be an “education that goes forth”. It is inclusive; it is an education for all.

The original meaning of “Catholic” is to be inclusive, to include all because Christ is in all, in everyone. In the words of Pope Francis, “todos”, “all as in all”. It was only the Reformation that led to its exclusivist meaning, e.g., Catholic vs. Protestant or Christian vs. Islam, etc. But from the beginning, as early as Ignatius of Antioch (107 AD), “to be Catholic” means to recognize that Christ is present “on the whole”, universal, complete. This means where God is, there is the whole Church or wherever the church is, there God is.

The value of inclusion is an important assertion in multireligious contexts but also in areas with intolerant governments like those in Asia. No one should be excluded from Catholic Vincentian education. There shall be a respectful space for all (all colors, all genders, all religions, all cultures). Inclusion shall be reflected in our institutional values, school programs and educational curricula.

2. Vincentian education as centered on the human person and the care of our common home.

The human person should be the center of Catholic Vincentian education. This is the main vision of Vatican II: “Education, if it is true education, must aim at the formation of the human person. Education, if it is true education, must aim at the formation of the human person, respecting one’s capacities, gender, culture and religion” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1).

In recent reflections of the Church, the move is to include the care of our common home as central to the educational process.¹⁵ It is not only the human being who is the center but the whole of God’s creation. The human person is a member of God’s big family of creation.

¹⁴ “Global Compact on Education,”

<https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/resources/Risorse/vademecum-english.pdf>; Congregation of the Catholic Education, “The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue,” https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_d oc_20220125_istruzione-identita-scuola-cattolica_en.html

¹⁵ See, among others, Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, “Ecological Education in Laudato Si,” *Seminare* 37, No. 4 (2016): 83-96, <file:///Users/danielfranklinpilario/Downloads/tom-37-4-07-kureethadam.pdf>; Patricia Joy Vertudez Mobilla, “Developing a Culture of Care: Ecological Education according to Laudato Si,” *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 12, No. 2 (2023): 1-13, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374378086_Developing_a_Culture_of_Care_Ecological_Education_According_to_Laudato_si

Pope Francis emphasizes this in his recent proclamation on “Global Compact on Education” (2021).

- a. To make the human person the center
- b. To listen to the voices of children and young people
- c. To advance women
- d. To empower the family
- e. To welcome the most vulnerable
- f. To find new ways of understanding economy and politics
- g. To safeguard our common home

In this context, we assert that the Catholic Social Teaching is a potent religious resource to forward these important concerns among our students and educational institutions.

Already in 1971, the Synod of Bishops proclaim: “Action on behalf of justice and work for the transformation of the world fully appear to us as intrinsic part of the preaching of the Gospel” (*Justice in the World*, 6). The key work is “intrinsic”: the work of justice is so crucial that if we do not preach justice and work for social transformation, we do not fully preach the Gospel.

We need to integrate the inalienable value of the human person into the framework of our institutions. The Catholic social teaching should not be just a course to be taught in our schools, or token inspiration to our extension services. It should be the main frame of our school policies, curriculum, research agenda and our educational apostolate.

3. Vincentian education is dialogical and synodal.

Pope Francis writes: “A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.”¹⁶ The theologian Paul Tillich is attributed with this famous phrase: “The first act of love is to listen.”¹⁷

This is precisely the essence of education: to listen, to dialogue, to walk together. Pope Francis says: “Walking together. One cannot educate without walking alongside the people being educated. It is beautiful when we come across educators who walk alongside boys and girls. Girls, boys, they have a right to make mistakes, but the educator accompanies them along the journey to direct these mistakes, so that they don’t become dangerous. The true educator is not frightened by mistakes, no: he or she accompanies, takes one

¹⁶ Pope Francis, “Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

¹⁷ Cf. Paul Tillich writes: “**In order to know what is just in a person-to-person encounter, love listens. It is its first task to listen.** No human relation, especially no intimate one, is possible without mutual listening.” Cf. *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954),

by the hand, listens, dialogues. [Education] is carrying forward and growing, helping to grow.”¹⁸

The Vincentian life is a life of dialogue and synodality. St. Vincent started his great work in the spirit of synodality.¹⁹ He collaborated with many people — priests of the mission, lay people in the Confraternities of Charity, Louise de Marillac and the Ladies of Charity, the civil authorities and people of power, diocesan clergy and other religious. Synodality is in the Vincentian DNA.

4. Vincentian education is caring for the weakest and most vulnerable.

Close to the heart of St. Vincent is the care for the weakest and the most vulnerable. Vincentian educational institutions should be a space of care for our students, faculty and stakeholders.

“The Catholic school is a school for all, especially the weakest... The culture of care becomes the compass at local and international level to form people dedicated to patient listening, constructive dialogue and mutual understanding.”²⁰

Our students are like the “man stranded on the road to Jericho”. Shall we stop and do our best to help? Or shall we go off and not care?

Pope Francis makes us choose in Fratelli Tutti: “There are only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off.” (FT, 70).

Neutrality is not a Christian position. In front of urgent need, in front of suffering, one cannot fence sit. One needs to choose.

Desmund Tutu, the great South African freedom fighter, says: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor . If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”²¹

“Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him.” (Pope Francis, 10 May 2014).

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<https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/topics/education/overview#tvct>

¹⁸ Pope Francis, “To the Members of the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education,”
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220420-catholic-education-project.html>

¹⁹ “Synodality in the Life and Work of St. Vincent de Paul,”
<https://famvin.org/en/2024/08/01/synodality-in-the-life-and-work-of-saint-vincent-de-paul-famvin2024/#:~:text=Synodality%20in%20the%20Work%20of%20Saint%20Vincent%20de%20Paul&text=One%20of%20the%20clearest%20manifestations,how%20best%20to%20address%20them;>

²⁰ Congregation for Catholic Education, “The Identity of Catholic Schools for a Culture of Dialogue,” 36.

²¹ Susan Ratcliff, ed., *Oxford Essential Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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