



## **Strengthening International Vincentian Communities**

**FX. Armada Riyanto, C.M.**

**Hugh O'Donnell, C.M.**

International Center of the Vincentian Formation (CIF), Paris, France

The CM Province of West, USA

[fxarmadacm@gmail.com](mailto:fxarmadacm@gmail.com)

[hodonn2011@icloud.com](mailto:hodonn2011@icloud.com)

### **Abstract**

This article examines the call to strengthen international and intercultural communities within the Congregation of the Mission in light of its Vincentian missionary identity and current demographic realities. Rooted in the vision of St. Vincent de Paul—who sent missionaries across borders in obedience to God's providence and the cry of the poor—the article argues that internationality is not a strategy but an evangelical necessity. Drawing on recent global statistics, it highlights the contrasting vocational vitality between younger provinces in Africa and Asia and aging provinces in Europe and North America, many of which continue to sustain historically and pastorally significant apostolates. The article proposes international communities as a prophetic response that revitalizes mission, embodies unity in diversity, and witnesses to the Gospel in a fragmented world. Emphasizing creative fidelity, intercultural formation, and solidarity grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, it calls the Congregation to renewed collaboration, shared responsibility, and openness to the Spirit, so that essential missions may continue to serve the poor and the Church effectively today.

Cet article examine l'appel à renforcer les communautés internationales et interculturelles au sein de la Congrégation de la Mission à la lumière de son identité missionnaire vincentienne et des réalités démographiques actuelles. S'inspirant de la vision de saint Vincent de Paul, qui a envoyé des missionnaires au-delà des frontières en obéissance à la providence divine et à l'appel des pauvres, l'article soutient que l'internationalité n'est pas une stratégie, mais une nécessité évangélique. S'appuyant sur des statistiques mondiales récentes, il met en évidence le contraste entre la vitalité vocationnelle des provinces plus jeunes d'Afrique et d'Asie et celle des provinces vieillissantes d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord, dont beaucoup continuent à soutenir des apostolats importants sur le plan historique et pastoral. L'article propose les communautés internationales comme une réponse prophétique qui revitalise la mission, incarne l'unité dans la diversité et témoigne de l'Évangile dans un monde fragmenté. Mettant l'accent sur la fidélité créative, la formation interculturelle et la solidarité fondée sur l'enseignement social catholique, il appelle la Congrégation à une collaboration renouvelée, à une responsabilité partagée et à une ouverture à l'Esprit, afin que les missions essentielles puissent continuer à servir efficacement les pauvres et l'Église aujourd'hui.

Este artículo examina el llamamiento a fortalecer las comunidades internacionales e interculturales dentro de la Congregación de la Misión a la luz de su identidad misionera vincentiana y las realidades demográficas actuales. Basándose en la visión de San Vicente de Paúl, que envió misioneros más allá de las fronteras en obediencia a la providencia de Dios y al clamor de los pobres, el artículo sostiene que la internacionalidad no es una estrategia, sino una necesidad



evangélica. A partir de estadísticas globales recientes, destaca el contraste entre la vitalidad vocacional de las provincias más jóvenes de África y Asia y el envejecimiento de las provincias de Europa y América del Norte, muchas de las cuales siguen manteniendo apostolados de gran importancia histórica y pastoral. El artículo propone las comunidades internacionales como una respuesta profética que revitaliza la misión, encarna la unidad en la diversidad y da testimonio del Evangelio en un mundo fragmentado. Haciendo hincapié en la fidelidad creativa, la formación intercultural y la solidaridad basada en la doctrina social católica, llama a la Congregación a una colaboración renovada, a la responsabilidad compartida y a la apertura al Espíritu, para que las misiones esenciales puedan seguir sirviendo eficazmente a los pobres y a la Iglesia en la actualidad.

**Keywords:** International Community, Congregation of the Mission, Intercultural, Solidarity.

From its beginnings, the Congregation of the Mission (C.M.) was marked by an outward, missionary focus. St. Vincent de Paul envisioned a community of priests and brothers who would go wherever the Church needed them—especially to serve the poor and evangelize the most abandoned. This missionary identity naturally fostered a spirit of internationality—not as a strategic choice, but as a spiritual and apostolic necessity in service to the marginalized.

St. Vincent himself sent missionaries beyond the borders of France: to Poland, Madagascar, Algeria, Ireland, and Italy.<sup>1</sup> His willingness to engage different cultures and respond to the needs of the Universal Church laid the foundation for what we today call an **international community**. For Vincent, mission transcended national or linguistic boundaries—it was grounded in charity, the love of Christ urging us forward (2 Cor 5:14), and in obedience to God’s providence as expressed through the cries of the poor.

To be an international community in the Vincentian sense is not merely to gather members originating from different nations; it is to live a genuine communion shaped by intercultural diversity and grounded in shared Vincentian values and evangelical charity.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, several provinces have taken wonderful steps to form such communities—sending confreres abroad, welcoming missionaries from other regions, and experimenting with intercultural houses of formation and ministry. These initiatives demonstrate a real desire to witness to the Gospel through unity amid diversity, and they reflect St. Vincent’s own missionary spirit, which continually crossed borders, languages, and social boundaries.

At the same time, realities on the ground reveal certain hesitations. Some confreres worry whether intercultural communities will function harmoniously in every context, or whether differences in language, cultural expectations, leadership styles, and pastoral approaches might lead to tension rather than enrichment. Others fear that local needs or sensitivities could make such experiments difficult to sustain. These concerns should not be ignored; rather, they call for deeper formation in intercultural competencies, clearer communication, and a renewed commitment to mutual respect. An international Vincentian community is both a gift and a task—an evangelical sign of God’s reconciling

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard van Winsen, C.M., “Saint Vincent e les Missions étrangères,” *Vincentiana* 1978, No. 3, 150-182 (van Winsen 1978). This article was translated by Sr. Jaqueline Killar DC and republished in *Vincentian Heritage* 1982, See: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1370&context=vhj>

<sup>2</sup> See Luigi Mezzadri, C.M., “L’umilté dans le dynamisme apostolique de Saint Vincent” and other authors on the Vincentian mission (Mezzadri 1977; van Winsen 1987a; Forrestal 2017; Bastiaensen 1978; Prager 1995; Ginete 2005; van Winsen 1987b; Maloney 1999), (Mezzadri 1978).

love, and an invitation to grow together through patient dialogue, shared mission, and fraternal humility.

## **Embracing the Reality**

In recent years, the Congregation of the Mission (C.M.) has undergone a significant demographic transformation<sup>3</sup>. While vocations are flourishing in certain regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, many provinces—particularly in Europe and North America—are facing a marked decline in the number of confreres. Yet these same provinces continue to carry apostolates of great historical, pastoral, and ecclesial importance: parishes located in complex urban settings, schools and universities that have shaped generations, services among migrants and the homeless, and longstanding missionary commitments. These works, born from the intuition and charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, remain not only valuable but indispensable—places where the Gospel is announced, the poor are accompanied, and the Vincentian charism continues to speak with renewed relevance.

This shifting landscape forces the Congregation to confront an essential question: How do we sustain, renew, and reimagine these missions when local personnel is no longer adequate to support them? The challenge is not merely administrative or strategic; it touches the very heart of our identity as an international and missionary community. It calls for creative fidelity, intercultural collaboration, and a willingness to share resources—human, spiritual, and pastoral—across provincial boundaries. It invites the entire Congregation to discern which ministries must be strengthened, which can be transformed, and which may need new models of governance or partnership. Most importantly, it requires us to listen anew to the Spirit, who continues to urge us toward the poor, and to embody the missionary audacity that Saint Vincent would expect of us today. One path forward is through the intentional creation of international communities. These are but expressions of our Vincentian identity. In the vision of St. Vincent de Paul, mission always transcended borders. Today, that vision must inspire a renewed spirit of collaboration across provinces, allowing confreres from younger or more vibrant provinces to participate in the mission of those that are aging or in decline.

International communities offer more than logistical support; they provide a prophetic witness to unity in diversity. In a world marked by division—national, cultural, and even ecclesial—our living together as brothers from different countries, languages, and backgrounds can itself be evangelizing. Such communities demonstrate that what unites us in the mission of Christ is stronger than what divides us.

Yet, this path also demands serious formation and support: cultural sensitivity, shared governance, language skills, and spiritual maturity. Without these, international communities risk misunderstanding and dysfunction. But with proper preparation, they become living signs of fraternity and renewal.

The internationalization of Vincentian life is not simply a response to numerical decline. It is a strategic and spiritual deepening of our global vocation—to be missionaries wherever the Church needs us most. As one body, we are called to mobilize our global resources to ensure that no essential mission falters due to local limitations.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. The Statistics of the CM, 2024 (Vincentiana).

In this way, international and intercultural communities do not simply compensate for or replace declining provinces; rather, they revitalize them from within. By welcoming vocations that arise among immigrant communities and by opening our doors generously to confreres from other provinces, we allow the Vincentian charism to breathe with a truly universal spirit. Such communities bring new energy, fresh cultural perspectives, and renewed missionary passion to provinces that carry important works but lack local personnel. This mutual exchange strengthens fraternity, expands our pastoral creativity, and reconnects our ministries with the global reality of the poor today—migrants, displaced families, and culturally diverse urban populations.

This approach is an act of deep fidelity: not a nostalgic fidelity to structures of the past, but a dynamic fidelity to the living Spirit of St. Vincent, who continually urges us to cross borders, to collaborate generously, and to let the poor evangelize us anew in every context and culture.

## **Number**

Within its historical context, the Congregation of the Mission has “classmates”, other congregations that also belong to the Society of Apostolic Life. They are the Oratorian founded by Cardinal de Bérulle, the Sulpicians founded by Jean-Jacques Olier, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary established by Jean Eudes, and the Congregation of the Mission founded by St. Vincent de Paul. Among these four, the Congregation of the Mission has, according to statistics from Catholic-Hierarchy.org, consistently had the largest membership. Nevertheless, the number of its members has steadily declined after the Second Vatican Council, dropping from 6,264 in 1966 to approximately 3,280 in 2024. Many factors contribute to this decrease, and indeed almost all religious congregations have experienced similar demographic decline.

Spanish moral theologian Marciano Vidal noted at a gathering of moral theologians in Trento (2010) that the consequences of diminishing numbers are not merely statistical; they have profound implications for the future life of the Church as a whole. While we trust that God will restore the numbers in God’s own way and time, the present reality calls the Congregation of the Mission to invest more intentionally and seriously in international cooperation, to rekindle its missionary spirit, and to engage in new evangelization—or re-evangelization—wherever it is most urgently needed.

The dataset (the latest statistics of December 2024) outlines the incorporated 3,280 members (bishops, priests, deacons, brothers, and vowed students), and the number of admitted members and aspirants across three major Vincentian jurisdictions: Africa, Latin America, USA, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. These figures give insight into the vitality, growth potential, and strategic importance of each region.

Africa emerges as a stronghold of Vincentian vitality, with a total of 515 incorporated members. Of particular note is Nigeria, with 144 members—making it the largest single contributor to the African Vincentian body—followed by Madagascar, Cameroon, and other countries. Africa also boasts 245 admitted members (189 of whom have completed the internal seminary) and a significant 298 aspirants. This reflects a healthy and expanding vocational pipeline, driven by strong youth engagement and local Church support. Vocational interest appears especially high in Nigeria, Madagascar, Cameroon, Tanzania, Kenya, and Mozambique, signaling long-term sustainability and leadership potential in these areas. The figures from Kenya, Congo (DRC), and Ethiopia also reflect promising, though comparatively smaller, growth trajectories.

The Latin America is home 799 incorporated members, including 10 bishops and 738 priests. Despite having more members than Africa, the region shows a slower pace in vocational development. Only 74 admitted members (42 having completed the internal seminary) and 113 aspirants are reported. Colombia stands out with 157 members and 34 admitted members, indicating a relatively active formation program. Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Fortaleza combined) and Mexico also show moderate numbers, but many provinces report limited vocational inflow, with several having no aspirants at all.

Puerto Rico and the U.S. provinces maintain a moderate presence. The U.S.A. – Western province stands out with 97 members, while Eastern USA follows with 89. However, aspirant numbers here are low, suggesting a need for renewed vocational outreach.

The contrast between Africa and Latin America and the USA is telling. Africa, with fewer overall members, exhibits far more dynamic vocational growth, suggesting a strategic shift in the Vincentian future toward the Global South. While Latin America and the USA maintain a strong presence, its slower aspirant intake may necessitate renewed efforts in vocation promotion and youth ministry.

Europe, though historically central to the Vincentian tradition, has fewer new vocations. Despite having the highest number of houses (141) and members, only 31 new members are admitted, with a mere 22 aspirants. Poland and Spain (both provinces) remain the strongest contributors in Europe, but overall, the region shows signs of aging with limited future growth.

Asia leads both in the number of houses and total members (737), underscoring the vibrancy and growth of the Vincentian mission in this region. Particularly notable are Vietnam (163 members), South India (172), and North India (140), each showing strong clerical and aspirant presence. Indonesia still enjoys the good number of vocations. Philippines has also more or less in the similar situation. Oceania-Australia is looking for and welcoming new vocations from Fiji and Solomon Islands as well as from the immigrant communities (Cf. Statistics of the CM, December 2024).

What makes the situation even more critical is that these older provinces still sustain apostolates of great historical, theological, and pastoral significance. They administer seminaries, serve urban and rural parishes, operate centers for the marginalized, and often hold long-standing relationships with dioceses and communities. These ministries are not obsolete relics—they remain deeply relevant to the mission of the Church today, especially in secularized societies where the Church's presence is becoming increasingly fragile.

The problem, therefore, is not one of mission or purpose, but of personnel. Apostolates that continue to answer real and urgent needs are being threatened, not because they lack meaning, but because there are no longer enough missionaries to sustain them. This widening gap between apostolic need and ministerial capacity poses not just a practical challenge, but an apostolic dilemma.

How should the Congregation respond? The Vincentian charism calls for creative fidelity. This moment demands bold, faith-driven solutions such as the formation of international and intercultural communities, greater collaboration across provinces, and an openness to mission beyond geographic or provincial boundaries. It is a *kairos* moment—a time for discernment, solidarity, and renewed commitment to our vocation to serve the poor and sustain the Church wherever we are most needed.

## Reflecting on Solidarity

From the lens of Catholic Social Teaching—particularly the principles of solidarity—the disparity in resources and personnel among the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission is not simply a matter of logistics or administration. It is a pressing call to discernment, conversion of heart, and deeper collaboration. It challenges us to ask: Are we living the Vincentian charism in a way that responds to the needs of the whole Body of Christ, or are we retreating into provincial boundaries?

St. Vincent de Paul was unwavering in his conviction that the missionary vocation must transcend all borders, limits, and comforts. For him, a Vincentian is not defined by a particular place, culture, or assignment, but by a heart completely available to God’s call and the world’s needs. The true measure of our vocation lies not in remaining where life is easiest or most familiar, but in our willingness to be sent wherever the Gospel cries out most urgently. Whether among the abandoned countryside, in foreign missions, or in new apostolic frontiers, readiness to go where the need is greatest embodies authentic Vincentian fidelity.

In his conference to the Missioners — Repetition of Prayer, 6 December 1658, St. Vincent says that the missioners must be ready to serve anywhere and that the Congregation is founded “to go everywhere” (*aller partout*) to evangelize the poor. In Letter to Antoine Portail, 14 March 1659, he writes that charity obliges the Mission to go wherever the needs of the poor call them and that no place is excluded from their service. In the Conference on the End of the Congregation (6 December 1658), He says the missioners are sent “to the poor, wherever they may be,” and emphasizes the universality of the apostolate.

The creation and support of international communities within the C.M. is not a modern invention—it is a faithful expression of this Vincentian universality. It embodies the Church’s principle of *Communio*, reminding us that we are one body in Christ. In this light, sharing personnel and resources across provinces is not simply a strategic decision—it is a moral imperative rooted in our shared baptismal and Vincentian identity.

Pope Francis continually warns religious communities against the danger of “**provincialism**”—a narrow focus on one’s own institution or region at the expense of the broader mission. Instead, he urges us to rediscover the missionary spirit that is at the heart of consecrated life.<sup>4</sup> For the C.M., this means embracing internationality not as a burden, but as a gift; not as a threat to local identity, but as a deepening of our Vincentian communion; not as a self-minded orientation, but as authentic engagement to the nature of the spirit of being Vincentians as inherited by Saint Vincent de Paul himself.

In this spirit, provinces experiencing growth are called to deepen the quality of formation, cultivate missionary generosity, and prepare confreres capable of serving beyond their own borders. At the same time, aging provinces are invited to embrace a renewed openness—welcoming missionaries from other cultures, engaging in

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis noted that institutions risk losing touch with reality, becoming “self-absorbed,” promoting functionalism and abstraction rather than authentic missionary engagement if they think only themselves (or “provincialism”). In a 2025 address to the Moderators of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, Pope Francis warned about the temptation to retreat into one’s “own group,” to maintain privilege, identity, or comfort at the expense of openness. He said groups must avoid the “enclosures” of self-referentiality — a “sickness” that isolates them from the wider Church and world. See also the seminar during the Pope of Benedict XVI, Pastors and the ecclesial movements: A seminar for bishops. “I ask you to approach movements with a great deal of love” Rocca di Papa, 15-17 May 2008.

interprovincial collaboration, and rediscovering the joy of shared mission. This reciprocal exchange strengthens the entire Congregation, allowing each province to offer its gifts while receiving the gifts of others. When mutual trust, transparency, and shared purpose guide our relationships, we become more attentive to the creative movements of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the challenges of demographics become opportunities for revitalization, communion, and renewed missionary zeal.

## **Moving into Concrete Action**

Concrete steps must be taken to build and sustain truly international Vincentian communities. These efforts require vision, structures, and a deep commitment to the missionary spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. The following five points outline key areas of action:

### *1. Strengthening Inter-Provincial Communication*

Effective collaboration begins with open and regular communication among provinces. Superiors must foster dialogue to share needs, capacities, and opportunities for mission. Transparent discernment processes—facilitated through regular regional or international meetings—can help match available personnel with areas of urgent pastoral need. Digital platforms and coordinated planning from the General Curia can support this global exchange.

### *2. Availability to Receive Confreres from Different Cultures*

Provinces facing a decline in vocations should develop a welcoming spirit and structures to receive confreres from other cultural backgrounds. This requires openness, trust, and a willingness to see the arrival of international confreres not as replacements but as collaborators in a shared mission. Communities must be supported in adapting to multicultural realities, recognizing the gifts brought by brothers from different parts of the world.

### *3. Language Learning and Vincentian Formation*

Missionaries sent abroad must be prepared to embrace the language of the receiving province. Language is far more than a practical tool for communication; it is an expression of humility, respect, and solidarity with the people we are called to serve. By learning the local language, a confrere enters the cultural and spiritual world of the community, allowing the Gospel to take flesh in ways that are meaningful and life-giving. To support this, Vincentian formation should integrate intentional linguistic preparation together with a deep grounding in the virtues of the Congregation: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for souls. Equally important is intercultural formation, enabling confreres to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity, openness, and missionary creativity. In this same spirit, provinces are encouraged to consider sending seminarians or students to other international missions for a period of exposure. Such experiences—whether through summer missions, pastoral internships, or extended formation placements—allow young confreres to encounter the universality of the Church and the diversity of Vincentian service. These cross-provincial experiences cultivate adaptability, broaden missionary horizons, and deepen the sense of zeal for souls. Through shared formation and mutual exchange, the Congregation strengthens not only language skills but also the global heart of the Vincentian vocation.

### *4. Establishing Clear Agreements and Support Structures*

Sending and receiving provinces, along with the Superior General, must enter into clear written agreements. These should define expectations regarding pastoral assignments, finances, formation, and fraternal support. It is essential that international confreres be fully integrated, not left isolated, and that their rights and dignity are respected in every stage of their mission.

### *5. Witnessing the Kingdom of God through International Communities*

International communities within the Congregation of the Mission are not merely practical responses to declining vocations—they are prophetic signs of communion and missionary witness. In today's fractured and secularized world, where the Gospel is often met with indifference or even resistance, the very existence of international Vincentian communities serves as a countercultural testimony to the transforming power of Christ's love.

These communities embody the universality of the Church. By gathering confreres from diverse nations, languages, and cultures to live, pray, and serve together, they make visible the unity that transcends all human division. In a society marked by growing individualism, nationalism, and fragmentation, this shared life of charity and fraternity becomes itself a form of re-evangelization—a lived proclamation that another way of being is possible through Christ.

Moreover, secularized societies—especially in Europe and North America—still carry deep wounds of spiritual poverty. Though church buildings remain, faith often lies dormant. International communities of Vincentians, formed in vibrant provinces, bring fresh energy and a renewed zeal for evangelization. Their presence revitalizes parishes, rekindles faith, and offers pastoral creativity grounded in intercultural collaboration.

This model of mission calls all Vincentians to rediscover what St. Vincent de Paul envisioned: a borderless vocation, always attentive to the cries of the poor and the spiritually abandoned. In re-evangelizing secular contexts, international communities become not just sustainers of existing apostolates but agents of renewal, witnessing by their lives that Christ is alive and that the Church remains a home for all.

Thus, international Vincentian communities are not only structurally strategic—they are spiritually indispensable, serving as lights in darkened places and as bridges of communion in a divided world. In this way, the Congregation honors St. Vincent's legacy and embraces the universal mission of the Church today.

### **Witness of the Vincentians in Taiwan**

In the 1990s, the China Province of the Congregation of the Mission (CM) began a significant journey of internationalization under the leadership of Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, CM. At that time, the missionaries of the province were no longer in mainland China, having been expelled by the Revolution of 1949. They had resettled in Taiwan, but the situation presented serious challenges.<sup>5</sup>

The missionary presence of the Congregation of the Mission in Taiwan during the 1990s was aging and notably fragmented into three distinct groups. The Dutch missionaries, who had originally served in China, were then working in northern Taiwan

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<sup>5</sup> There are some publications on the theme of Mission of the Vincentians in China and Taiwan, witnessing also the martyrdom of the missionaries in the past time (Bellemakers 2024; O'Donnell 1999; Maloney 1999; Ferreux 2022; O'Donnell 1998).

and doing serious charitable activities. The American Vincentians had taken up mission in the south, while a few aging Chinese confreres—formed and ordained before the Communist Revolution—remained in Taipei. Each group held to the geographical, linguistic, and pastoral identities shaped by their original mission territories in China. For many years, they operated independently of one another, each maintaining its own routines, outlooks, and pastoral approaches.

One key factor contributing to this fragmentation was their deep-rooted belief that their mission in Taiwan was temporary—that eventually they would return to mainland China once conditions changed. This hope of return shaped their focus and identity. As a result, little effort was made initially to build a cohesive Vincentian community in Taiwan itself. However, as time passed and it became evident that the door to China might remain closed for the foreseeable future, they began to reconsider their call. Slowly, a shared realization grew: that Taiwan itself had become their new field of mission. This recognition marked a turning point in the life of the province.

However, over time, a shared realization gradually emerged among the confreres in Taiwan: the missionary vocation could no longer be directed solely toward mainland China. The people of Taiwan—rich in culture and deeply in need of pastoral accompaniment—had become a valid and urgent mission field. This marked a significant shift in mindset, especially for those who had long held onto the hope of returning to the mainland.

In the 1970s, Fr. James Richardson, C.M., then Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, poignantly observed: “The number of our confreres who remained in China is not yet known—who still lives and who has died” (Richardson, *Letters of the Superior General*, 1974). This statement reflected the profound uncertainty surrounding the China mission following the Revolution, when political upheaval and religious persecution disrupted the Vincentian presence. The somber reality was not abandonment but a forced silence; the mission continued in hidden, often perilous ways, sustained by the courage and faithfulness of those confreres who remained. Richardson’s words served both as a lament and a call to solidarity with the missionaries who persevered under immense hardship. Historical accounts confirm that while many confreres were exiled, imprisoned, or dispersed, their witness laid foundations for future re-engagement in the Church’s mission in China (Coste, *Correspondence of the Superior General*, vol. XII). It remains a solemn reminder of the resilience of the Vincentian charism in times of trial.

Inspired by this enduring missionary spirit, Fr. Hugh O’Donnell, C.M., along with his provincial council, began to chart a new course. They initiated an internationalization process by inviting confreres from various provinces to Taiwan for one to two-months exposure programs. These exposures were not only opportunities for mutual learning and intercultural exchange but were also a clear and hopeful declaration to the Congregation and to the wider Church: “The China Mission is still alive.” Through this bold initiative, the Province of China began to reimagine its identity—not as a remnant of a lost mission, but as a living community ready to embrace a new, international future.

These exposure visits, held several times over the years, gradually began to bear fruit. The first confrere who responded generously to the call for mission in Taiwan was Fr. Anton de Britto Budianto, C.M., from Indonesia. His commitment marked a turning point in the revitalization of the China Province. Fr. Anton de Britto was assigned to a small parish in southern Taiwan, where he served with deep pastoral sensitivity and

cultural openness. His creativity became evident in how he animated parish life—developing youth programs, organizing community gatherings, and initiating catechetical approaches tailored to the local context.

Inspired by Fr. Anton’s witness, five more Indonesian confreres soon followed, each bringing unique gifts that enriched the growing Vincentian presence in Taiwan. Among them was Fr. Budiarto, who devoted his mission to the indigenous communities and built a Catholic Church building with the indigenous ornaments and symbols for catechesism. With deep sensitivity to local culture, he crafted inclusive liturgies, promoted indigenous lay leadership, and integrated traditional symbols into pastoral life. His ministry strengthened both the spiritual identity and the cultural dignity of the people he served.

As interest in the Taiwan mission increased, confreres worldwide offered their support and commitment. From the Philippines came missionaries with strong parish experience and a contagious pastoral zeal. Confreres from India brought their gifts in parishes and community building. The arrival of Polish and South Korean confreres added missionary perseverance and a long tradition of evangelization, while Vietnamese confreres contributed youthful energy, discipline, and a deep devotion. The presence of Irish confrere as well as from Australia in China added historical-contextual engagement, pastoral wisdom, and cross-cultural experience.

Fr. Yohanes Kusno Bintoro CM, another Indonesian missionary, played a particularly strategic role in building bridges in China. With a patient and dialogical approach, he cultivated mutual understanding with ecclesial leaders in the regions. Notably, he and Fr. Hugh O’Donnell contributed significantly to the formation of diocesan seminarians and priests from China for theological training and pastoral exposure in Indonesia and the Philippines. Through teaching, mentoring, and accompaniment, he helped shape a new generation of clergy equipped to serve the Church in complex socio-political contexts.

As the mission grew, confreres from different countries joined, each bringing their own gifts and cultural perspectives. Their presence not only sustained the existing apostolates but also revitalized them, turning internationality into a lived expression of communion in diversity, deeply rooted in the Vincentian spirit of mission and service to the poor.

As the original generation of “China missionaries” aged and entered retirement, a new international generation of Vincentians stepped in to carry forward the mission. This transition did more than preserve continuity—it marked a transformative renewal of the China Province’s identity as a truly intercultural and missionary community. Confreres from Indonesia, the Philippines (and South Korea), Vietnam, Poland, and India brought fresh energy, diverse gifts, and a shared commitment to serving the poor and strengthening the local Church. In harmony with the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, who urged his followers to go wherever the need was greatest, this international collaboration became a living expression of charity, humility, and zeal for souls.

Rather than being hindered by differences in language or culture, the missionaries embraced them as opportunities for mutual learning and deeper communion. This spirit of unity in diversity mirrored Vincent’s vision of a universal mission rooted in love for Christ and solidarity with the marginalized. What began as a response to personnel shortage gradually evolved into a prophetic witness—demonstrating that the Vincentian

mission is not bound by nationality, but animated by a shared vocation to serve Christ in the poor, wherever they may be found.

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