



Charism in Motion: 400 Years of Grace, Mission, and Renewal – Toward a Vincentian Future

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Abstract

As the Congregation of the Mission celebrates its 400th Jubilee, this article reflects on the enduring vitality of the Vincentian charism through Articles C.1 and C.2 of its Constitutions. These foundational texts articulate a missionary identity rooted in following Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, through holiness of life, evangelization—especially of the most abandoned—and the formation of clergy and laity. Integrating biblical foundations, Vincentian tradition, and contemporary magisterial teachings, the study presents the charism as dynamic rather than static: faithful to its origins yet responsive to the signs of the times. Particular attention is given to “putting on the spirit of Christ” as an incarnational holiness formed in the Heart of Christ, and to evangelizing the poor as a sacramental encounter with Christ present in wounded humanity. The article argues that Vincentian mission today demands renewed interior conversion, prophetic mercy, and missionary creativity. In this Jubilee context, the charism emerges not as a relic of the past, but as a living fire guiding the Church toward hope, justice, and compassionate service in a wounded world.

Alors que la Congrégation de la Mission célèbre son 400^e jubilé, cet article réfléchit à la vitalité durable du charisme vincentien à travers les articles C.1 et C.2 de ses Constitutions. Ces textes fondamentaux articulent une identité missionnaire enracinée dans la suite du Christ, l'évangéliste des pauvres, à travers la sainteté de vie, l'évangélisation - en particulier des plus abandonnés - et la formation du clergé et des laïcs. Intégrant les fondements bibliques, la tradition vincentienne et les enseignements magistérielles contemporains, l'étude présente le charisme comme dynamique plutôt que statique : fidèle à ses origines mais réceptif aux signes des temps. Une attention particulière est accordée à « revêtir l'esprit du Christ » comme une sainteté incarnée formée dans le Cœur du Christ, et à évangéliser les pauvres comme une rencontre sacramentelle avec le Christ présent dans l'humanité blessée. L'article soutient que la mission vincentienne exige aujourd'hui une conversion intérieure renouvelée, une miséricorde prophétique et une créativité missionnaire. Dans ce contexte jubilaire, le charisme n'apparaît pas comme une relique du passé, mais comme un feu vivant qui guide l'Église vers l'espérance, la justice et le service compatissant dans un monde blessé.



Mientras la Congregación de la Misión celebra su 400 aniversario, este artículo reflexiona sobre la vitalidad perdurable del carisma vicenciano a través de los artículos C.1 y C.2 de sus Constituciones. Estos textos fundamentales articulan una identidad misionera arraigada en el seguimiento de Cristo, el Evangelizador de los Pobres, a través de la santidad de vida, la evangelización —especialmente de los más abandonados— y la formación del clero y los laicos. Integrando los fundamentos bíblicos, la tradición vicenciana y las enseñanzas magisteriales contemporáneas, el estudio presenta el carisma como algo dinámico y no estático: fiel a sus orígenes, pero sensible a los signos de los tiempos. Se presta especial atención a «revestirse del espíritu de Cristo» como una santidad encarnada formada en el Corazón de Cristo, y a evangelizar a los pobres como un encuentro sacramental con Cristo presente en la humanidad herida. El artículo sostiene que la misión vicenciana hoy exige una conversión interior renovada, una misericordia profética y una creatividad misionera. En este contexto jubilar, el carisma surge no como una reliquia del pasado, sino como un fuego vivo que guía a la Iglesia hacia la esperanza, la justicia y el servicio compasivo en un mundo herido.

Keywords: Vincentian Charism, Mission, Evangelization, Changing World.

Introduction

As the Congregation of the Mission commemorates its 400th Jubilee, the foundational articles of its Constitutions - C.1 and C.2 - offer a profound lens through which we reflect on its enduring charism and evolving mission.¹ These articles articulate not only the purpose of the Congregation but also its spiritual posture and pastoral strategy in a continually changing world with rapid pace. Article C.1 defines the Vincentian vocation as to follow Christ evangelizer of the poor. This end is achieved through a threefold expression: putting on the spirit of Christ, evangelizing the poor - especially the more abandoned - and forming clergy and laity for deeper participation in the Church's mission. Article C.2 complements this by calling the Congregation to continual adaptation and renewal, urging fidelity to the Gospel while remaining attentive to the urgent needs of the Church and signs of the times.

In the 400 Jubilee of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, this essay tries to explore these two articles in depth, integrating theological reflection, magisterial teachings, and contemporary relevance. It seeks to illuminate how the Vincentian mission remains both timeless and timely rooted in Christ and responsive to the world. In doing so, what we as Vincentians try to affirm is that the charism of St. Vincent de Paul is not

¹ Following the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation of the Mission (CM) undertook a process of renewal, beginning with the 1968/69 General Assembly, which drafted provisional constitutions emphasizing fidelity to St. Vincent and the evangelization of the poor as central to its mission. Clarifications in 1969 affirmed this as the CM's preeminent but not exclusive purpose. Subsequent assemblies, especially in 1974 and 1980, deepened this focus, culminating in a decisive vote to define the CM's single purpose as "following Christ evangelizing the poor." Despite debates over terminology and the role of clergy formation, the final 1980 text affirmed that this purpose is fulfilled when members embody Christ's spirit, serve the most abandoned, and assist clergy and laity in their formation for evangelization. See. Carlo Braga, "The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Notes," *Vincentiana* 44, no. 4 (2000): 289–307. Antonio Elduayen, "Identity of the Congregation According to Articles 1–9 of the Constitutions of 1980," *Vincentiana* 44, no. 4 (2000): 308–319. Alexander Jernej, "The Treaty of 1625: Development of the Community and Its Purpose" (Paper presented in Paris).

a relic of the past but a living fire, capable of guiding the Church through the complexities of the present and into the hope of the future.

Part I

Article 1 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission establishes the *telos* - the ultimate purpose - of the Congregation: to follow Christ in His mission to evangelize the poor. This is not merely a form of social outreach, but a profound theological vocation rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Church's preferential option for the poor. The phrase "follow Christ the evangelizer of the poor" echoes the scriptural foundations of Luke 4:18, situating the Congregation's identity within the very mission of Jesus, who came to bring good news to the poor and to identify Himself with the least.² The Vincentian charism, therefore, is not an auxiliary ministry or a charitable add-on - it is a direct participation in Christ's salvific work, a living embodiment of His compassion and justice. The reference to being "faithful to St. Vincent" in the constitution invokes the founder's radical commitment to the poor, which becomes the interpretive key for understanding the Congregation's spirituality and praxis. His charism of systemic charity, pastoral innovation, and mystical service continues to shape the Vincentian way of life and the Church at large. This radical following or discipleship unfolds in a threefold expression: putting on the spirit of Christ, evangelizing the poor - especially the more abandoned - and forming clergy and laity for deeper participation in the Church's mission. Together, these dimensions form a cohesive vision of Vincentian identity - Christocentric, ecclesial, and missionary - animated by fidelity to the Gospel and a love that reaches the margins.

1. Putting on the Spirit of Christ - Vincentian Holiness in an Artificial Age

One of the imperatives that Jesus gives to his disciples is the attempt to perfection just as the heavenly father (Cf. Mt 5:48).³ The Vincentians make it a maxim by their vocation to imitate Christ in his perfect charity. This foundational dimension of the Vincentian mission is not merely a spiritual aspiration - it is a vocational imperative. In a world fractured by superficiality, polarization, and moral fatigue, the Vincentian witness of interior transformation and perfection offers a luminous path toward authenticity, holiness, and ecclesial renewal. St. Vincent de Paul understood holiness not as abstract piety but as vocational fidelity - a radical conformity to Christ's humility, charity, and zeal. The Constitutions echo this from the common Rules, urging members to acquire "a

² In Luke's Gospel, the quotation "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." is a deliberate conflation of Isaiah 61:1a, b, d; 58:6d; and 61:2a, omitting "to heal the broken-hearted" and "the day of vengeance of our God" to emphasize a message of grace over judgment. The Greek text closely follows the Septuagint (LXX), with minor shifts in verb forms, and reflects a prophetic anointing rooted in Jesus' baptism. The passage outlines Jesus' mission in Deutero-Isaian terms: proclaiming good news to the poor, release to prisoners, sight to the blind, and relief to the downtrodden - each group echoing postexilic concerns and Lucan social emphasis. Finally, the proclamation of "the Lord's year of favour" signals a new salvific era inaugurated by Jesus, distinct from vengeance and aligned with jubilee themes, paralleling reinterpretations found in Qumran texts. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, Anchor Yale Bible 28 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 532-33.

³ "This verse belongs firstly to the unit that begins in 5:43—as is shown by the motif of the *imitatio Dei*, which takes the reader back to 5:45. Simultaneously, 5:48 is the fitting culmination of all of 5:21-48, for each of the six paragraphs in the section calls for 'perfection', that is, each makes an absolute demand which cannot be surpassed". See W. D Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 560.

holiness appropriate to their vocation.”⁴ What is this holiness? What are its standards? For a Vincentian, this holiness is incarnational: it is lived in the streets, among the poor, and in the hidden recesses of the heart just as Christ the Evangelizer did it centuries before. Church has always advised to follow this example of Christ. Pope Francis’ encyclical *Dilexit Nos* deepens this vision. He writes: “The heart is also the locus of sincerity... the part of us that is neither appearance or illusion, but is instead authentic, real, entirely ‘who we are’”.⁵ Therefore Vincentian call to “put on the spirit of Christ” is rooted in the Sacred Heart - a symbol of divine love and missionary impulse. Pope Francis affirms: “In the presence of the heart of Christ, I once more ask the Lord to have mercy on this suffering world in which he chose to dwell as one of us. May he pour out the treasures of his light and love, so that our world, which presses forward despite wars, socio-economic disparities and uses of technology that threaten our humanity, may regain the most important and necessary thing of all: its heart.”⁶ Is he calling for a sentimental holiness? No. It is a prophetic response to a world that has lost its centre. Hence *Imitatio Dei/Christi* in its true sense opens the Vincentian missionary, formed in the Heart of Christ, to become a vessel of mercy, truth, and healing.

It is a call to be rooted in Christ. Rooted in Christ, it embodies authenticity over image, compassion over apathy, and resilience over despair. The Vincentian is not merely a worker or NGO, but a mystic in motion, just as the founder- his mission flows from contemplation. Therefore to “put on the spirit of Christ” is to rekindle the joy of faith, the fervour of mission, and, in Vincent’s words, become “a flame of love” that warms the cold corners of the Church.

In this Jubilee year, the Vincentian call to holiness becomes not only a personal invitation but a collective legacy project - an opportunity to rekindle the original fire of the charism that has animated four centuries of service, contemplation, and evangelization. Each member is summoned to renew their personal vocation in light of Christ’s Heart, allowing that divine love to reshape their intentions, deepen their compassion, and guide their mission. This renewal is not inward-looking alone; it radiates outward as missionary joy - an unmistakable witness in every encounter, every word, and every act of service. Holiness, in the Vincentian tradition, is not static perfection but dynamic fidelity - a life ablaze with grace, purpose, and zeal. So, to “put on the spirit of Christ” is to live with a heart set ablaze - burning with love, truth, and mission. In this 400th Jubilee, the Congregation of the Mission is called not merely to commemorate its past but to incarnate its charism anew. The Vincentian heart, formed in Christ, becomes a sanctuary of holiness in a world that desperately needs it.

2. Evangelizing the Poor, Especially the Abandoned - Vincentian Mission in a Wounded World

Luke presents the imperative of *Imitatio Dei* in Mt 5:48 with the framework of mercy “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful!” (Lk 6:36).⁷ If the basis of Christian

⁴ *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, I.3; XII.13.

⁵ Francis, *Dilexit Nos* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2024), §5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §31.

⁷ “It’s Matthean counterpart reads, “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). The Lucan form not only sharpens the saying, by putting it in the manner of a command, but expresses it in terms of mercy. It is hard to say which would have been the more original “Q” form, “perfect” or “merciful.” Since Matthew uses *teleios* elsewhere (19:21), he may have redacted the “Q” saying; Luke never uses this

Holiness is *Imitatio Dei*, then the wellspring of the Christian Missionary outreach is this Mercy: Mercy of the merciful saviour. In the Vincentian mission evangelization of the poor springs from this spirituality of being merciful. It is the sacred place (sanctuary) and sacred occasion (Chairos), where mercy encounters mercy. The poor are not merely underserved; they are the privileged locus of divine encounter. As Pope Leo XIV beautifully declares, “contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us.”⁸ It is a profound theological affirmation that the poor embody Christ’s presence. St. Vincent de Paul saw the poor not as objects of pity but as subjects of grace. His example affirms that the poor are sacramental - they reveal Christ.

The Constitutions of the Congregation echo this in C.1, stating that members must “work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned.” This is not optional. It is the very heartbeat of the Vincentian vocation. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, writes: “The poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel... we have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor”.⁹ Most recently Pope Leo XIV in *Dilexi Te* stated categorically that “The condition of the poor is a cry that, throughout human history, constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church. On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself.”¹⁰ Thus, evangelization is inseparable from the Church’s mission to serve the poor. This bond is not sentimental - it is sacramental. To evangelize the poor is to touch the wounds of Christ.

Now who are these Poor and more abandoned? In today’s world, the “more abandoned” include not only the economically destitute but also various other categories. These are the ones who fall between the cracks of systems and the margins of attention. Pope Leo XIV’s *Dilexi Te* affirms: “I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry.”¹¹ In a globalized world marked by economic disparity, cultural fragmentation, and spiritual fatigue, the Vincentian mission to the poor needs to stand as a prophetic protest against indifference and exclusion. It does not merely offer services - it offers presence, dignity, and communion: The Vincentian needs to see the face of Christ in every abandoned person, affirming their sacred worth beyond statistics or stereotypes. In such a scenario, evangelization by word, deed or example becomes an encounter of healing. Therefore, Vincentian Evangelization is not just ministry - it is incarnational justice, where the Gospel becomes flesh in the margins of the world.

In this Jubilee year, evangelizing the poor becomes more than a pastoral priority - it becomes a legacy of love, a sacred inheritance entrusted to every member of the

adjective and has *oiktirmōn*, “merciful,” only here. In either form the saying is a take-off from Lev 19:2, “You must be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” The Lucan form proposes an imitation of God, and precisely of a quality that the OT predicates of him. God in the OT is never said to be perfect (*teleios*) or blameless (*amōmos*), but he is said to be merciful (*oiktirmōn*, Exod 34:6; Deut 4:31; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 640–41. See also J. Dupont, “‘Soyez parfaits’ (Mt. V, 48), ‘Soyez miséricordieux’ (Lk. VI, 36),” *Sacra Pagina* BETL 12–13 (Paris, 1959): 150–62.

⁸ Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2025), §5.

⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014), §48.

¹⁰ Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, §9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §7.

Vincentian family. It calls each one to recommit to missionary creativity, finding fresh and courageous ways to reach those who are abandoned, overlooked, or silenced by society. In every encounter of evangelization and mission, the Vincentian is invited to radiate imitate the mercy of Christ, the evangelizer par excellence, allowing mercy to become the method and love to become the language. As *Dilexi Te* reminds us: “No Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our “family.” They are “one of us.” Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function. In the words of the Aparecida Document, “we are asked to devote time to the poor, to give them loving attention, to listen to them with interest, to stand by them in difficult moments, choosing to spend hours, weeks or years of our lives with them, and striving to transform their situations, starting from them. We cannot forget that this is what Jesus himself proposed in his actions and by his words.”¹² To evangelize the poor is to proclaim a Gospel that walks, weeps, and heals. In this 400th Jubilee, the Congregation of the Mission is called not merely to remember its charism but to embody it anew. The Vincentian missionary, formed in the Heart of Christ and sent to the margins, becomes a candle of hope in a world of wounds.

3. Formation of Clergy and Laity - Vincentian Mission for Ecclesial Renewal

The call to *Imitatio Dei* in Matthew 5:38 and to Merciful in Luke 6:36 are addressed to the Disciples. These are the persons, who will be the emissaries of Christ the evangelizer of the poor. A powerful Gospel passage that highlights Jesus’ emphasis on the formation of His disciples is Matthew 28:19 - 20, often called the Great Commission. This passage reveals that Jesus not only called His followers to mission but entrusted them with the task of forming others - teaching, guiding, and nurturing them in faith.¹³ For an effective Vincentian Mission, the third aspect of our identity that is to form clergy and laity emerges as a strategic and spiritual imperative. This dimension of the Vincentian mission is not merely educational - it is ecclesiological. It reflects the apostolic multiplier effect: by forming others, Vincentians extend their mission, build up the Body of Christ, and ensure the Church’s vitality across generations and cultures. St. Vincent de Paul recognized that the renewal of the Church depended on the sanctification and education of its ministers and faithful.

In today’s Church, where priestly vocations are declining and lay leadership is expanding, the Vincentian model of formation need to move forward in a spirit ecclesial renewal. The Second Vatican Council’s *Apostolicam Actuositatem* confirms: “The laity

¹² Ibid., §104. Also See Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Aparecida Document* (2007), no. 397.

¹³ “The commission is expressed not in terms of the means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to “make disciples.” It is not enough that the nations hear the message; they must also respond with the same whole-hearted commitment which was required of those who became disciples of Jesus during his ministry (see e.g. 8:19–22; 19:21–22, 27–29). The sentence structure is of a main verb in the imperative, “make disciples,” followed by two uncoordinated participles, “baptizing,” “teaching,” which spell out the process of making disciples. The order in which these two participles occur differs from what has become common practice in subsequent Christian history, in that baptism is, in many Christian circles, administered only after a period of “teaching,” to those who have already learned”. However taking note of the order of the participles in the sentence , he opines that “If the order of Matthew’s participles is meant to be noticed he is here presenting a different model, whereby baptism is the point of enrolment into a process of learning, which is never complete; the Christian community is a school of learners at various stages of development rather than divided into the baptized (who have “arrived”) and those who are “not yet ready.” See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1115–16.

likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world”.¹⁴ Therefore, formation be it of the clergy or that of the laity, is not about creating assistants - it is about empowering co-responsible apostles. The 2023 document *Pastors and Lay Faithful Called to Walk Together* affirms: “Lay women and men are not merely ‘collaborators’ or ‘assistants’ to the ordained... but co-responsible on matters related to the life of the Church and its mission”.¹⁵ In such a call to formation the pedagogy is to be well monitored. This pedagogy is missionary. It forms apostles, not administrators. It prepares clergy and laity to proclaim the Gospel with joy, credibility, and compassion. Pope Francis affirms in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization”.¹⁶ Vincentian formation must envisage this agency. It needs to transform passive recipients into active disciples.

In this Jubilee year, the Vincentian commitment to formation calls for empowerment. It calls each member to reinvest in educational and formative ministries that do more than instruct; they form apostles - men and women whose hearts are shaped by mission, mercy, and theological depth. It invites a reimagining of pastoral strategies that include and uplift the laity, recognizing their vital role not as helpers but as co-responsible agents of evangelization. Above all, it reaffirms the baptismal dignity of every believer, reminding the Church that its mission belongs to all. Thus, to form clergy and laity is to build a Church that is wise, compassionate, and missionary.

Part II

Having stated and analysed the article 1 of the constitution, which encapsulates the basic identity of the Congregation and a missionary, Article 2 of the Constitutions highlights the Vincentian commitment to adaptation and renewal, emphasizing the methodological and prophetic dimension of its mission: In gist how to be relevant. Rooted in fidelity to the Gospel and attentive to the signs of the times, the Congregation is called to respond creatively to evolving realities of the present-day world, society, church and community. The directive to “open up new ways and use new means” affirms a dynamic apostolate - one that embraces innovation. This flexibility is not a departure from tradition but a deepening of it, guided by discernment and zeal. Here what follows is the analysis of the article 2 of the constitutions considering the 400 years of Jubilee.

1. Fidelity and Flexibility - Vincentian Anchoring in a Shifting World

The Constitutions affirm this in C.2, calling the Congregation to remain “faithful to the Gospel” in all its works. The call to be faithful to the Gospel in a world of Change is a scriptural imperative even from the apostolic times.¹⁷ For example, St Paul exhorts

¹⁴ Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity), 1965, §2.

¹⁵ Francis, *Pastors and Lay Faithful Called to Walk Together* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023), §3.

¹⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §120.

¹⁷ The call to faithfulness in the Gospel resounds throughout Scripture as both a personal and communal imperative. Believers are urged to hold fast to the sound teaching they have received, guarding it with love and courage through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:13–14). This fidelity is not passive - it demands vigilance against distortion (Galatians 1:6–8), perseverance in truth for salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1–2), and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel’s transformative power (Romans 1:16). It also calls for a

Timothy “Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us” (2 Timothy 1:13–14).¹⁸ The call to remain “faithful to the Gospel” while being “attentive to the signs of the times” (C.2) emerges as a prophetic imperative. This duality - anchored in the charism of the Founder yet responsive to reality - is a Vincentian hallmark. In these times of swift transformation and blurred moral lines, only a mission rooted in faithfulness and open to adaptation can remain both timeless and timely. St. Vincent de Paul embodied a fidelity that was both unwavering and alive - a devotion to Christ, the Church, and the poor that refused to calcify into dogma, choosing instead the ever-renewing path of Gospel truth, mercy, and mission. Pope Francis echoes this in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel”.¹⁹ Fidelity here is not about preserving appearances - it is about embodying Christ’s love in every context.

Being faithful to the Gospel, one must be reminded always that the Vincentian mission is not static. It must respond to historical shifts, cultural changes, and pastoral urgencies. This is the flexibility of discernment - a spiritual attentiveness that listens to the cries of the poor, the movements of the Spirit, and the needs of the Church. *Gaudium et Spes* affirms: “The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel”.²⁰ This attentiveness is not and must not be trend-chasing - it is prophetic listening.²¹ It allows the Vincentian to remain faithful without becoming fossilized, and flexible without becoming rootless. The Vincentian faithful to the Charism, is thus not a relic of tradition nor a captive of trends, but a living bridge - rooted in Christ and open to the world, embodying a mission that is both faithful and fresh. He is a missionary in the Church that listens deeply and loves generously and a Church that heals. This dual posture allows the Vincentian to engage the world without losing the soul of the mission.

In this Jubilee year, fidelity and flexibility emerge not merely as virtues but as something greater that fuels the Vincentian inheritance for a Church in motion. Fidelity and flexibility invite each member to reclaim the original fire of the Gospel, rekindling

life worthy of the Gospel, marked by unity and shared purpose (Philippians 1:27), and promises eternal reward for those who remain faithful even unto death (Revelation 2:10).

¹⁸ Paul exhorts Timothy to continually hold fast to the model of sound teaching he received - a living example rooted in both doctrine and moral integrity. The Greek term *hypotypōsis* (model/example) reflects a tradition of moral exemplarity found in both Scripture and Hellenistic philosophy. Timothy is urged to preserve the “healthy teaching” he heard from Paul, which combines truthful speech (*logoi*) with faith (*pistis*) and love (*agapē*) - qualities observed in Paul and grounded in Christ Jesus. This fidelity is not static but dynamic, requiring Timothy to guard the “precious deposit” entrusted to him, just as Paul was entrusted by God. The power to protect this deposit comes not from human strength but from the indwelling Holy Spirit, a recurring theme in Paul’s letters. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 35 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 351–52.

¹⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §114.

²⁰ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 1965, §4.

²¹ Trend-chasing seeks relevance by mimicking what is popular, often driven by visibility, or cultural fads. It is reactive, superficial, and risks diluting the Vincentian charism. Prophetic listening, by contrast, is rooted in discernment - it responds not to trends but to the Spirit’s movement within the signs of the times. Anchored in the Gospel and tradition, it engages contemporary realities with depth, humility, and mission-focused creativity. This is not about adapting to the world’s noise but about hearing its cries, allowing the Vincentian to speak with credibility, compassion, and transformative grace.

the passion and purity of the mission that first animated St. Vincent de Paul. It also calls for a renewal of discernment practices, attuned to the complexities and urgencies of contemporary realities, where the Spirit speaks through both silence and upheaval. Above all, it summons Vincentians to radiate Christ's mercy in every encounter - offering tenderness where there is pain, and presence where there is isolation. In this 400th Jubilee, the Congregation of the Mission is called not merely to preserve its charism but to embody it anew - rooted in the Gospel, responsive to the signs of the times, and radiant with missionary joy.²²

2. Innovation in Evangelization - Vincentian Creativity for a Changing World

Being faithful to the Gospel, the charism demands and the constitution exhorts us to "Open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place" (C.2). It becomes a clarion invitation to missionary creativity. The phrase "new wine is poured into new wineskins" comes from Jesus' teaching in the Gospels (e.g., Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37-38). It's a rich metaphor that speaks to the need for renewal, transformation, and openness to the Spirit's work. Jesus uses this image to illustrate that the new life of the Gospel cannot be contained within rigid, outdated structures.²³ It calls for new vessels: renewed hearts, fresh communities, and dynamic expressions of faith. This metaphor is especially poignant. It's a call to let the Spirit ferment something vibrant and alive within the Church - and to shape new forms, new platforms, and new expressions that can carry it forward without bursting under the weight of tradition. Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, writes: "The Church must constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting or representing to them God's revelation and faith in Jesus Christ".²⁴ This is not about abandoning tradition - it is about translating it. Innovation becomes a bridge between the eternal Gospel and the evolving human experience.

The Vincentian charism, rooted in fidelity to Christ and the poor, must develop expressing itself through new forms, new languages, and new platforms.²⁵ The Vincentian mission must remain open to diverse cultural expressions of evangelization, recognizing that various ministries - whether formative or educational or pastoral or any other - can authentically embody and invigorate the charism. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us "Popular movements, in fact, invite us to overcome "the idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a

²² In this hour of dwindling vocations and thinning communities, we hear a clarion call - not to retreat into familiar structures of comfort, but to venture boldly into new dimensions of grace. It is a summons to rekindle the fire of our charism with creative fidelity, to let missionary dynamism breathe new life into our witness, and to trust that the Spirit still speaks in the language of renewal.

²³ The parable of the wineskins explicitly sets out the answer to this incompatibility of the new with the old: new wine must be put into new skins. The parables are not decoded for us, and we can only speculate about what sort of new religious structures Jesus, or Matthew, may have had in mind as the appropriate context for the new wine of the kingdom of heaven. See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 357.

²⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), §56. Also See Benedict XVI, *Ubicumque et Semper* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010).

²⁵ The pastoral and missionary expressions of the Vincentian vocation naturally take on different forms across languages, cultures, and regions. Evangelization, shaped by local realities, cannot be confined to a singular model. An overly centralized view that dismisses certain ministries as incompatible with the Vincentian charism may risk overlooking the Spirit's creative work. In some contexts, education is a vital path of evangelization; in others, parish ministry may be the most effective means of reaching hearts. What matters is not uniformity, but fidelity to the Gospel and openness to the diverse, life-giving expressions of mission that continue to invigorate our charism.

project which can bring people back together. If politicians and professionals do not listen to them, “democracy atrophies, turns into a slogan, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future. The same must be said of the institutions of the Church.”²⁶ St. Vincent de Paul was a pioneer of pastoral innovation. He founded seminaries, mobilized lay collaborators, and reimagined charity as systemic justice. His example affirms that innovation is not novelty for its own sake - it is fidelity in motion. The Constitutions demands it in C.2, urging the Congregation to “open up new ways and use new means.” Thus, the Vincentian mission, rooted in fidelity to Christ and love for the poor, is called to expand its reach into spaces that were once peripheral but are now central to human experience.

Pope Francis affirms in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the Church must be a place of creativity, where the Spirit can inspire new forms of evangelization.²⁷ This creativity is not a departure from the Gospel - it is its dynamic unfolding. In a society shaped by technological acceleration, cultural fragmentation, and existential searching, the Vincentian witness of innovative evangelization must emerge as a sign of hope and relevance. This is not innovation for its own sake - it is the Spirit’s invitation to proclaim the Gospel with fresh fire, in new modes and languages, and even on unfamiliar terrain. In this 400th Jubilee, the Congregation of the Mission is called not merely to preserve its methods but to reimagine them - faithful to Christ, responsive to the world, and radiant with missionary creativity. We need to remember that to innovate in evangelization is to proclaim a Gospel that moves, multiplies, and adapts.

3. Evaluation and Planning - Vincentian Stewardship for a Fruitful Mission

A final point in Constitution article 2 is the call to “evaluate and plan its works and ministries” and to remain “in a continual state of renewal” (C.2). It emerges as a spiritual discipline of stewardship. However, it is to be kept in mind that it is not bureaucratic - it is contemplative, pastoral, and prophetic. It ensures that the mission remains faithful, fruitful, and responsive to the evolving needs of the Church and the world. St. Vincent de Paul was a master of practical charity, he constantly assessed the effectiveness of his missions, the needs of the poor, and the readiness of his collaborators. Pope John Paul II affirms in *Redemptoris Missio*: “Situations are not, however, the same everywhere. While acknowledging that statements about the missionary responsibility of the Church are not credible unless they are backed up by a serious commitment to a new evangelization in the traditionally Christian countries, it does not seem justified to regard as identical the situation of a people which has never known Jesus Christ and that of a people which has known him, accepted him and then rejected him, while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed gospel principles and values.”²⁸ This reflection is not a retreat into self-analysis - it is a movement toward greater fidelity and fruitfulness. It once again involves reading the signs of the times, discerning the Spirit’s promptings, and aligning resources with mission priorities. It is a form of pastoral governance rooted in prayer, dialogue, and accountability. Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the

²⁶ Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, §15.

Also, Francis, “Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements,” Vatican, November 5, 2016, *L’Osservatore Romano*, November 7–8, 2016, 5.

²⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §33.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), §37.

complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory.”²⁹

Thus, evaluation is a call to authenticity. Planning becomes a way of ensuring that every ministry remains a channel of grace. The Vincentian virtue of zeal drives the Congregation to remain in a “continual state of renewal” (C.2), constantly seeking to deepen its holiness, sharpen its mission, and adapt its methods. In today’s world, where institutions are increasingly measured by their impact and transparency, the Vincentian commitment to evaluation and planning stands as a vital witness. It fosters integrity in a time of scrutiny, ensuring that ministries are not only effective but remain aligned with the values of the Gospel. It cultivates adaptability in a time of rapid change, allowing the mission to respond creatively without compromising its spiritual core. And it promotes sustainability in a time of scarcity, encouraging wise stewardship of resources for lasting and meaningful impact. Pope Francis writes: “A missionary heart is aware of these limits and makes itself “weak with the weak... everything for everyone” (1 Cor 9:22). It never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness.”³⁰ Evaluation and planning prevent rigidity. They foster a Church, Congregation and Community that is discerning, dynamic, and deeply rooted in mission. It invites each member to reassess ministries and methods through the lens of Gospel, to reimagine structures and strategies for deeper impact, and to reaffirm the zeal that breathes life into renewal. Let us not consider it just as a matter of management, but of mission - a distinctly Vincentian way of ensuring that every work is, at its heart, a work of mercy and love.

Conclusion

Pope Leo XIV concludes the Apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te* in this way: “Through your work, your efforts to change unjust social structures or your simple, heartfelt gesture of closeness and support, the poor will come to realize that Jesus’ words are addressed personally to each of them: “I have loved you” (Rev 3:9)”³¹ Being faithful to our Vincentian identity, it is particularly an exhortation to all of us as generally for the whole Church. The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, particularly Articles C.1 and C.2, reveal a charism that is both contemplative and apostolic, traditional and innovative, personal and ecclesial. The threefold expression of the mission - interior transformation, evangelization of the poor, and formation of clergy and laity - grounds the Vincentian vocation in the heart of Christ and the margins of society. The call to adaptation and renewal ensures that this mission remains dynamic, discerning, and fruitful. In a world marked by fragmentation, injustice, and spiritual hunger, the Vincentian witness offers a path of healing, hope, and holiness. It invites each member of the Congregation - and indeed the wider Church - to live with a heart set ablaze: faithful to the Gospel, attentive to the signs of the times, and radiant with missionary zeal. As the Congregation enters its fifth century, these articles serve not only as constitutional directives but as spiritual compasses - guiding the Vincentian family toward deeper fidelity, broader outreach, and continual renewal in the service of Christ and the poor.

²⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §45.

³¹ Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te*, §121.

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