

The Congregation of the Mission

In order that he might better respond to a wide variety of needs, St. Vincent brought together as many people as he could, rich and poor, humble and powerful, and used every means to inspire in them a sensitivity to the poor, who are the privileged image of Christ. He moved them to help the poor directly and indirectly (Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, Introduction, p.19).

The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively: (1) make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (Common Rules I:3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (Common Rules XII:13); (2) work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned; (3) help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a deeper and fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor (Constitutions, #1).

From the time of its founder, the members of the Congregation of the Mission recognized that they had been called by God to continue the mission of evangelizing those persons who are poor.

Acknowledging the concerns of the Asian bishops, John Paul II told them that if the Church “is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient, and progressive preaching of the saving death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.” Those words hold true for all of us (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #110).

Furthermore, all the members of the Congregation can say as Jesus himself said: I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43).

The official name of this group of brothers and priests is the Congregation of the Mission (CM). The members are also referred to as the Lazarists because its origin can be traced to the time that the members resided at the Priory of Saint Lazare. In many English-speaking countries, the members are called Vincentians, while in Spain, the members are known as Paules and in Latin American, known as Vicentinos.

From the time of its establishment until the eighteenth century, the Congregation experienced an uninterrupted development. The Vincentian missionaries who numbered 25 in 1632 had grown to 770 at the beginning of the French Revolution in 1792 (508 priests and 262 brothers ... there were also at that time 220 seminarists).

As a result of the decree that suppressed the religious orders in France, the members of the Congregation were scattered. Twenty-four confreres were murdered or died on the barricades. In 1804 Napoleon reestablished the Congregation and seventy confreres gathered together and committed themselves to a common life.

In 1809 the Congregation was once again suppressed and it was not until 1816 that it was definitively reestablished. During the 19th century there was an increase in numbers which allowed the Congregation to open new missions in France: parishes, major seminaries. This increase in numbers also permitted the Congregation to send missionaries to Asia (especially China), the Middle East and South America.

In the 20th century the separation of Church and State in France produced a certain stagnation. In France, the Congregation was recognized as a Church institution and remained active throughout the world. In the post-war period, the French missionaries began to minister in Cameroon.



May 17, 1658

**St. Vincent de Paul gives the Rules
to the Congregation of the Mission**