

IF SAINT VINCENT AND SAINT LOUISE WERE TO GIVE A NEW CONFERENCE, WHAT WOULD THEY SUGGEST TO US IN ORDER TO BE AUTHENTIC SERVANTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY?



(Inter-Assemblies Document, p. 7)

“My dear Sisters, the theme of today’s conference is, “What does it mean to be an authentic servant in the 21st century?”

I’d like to begin with this picture of a sculpture on Chartres cathedral depicting the creation of Adam. Called by some “the unfinished creation,” it portrays Adam only half-emerged from the dust of earth, as if the work of creation is frozen at mid-point. This human being is incomplete, unfinished. He is becoming, and his creation is a work in progress. The first words of the book of Genesis can be translated in different ways: “In the beginning God created” or “In the beginning God began creating.” The sculpture is a meditation on the work of creating that is continuing. And so it is with you, Sisters, and with the entire Little Company. You are each and together a work in progress, continually being molded and shaped by God, by persons who are poor and by Divine Providence. Your Constitutions remind you that *“to depend on the Holy Spirit is to allow oneself to be molded into a resemblance to Christ, gentle and humble of heart.”*¹

Your beginnings were at the same time simple and unexpected. I remember pondering, *“Who would ever have thought that there would be Daughters of Charity?... I did not think of it... God thought of it for you”*² and that just as the Company *“was not then what it is now, there is reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it”*³



In this year of 2021, almost 400 years since your foundation, your call to be authentic servants is the same as the call heard by the first Sisters. Again, your Constitutions reassure you: *“Throughout the world it continues to raise up and assemble Daughters of Charity, who strive to rediscover at the source the inspiration and intuitions of their Founders, so that they may respond with ever-renewed fidelity and availability to the needs of their time.”*⁴ Today, we will draw inspiration from the most recent Inter-Assemblies Document, with its primary convictions, questions and recommendations covering all aspects of your lives, some of which you rightly wish to keep and continue developing in the Company as a whole.

There is no doubt, Sisters, that the theme “The Boldness of Charity for a new Missionary Momentum” captured your creative imagination and fueled your deep desire to go further, to go beyond, to go wherever necessary, in order to accompany and assist the poorest people in your world. Eagerly, you took up the challenge to be bold and to dare to become more authentic servants, and you have taken steps and strides – sometimes fearfully, always trustingly – towards those who are poor to be closer to them, to walk with them, to listen and learn from them and to encourage and enable them to take the steps they desire or need. The Little Company has indeed experienced new missionary momentum at the peripheries of society, in particular with migrants, with people who are being trafficked and with those who are homeless. You have also searched the peripheries nearer home – the loneliest child or teenager, the family most in need, the most neglected elderly person – each one often “hidden in plain sight.” And you have consistently sought to do all of this in collaboration with others because you need to for a better service and because it is in your Vincentian DNA to be collaborative.

However, there is always more... and so, it is important to reflect in particular on the “not enough,” to identify which actions and attitudes you still need to pursue and develop. Gathering both the mature fruits of the past five years and the remaining seeds for further nurturing ensures a seamless transition from “Boldness” to “Ephata.”

Your responses to the question: “What should be kept and developed?” reveal this continuing commitment to what is presently unfinished. Approximately 30% of your responses drew attention to the first section in the Inter-Assemblies Document (IAD): *A way of living driven by the Gospel*; 48% focused on the middle section: *A missionary momentum inspired by charity*; and 22% highlighted section three: *A Company enriched by the participation of all Sisters*. Today, in order to draw inspiration from your responses, we will use the first three questions on page 7 of the IAD as a framework for the evaluation, which will reflect the responses submitted by your Provincial Assemblies and be enriched by quotations from your texts.⁵

1) Constitution 18

2) Saint Vincent, Conference of June 14, 1643, Explanation of the Regulations, CCD IX, 93

3) Saint Vincent, Conference of February 13, 1646, Love of Vocation and Assistance to the Poor, CCD IX, 194

4) Constitutions, p. 19-20

5) The numbers in parentheses represent the number of Provincial Assemblies that made reference to an idea.